Islamic Extremism: The Untold Truth

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Abdi Rahman Mohamed Jibril

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Foreword

For the short time that I have been privileged to know and occasionally share ideas with Jibril, I have formed the opinion that he is not much of an outward person. He is calm and somewhat reserved; one could easily brand him antisocial or, yet, lump together with the hermit or recluse kind. This first impression, however, belies a man bubbly with ideas about society and its many challenges. It is until you do a tête-à-tête with him. A smile ensues, then the real Jibril easily and smoothly pleasantly unpacks. It is delightful to do conversation with this gentleman.

He has an eye for detail and a sharp mind that one would find quite engaging. He is quite at home with discussing current affairs in general, but more specifically, he enjoys endless discussions on topical and political issues. The happenings around Jibril would hardly escape his notice. It is basically this interest in public affairs that led

Jibril to write this thought-provoking book on a subject as controversial as the title suggests.

When I first met him and he opened up about a book he intended to write, it did not occur to me straight up that this was a man who had completed the act of writing the book long before we met. He said, 'I've been walking around with this book for a long time, and now is the time to bring it out.' It was not until the time he sent me a draft copy for my comments that I actually believed him. I enjoyed every moment of contact with the initial material about this book. Other than learning quite a lot that I did not know about Islam, I enjoyed reading the book immensely.

Upon picking up this book to read, one may expect the usual middle ground and woolly approach to this very sensitive subject. Jibril does it differently. He calls a spade a spade. On the moot subject of the book, extremism, for example, he argues convincingly that most, if not all, of the actions of extremists can easily be justified based on the writings and teachings of the Koran and other holy books. In the same breath, he chastises those justifying their bestiality upon humanity on the writings of the Koran and other holy books. On this, he argues that though ancient Muslims, not least of all Prophet Muhammad himself, practiced some form of violence, he posits that those times may have demanded such method of dealing with dissent. To Jibril, modern times call for different approaches.

He goes ahead to heap blame at the doorstep of Muslim clerics, preachers, and scholars for the unhindered misinterpretation and misapplication of the Koran's writings and teachings. He argues that the good book needed to be read with different eyes and minds in order to arrive at plausible conclusions different from the ones that have brought us to the crazy world we live in today—a world in

which young Muslims have allocated themselves the role of world police to decide who is and is not doing things in line with the dictates of the Koran.

In this book, Jibril argues that the menace of extremism can be dealt with so long as those in positions of influence are willing to do their part in taming the runaway problem. He advocates a sober and focused approach to the challenges the youth face: the twin problems of lack of or poor education and unemployment. He recommends that Muslim leaders whether in the academia, the mosque, or in the political field come together to confront the problem of extremism head-on.

This is a book you would not find loaded with the usual hackneyed phrases. It goes for the facts of the matter and lays them bare. However, all that I have said notwithstanding, let me suggest to you, the reader, to be the ultimate judge of this piece of work. Take the plunge!

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My sincere acknowledgements and heartfelt thanks go to my country, Kenya, and its people. I appreciate and thank them most sincerely for their tolerance of different cultures, including language, and giving home to Somali refugees, following the departure of Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991 that led to the collapse of the Somali state.

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Contents

Introduction xiii

Chapter 1 What do extremists believe? 1
[a] Religious point of view 1
[b] The jihad concept 20

Chapter 2 What motivates extremists? 33
[a] The lost glory 33
[b] Governance is for God 40
[c] Martyrdom (Al-shahid) 46

Chapter 3 Islam extremism and Kenya 51
[a] Is the reward of kindness anything but good? 51
[b] Why extremists target Kenya 54
[c] Terror acts in Kenya (1970–2015) 56

Chapter 4 Unreligious Islamic beliefs 62
[a] The god of the tribe 62
[b] Polygamy: An archaic practice 67
[c] The call for the prayer 71

Chapter 5 Islam in its proper context 80
[a] God is one 80
[b] Islam recognises other religions 84
[c] Morality, values, and ethics in Islam 88
[d] Combining the Koran's principles 97

Chapter 6 The Koran and change 106
[a] The concept of abrogation 106
[b] Empowering the charged with authority committee 113

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[c] Reinterpretation of Islam 122

Chapter 7 Mending fences 129
[a] Consciousness as the end of dogma..... 129
[b] Embracing democracy and human rights.....140
[c] Learning from Western societies 162

Chapter 8 The way forward..... 176
[a] The benefits of change.....176
[b] The cost of change 179

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Introduction

Islamic Extremism: The Untold Truth analyses the origins of religious extremism as manifested in acts of terrorism perpetrated mainly by Muslim youth. It is a research and study of the source of Islamic extremism and what can be done to stop mass killings of innocent people. Despite many social problems, Muslims continue to hold extremist views supported by the teachings of the Koran.

Chapter 1 outlines the religious understanding of the Islamic extremists and points out their Islamic views. It further discusses at length how extremists use the teachings of the Koran and other Islamic texts to justify their heinous actions. This has led to the phenomenon of terrorism against the so-called infidels or non-believers. There are Koran verses and Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad that support violent acts and aggression in the name of jihad (holy war). It is only by accepting this fact that those who oppose terrorism can devise the right strategy for combating the vice. The solution

to this problem lies in confronting religious extremism among Muslims especially the youth.

Chapter 2 discusses what motivates the extremists and describes in detail the Islam extremism problem. Quoting the Koran and Muslim scholars, the chapter argues that there is enough evidence that a solution can be found within the Muslim community. From history, there exists a cause-and-effect relationship between Islamic extremism and terrorism. The youth are taught about the lost glory, that governance is for God, and the significance of martyrdom (*al-shahid*). These teachings together with culture result in radicalisation among Muslim youth. The most notorious are those who attend madrasas (institutions for the study of Islamic theology and religious law). The mainstream Muslims do not condemn radicalisation because it is based on Koran writings.

Although Islamic extremism is not new in the world, it reached a climax in Eastern Africa and Kenya, in particular, after the failure of the Somali state in 1991. The absence of a functional government made Somali a haven for terrorist groups like al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda who operate and recruit Somali militants to kill non-Muslims. Chapter 3 discusses the unresolved Somali question, why Kenya is a target, and the impact of terrorism from the past to the present including the aftermath of the Garissa University attack on 2 April 2015 that left 147 killed and 92 injured.

Chapter 4 discusses religious beliefs among all Muslims that cannot be justified, but at the same time, no one can deny them. For example, the god of the tribe, polygamy which is an archaic practice, treatment of women (especially dressing), and the Muslim call for prayer. The chapter concludes that for a very long time, there has been a deliberate attempt not to review Islamic principles so as to improve the

Muslim society for the better. On the other hand, extremists still hold dearly to unjustified, illogical, unreligious beliefs. And that is despite the Koran itself warning them not to believe such. This chapter also describes the cause of the confusion and disorders in the Muslim's belief system. The overall argument is that there is a disconnect between some Islamic teachings and the present circumstances prevailing in the Muslim world. Some of the teachings are illogical and unreligious, but extremists still follow them without question. The Koran itself seems to encourage such beliefs.

Recently, a healthy debate has emerged among Muslim scholars on the exact true meanings and interpretations of some Koran verses. This is a welcome development in the war against terror that started in earnest in 1990, led by the USA. Chapter 5 suggests religious and logical solutions that can help get rid of the harmful understanding of Islam. Its aim is to persuade extremists to see the other side of the coin and change their ideology and embrace peace.

It further gives the reader a proper glimpse and perspective of Islamic beliefs. A little deeper thinking reveals that Islam is not necessarily a violent religion. Of importance is the fact that God is one, Islam recognises other religions, there is morality, values, and ethics in Islam, and to understand the Koran, we have to read and combine its various principles. Then, we will eventually know the real motive of terrorists, direct the war to the source of the hatred and extremism, and stop chasing after inconsequential individuals.

Chapter 6 discusses the provisions for change available in the Holy Book and how they can be actualised. These provisions include the concept of abrogation, empowering the charged with authority committee, and reinterpretation of Islam. It prescribes the religious and logical solutions for

the problems and confusion that has persisted for a long time in the Muslim society.

Chapter 7 argues that it is possible to have peace, only if the extremists can gain deeper knowledge and understanding. It advocates for consciousness as the end of dogma, embracing democracy and human rights, and learning from Western societies.

This book is a must-read for all those who care for world peace. It should be read without prejudice but not dismissed as happens often. Chapter 8 discusses the benefits and cost of change. All arguments in this book are backed by religious evidence from the Koran and other Islamic writings. These are not necessarily personal views but well-known Islamic teachings and principles. Various Koran verses and Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad are cited. By sharing these ideas about the current Islamic extremism problem, I hope that readers will digest the contents and help curb radicalisation and Islamic fundamentalism.

My intention is to enlighten the Muslim society by providing more information on the subject. This should not be misconstrued as a blanket criticism of any particular community and its belief system. The end result, I believe, is that they will get awareness and see clearly their weaknesses. That will then lead to considerable social and cultural change.

This book is not based on perceptual imagination. It outlines facts from the Islamic writings while narrating from the point of view of the actual and practical social life in the Muslim community. It is a result of my lifetime experiences, studies, and observations of the Islam religion and Muslim society at large as an insider. I have never had any education or training outside my local community and its cultural environment. So there are no external views from competing

civilisations. All arguments are supported by evidence from Islamic scripts and Muslim practical day-to-day activities.

This book suggests practical solutions for the current turmoil in the Muslim society and the threat posed by Islamic extremism. It is a first of its kind that advances self-criticism of the Muslim society and offers religious-based solutions. Also, it is important reference material for Muslims who want to know the truth about Islamic faith and change their belief system. It is also an invaluable tool for new social re-engineering.

In addition, international bodies who want to promote peace and create a better world and peaceful life for all human kind can use it as a reference point. It describes correctly the source of the problem and prescribes direct, straightforward solutions for the vice in the Muslim community. I have given it an Islamic approach completely based on five basic fundamental principles, as follows:

[a] *Enjoining of what is right and forbidding what is wrong.* This well-known Islamic principle is found in the Koran and Hadith writings. Koran, Surah Al-Imran 3, verse 110 says, 'Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in God.' My purpose is therefore to enjoin my Muslim brothers and sisters in what is right and forbid them what is wrong. The book will remind them of the many good religious principles which seem to have been forgotten and warn them against what is forbidden that they are accustomed to.

[b] *Collective interests and supplementing them; reducing evil or disabling it.*

[c] *Islamic rulings depend on their valid causes for existence or lack of it.* There are no rulings in Islam without clear purpose and wisdom. Whether your beliefs and actions

are positive or negative, they must have a legitimate cause. On that basis, I have ruled out all Koran verses that support fighting and violence because their cause and effect are invalid and illegitimate in a democracy and under the UN Convention on Human Rights.

[d] *Absolute Islamic principles and subordinate principles*. That principle was established by well-known Islamic scholars and authoritative sheikhs. I have treated the verses that support jihad and fighting as subordinate to the main theme of the Koran. The absolute principle of Koran verses is that they encourage forgiveness and peaceful coexistence. For example: 'Take the forgiveness principle and command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant. If a suggestion form Satan assails thy mind seek refuge with God; for he hearten and knoweth all things.'

[e] *Moral congenitally*. This is the common understanding for all human beings. Koran, Surah Al-Rum 30, verse 31 says, 'So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the faith: Establish God's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind; no change in the work by God: that is the standard Religion; but most among mankind understand not.'

Finally, these are the basic guidelines that form the main arguments in this book. It is therefore important for us to recognise and admit that we have a problem so that we can correct it. If not, we will continue to suffer social, cultural, religious, and political problems.

Chapter 1

What do extremists believe?

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[a] Religious point of view

This chapter outlines the origins of the apparent insatiable extremism among Muslim youth. It does not merely criticise Islam or say unpopular things about the religious leaders. These youth hold strong opposing thoughts and views based on their religion. In the end, they commit heinous crimes against perceived enemies and the whole of humanity at large.

Muslim Salafists give all manner of excuses and justifications for their unacceptable actions. Salafi is a movement within Islam that references the Salafist doctrine known as Salafism. It takes its name from the term *salaf*, meaning 'predecessors' or 'ancestors'. This is used to identify

the earliest Muslims, who, its adherents believe, provide the epitome of Islamic practice. A Hadith quotes Muhammad saying, 'The people of my own generation are the best, then those who come after them, and then those of the next generation.' This is interpreted as a call to Muslims to follow the example of those first three generations, the Salaf.

What is disturbing is that the Koran and the teachings of the prophet Mohammad (pbuh) are the source of their inspiration to commit deplorable crimes. What may surprise us all is that indeed the truth is that the Koran and the Hadith have these teachings. As though this were not enough, the common understanding among most Muslims is that this is the position; in fact, their own customs and culture are evidence of these beliefs and practices.

Islamic extremists follow the direct meaning of the Holy Koran. Most of them are Muslim youths who are educated, trained, and told to believe in the jihad (holy war) concept. Surah Al-Saff 61, verses 10–11 say of the jihad, 'O, You who believe! Shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a grievous penalty? That you believe in God and His apostle, and that you strive your utmost in the cause of God, with your property and your persons: That will be best for you, if you but knew.' Believing in these teachings, the youth dedicate their lives to implementing them. These teachings have been taught since the revelation of the Holy Koran and have been inherited from their fathers and forefathers.

These verses demonstrate the deal between the believers and their lord. These jihad teachings are not only in the Koran but also in the law (Torah) and Gospel. The Koran teaching about the jihad concept says in Surah At-Tawbah 9, verse 111 that 'God has purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs in return is the Garden of paradise, they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain:

A promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Koran: And who is more faithful to his covenant than God? Which you have concluded: That is the achievement supreme.'

By quoting these verses, Islam extremists seek to strike a deal with their god. These they want non-Muslims to understand and take it that their actions are justified. However, there is no real believer in any Muslim country who doubts or has illusions on the gravity of the holy war against perceived infidels.

Sayyid Qutb writes that 'It is the entering into a deal between the believer and God. God—the Almighty is the buyer, when the believer is the seller. They allegiance with God Not then remain a believer in the same thing, nor in his money Captured without God—the Almighty—and without jihad In the process To be the word of God is supreme, To have the whole religion of God. Believer in God, he sold those same deals and money for a price specified is known as a paradise.' Sayyid Qutb was an Egyptian author, educator, Islamic theorist, poet, and the leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. He is one of the Muslim scholars who use the Koran to justify terrorism acts. Also, Qutb is considered as the father of jihadist inspiration in the Muslim world.

However, compared to perceived opponents, extremists, as believers in the Islam faith, are in a position to better understand the real meaning of the teachings of the Koran independent of the circumstances. But their understanding is not righteous. They interpret the Koran (as written in Arabic) literally to justify their actions.

The main concern for the Muslim extremists is the Muslims who believe the Koran but, at the same time, fail to follow its commands. That is their main problem. Since

many Muslims refuse to attack infidels, extremists feel disappointed. Therefore, the extremists lose rationality and choose to honour their belief system even when success is impossible.

Islam extremists seek to impose their religious beliefs on others by terrorising and killing fellow human beings. The current crisis in the Muslim world has become global. Therefore, there is a need to address the source of the conflict and find a solution. It is obvious that the cause of the problem is the interpretation of some Koran verses.

As noted above, many literally permit and order fighting against those who have a different belief system. But they do not explain the conditions and procedures for the implementation of these principles. They only stress encouragement, persistence, and the importance of the so-called holy war.

Therefore, what extremists do is justifiable according to the writings of the Holy Koran. Many Koran text provisions talk about the jihad. Writings on the jihad exhort adherents to fight enemies of Allah. Those who believe and follow these teachings are common and well-known in the Muslim society. Indeed, the longest chapters in the Koran are about jihad and the fighting of infidels. For example, Surahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Imran, Al-Nisa, Al-Ma'idah, Al-Fath, and Al-Tawbah, among other Koran texts, explicitly encourage jihad and enmity between Muslims and non-Muslims (kafir). Extremists follow and fulfil what is written in the Koran and Hadith. So they are right according to the writings of Islam while those who oppose them are wrong.

Abu Hurairah was a companion of Prophet Muhammad and the most prolific narrator of Hadith in Sunni Hadith compilations. He narrated, 'Who died and did not invade and did not happen the same invasion, died on the Division

of hypocrisy.' Muslim youth follow, step-by-step, such religious teachings and sayings of their prophet.

The main problem is that Islam suffers from long years of negligence from those who ought to have nurtured it over time. For example, Koran verses that preach peace are not many and well known like those that advocate the jihad and fighting against infidels. Thus, religion feeds the jihad and encourages jihadists and extremists to wage war. The result is torture and human rights abuse that has existed in the Muslim world for a very long time.

Islamic extremists do not read the Koran with the purpose of understanding the revelation, aims, and the main doctrine of the faith. Their anger and world view of the rest of humanity is wrongly premised, hence failure to appreciate human brotherhood. Although Islam is supposed to be a religion of peace, extremists believe that those who oppose Islam are wrong and are serving the interests of some foreign forces. They further assert that non-Muslims know little or nothing about Islam. Whereas Islam can be truly a religion of peace, the current violent acts by Muslims say otherwise, hence the need for reinterpretation.

To solve the current crisis in the Muslim world, we need to know the source of the problem. Why do Muslim youth get involved in terrorism? It is obvious that diplomatic language and political speeches cannot unravel the mystery behind this phenomenon. It needs a fearless person who can go deep into the issue and explain the role of Islam and the belief system. Islamic teachings are the main source of terrorism.

The point of divergence between Muslim extremists and the modern clergy is that extremists prefer to implement the meaning of the Koran texts literally, while mainstream sheikhs preach the right belief and faith. They refuse to

compromise the teachings of the Koran for their own worldly interests.

What is sad is that the direct and clear meaning of the Koran verses supports the belief of the extremists. Therefore, Muslim religious and political leaders need to focus on the origin of the problem, which in this case is the Holy Book. The Koran remains the single most important source of extremism or radicalism among the youth. But let me be clear here, the fact that the Koran verses and the prophetic teachings are the source of the problem does not mean in any way that the religion itself is bad. No!

For the Holy Book to have relevance in the twenty-first century, it needs to be the source of spiritual growth, strength, love, and kindness rather than being the source of unending conflict and misunderstanding. Islam and the Muslim community in general have been neglected and misused by some Muslim leaders for many years. It is evident that some creative thinking is required in the interpretation of the writings of the Holy Book. This will make the message suit the needs of its followers in the world of today. God, in his infinite wisdom, did not intend that anything remains the same forever.

In the current war against extremists, the world powers have not quite addressed the real problem. Instead, they have created a phantom in the name of an extremist that obviously is not the source of the problem. There is something else that makes the so-called extremists commit acts of terror. This is what must be dealt with without looking for shortcuts. We cannot purport to cure a disease without a proper diagnosis. We must know what we are treating before prescribing treatment; we must understand the source of extremism for us to be able to deal with it effectively.

Al-Qaeda, Isil, al-Nusra, al-Shabaab, and Taliban were not dropped from the sky. They are our very own children and products of the Muslim society. With the advent of Muslim extremism, the Muslim religious and political leaders tried to explain the vice to the wider society as it is, but instead, they ended up saying a lot of untrue things regarding the negative development of Muslim youths. They could not say that it is a social problem that needs to be confronted head-on and corrected. They sought to blame the youth for the activities they were engaging in. They made no attempt to explain the role of the jihad principle.

In the beginning of the revelation, Muslims fought against Arab tribes and polytheists. The prophet and his followers fought and won over the Arab tribes in the ancient times. Therefore, according to Islamic teachings, the jihad is the most important worship a Muslim uses to connect with his Creator. It is the greatest price a Muslim pays in anticipation of heavy rewards from God. That heavy reward in the hereafter is a very ambitious goal.

The traditional principle of jihad is well known and common in the Muslim society. Over a long time, Islam experts have explained in their famous and well-known Islamic books about jihad. Islam extremists take the Koran teachings seriously—especially this jihad provision that advocates fighting against infidels.

There is no common policy in Islam that guarantees peace. Instead, it emphasises fighting and jihad. This is demonstrated by the following verses which decree fighting infidels in the name of jihad.

Surah Al-Baqarah 2 says,

> And say not of those who are slain in the way of God 'they are dead' Nay, they are living though you perceive it not. (154)
>
> And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevail justice and faith in God. (193)
>
> Fighting is prescribed for you and dislike it. But, it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you love a thing which is bad for you. But God knows and you know not. (216)
>
> Who is he that will loan to God a beautiful loan, which God will double unto his credit and multiply many times? It is God that gives (you) want or plenty And to him shall be your return. (245)

Surah Al-Imran 4 says,

> Did you think that you would enter Heaven without God testing those of you who fought hard (in His cause) and remained steadfast? (142)
>
> And if you are slain, or die, in the way of God, forgiveness and mercy from God are far better than all they could amass. (157)

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> And if you die, or are slain, lo! It is unto God that you are brought together. (158)
>
> Thinking not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their lord; they rejoice in the Bounty provided by God. (169)
>
> And with regard to those left behind, who have not yet joined them (in their bliss) the (Martyrs) glory in the fact that on them is no fear, nor have they (cause to) grieve. (170)

Surah Al-Nisa 4 says,

> Let those fight in the cause of God who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter, to him who fight in the cause of God, whether he is slain or gets victory, soon shall we give him a reward of great (value). (74)
>
> And why should you not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated (and oppressed) men, women, and children, whose cry is: 'our lord! Rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will help!' (75)
>
> Those who believe fight in the cause of God, and those who reject faith fight in the

> cause of evil: So fight ye against the friends of Satan: Feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan. (76)
>
> Then fight in God's course thou art held responsible only for thyself and rouse the believers. It may be that God will restrain the fury. (84)
>
> They but wish that you should reject faith, As they do, and thus be on the same footing (as they): But take not friends from their ranks until they flee in the way of God (from what is forbidden But if they turn renegades, Seize them and slay them wherever ye find them; and (in any case) take no friends or helpers from their ranks. (89)

Surah Al-Ma'ida 5 says,

> O ye who believe, take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors. They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily God guided not a people unjust. (51)

Surah Al-Anfal 8 says,

> Say to the unbelievers if they desist (from Unbelievers) their past would be forgiven them; But if they persist, the punishment

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> of those before them is already (A matter of warning for them). (38)
>
> And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, And there prevail Justice and faith in God Altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily God Doth see all that they do. (39)

Surah At-Tawbah 9 says,

> But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them, and seize, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem of war; but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them; for God is often forgiving, most merciful. (5)
>
> But if they violate their oaths after their covenant, and taunt you for your faith—fight ye the chiefs of unfaith for their oaths are nothing to them: that thus they may be restrained. (12)
>
> Will you not fight people who violated their oaths, plotted to expel the apostle, and took the aggressive by being the first to assault you? Do you fear them? Nay, it is God whom you should more justly fear, if you believe. (13)

Fight them, and God will punish them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you to victory over them, and heal the breasts of believers. (14)

O ye who believe! Take not for protectors your fathers and your brothers if they love infidelity above faith: If any of you do so, they do wrong. (23)

Say: if it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline: or the dwellings in which you delight—are dearer to you than God, or His Apostle, or the striving in His cause; then wait until God brings about His decision; and God guides not the rebellions. (24)

Fight those who believe not in God not the last Day, not hold that forbidden which has been forbidden by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of truth, even if they are of the people of the Book, until they pay the Jizya (Tribute) with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. (29)

Fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together. But know that God is with those who restrain themselves. (36)

> Go you forth, whether equipped lightly or heavily, and strive and struggle, with your goods and your persons, in the cause of God. That is best for you, if you, but knew. (41)
>
> O prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the Hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell, an evil refuge indeed. (73)
>
> God has purchased of the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs in return is the garden of paradise they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain; a promise binding on Him in Truth, through the law, the Gospel, and the Koran; and who is more faithful to his covenant that God? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded: that is the achievement supreme. (111)

The Hadiths also cover jihad principles extensively. Sahl bin Sa'd, may Allah be pleased with him, said, 'The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him: "strap on in the way of Allah is better than the world and what in it and the position of whip one of you from heaven is better than the world and everything in it and going evening in the way of Allah or the trail back is better than the minimum and it."'

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) said, 'The Messenger of Allah (pbuh): "Such fights for the sake of Allah and God knows who labours—like fasting to ensure the God of the Mujahidin in the process that he passed away

that he enter paradise or bring him back safe and sound with reward or booty."' Narrated by Muslim in his saheeh, in his words, Allah guarantees to those who come out in the process not only helmed by jihad in the way of God, and faith in me and ratification. Presley be the guarantor to enter paradise or return it to his home, which came out of him what earned from wages or booty. When the Prophet (pbuh) was asked: Any better? Said faith in God and His Messenger, then what he said was said jihad for the sake of God and then told why he accepted pilgrimage.

And Abu Anas Bin Jabr Al Ansari, may Allah be pleased with him, said, 'The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him: "What Egbert forward Abdul in the way of Allah in his"', and it also narrated from Abu Hurairah may Allah be pleased with him said: The Messenger Said: "Matt did not invade did not happen by itself died on the Division of hypocrisy."'

And Ibn Umar said, 'I heard the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) say, "If you indulge in *`Inah* (a form of trade; selling by borrowing), and follow the tails of cows, and are content with being farmers, and ignore jihad, Allah will impose on you a humiliation that would not be taken away until you go back to your religion."' This was narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawood, and Ibn Al-Qattan, said Hafiz in adulthood—*thiqaat*.

The Koran explains the regulations and rules for dividing booty and war captivities from infidels after slaving them. These rewards include worldly benefits like slaves and booty. However, the ultimate prize is a very attractive reward—death or victory. Hadith says, 'God makes my living under the shadow of my spear.' Hadith experts have confirmed that this Hadith is true. Therefore, that is what God wants and promises to pay a lot of rewards.

We still read the names of those killed in the battlefields and the location of the battlefields and glorify them to maintain the same image. Examples include the wars against Arab polytheist such as Badar, Uhud, Tabuka, and Hunain. It then appears like we are still living in the same situation as of those days. In effect, they appear like lifelong model examples for our children.

Muslim youth are ill-treated when they fail to get quality education and general good upbringing. In effect, they wrong other nations by forcing on them sharia. Although fighting against infidels is a common notion in Islamic culture, many Muslims blame extremists because it is no longer acceptable to fight in the name of religion. Thus, their attitude and actions towards others are misplaced.

Because of the sacrifices they make in line of duty and evil schemes, extremists suffer a lot in life. Yet they do not know how their situation will be in the hereafter. They suffer physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, and mental anguish to a point of total insanity. They are confused by Muslim clerics who preach that they must honour the orders of the Koran. Sheikh Abubakar Shariff (Makaburi) of Masjid Musa in Mombasa had been advocating for a religious war between Christians and Muslims before he was killed. However, he remains innocent until proved guilty by a court of law. He was quoted as saying heinous killings were justified along with killing of Christians and burning of churches. Such radical preachers confuse the youth which leads to aggression.

The hostility is seen in the attacks against non-Muslims who they refer to as infidels. Yet some Muslim forbearers—despite their Islamic faith—refused to fight alongside extremists against God's and Islam's perceived enemy as

the Koran commands. Such is the confusion that has led to loss of rationality.

In carrying out these instructions, Muslim youth go through many frustrations and humiliations. Unfortunately, most of them do not understand why they are suffering. So they translate their grievances to more aggression using religious teachings against their perceived enemies. Sometimes, they look back with nostalgia on the ancient times when the Muslim community experienced long years of development and unbridled success. This is why majority of them prefer to be named after those they consider to be great from the ancient times. They are all too eager to emulate their thinking and way of life.

The current internal fights among Muslims are a symptom of a much bigger problem. It is a social problem that requires careful and delicate handling devoid of the usual assumptions that seek to categorise this as either a personal or a group problem. It is a huge social problem that must be confronted head-on with the seriousness it deserves.

Muslim youth extremists are tormented. Thousands of them are detained for long periods of time without trial, tortured in the prison, or even killed. They experience human rights abuses on a daily basis. The abuse of power by those in political positions and the absence of responsibility and accountability are normal in their lives. It is difficult for people brought up in such a social and political environment to understand the value of justice and human rights. However, many Muslims who do not agree with the teachings of firebrand preachers urge fellow Muslims to refrain from unleashing chaos on innocent non-Muslims.

Islam extremists are wrong because they bring suffering to the rest of humanity. Many Muslim scholars agree that the acts of terrorists are unacceptable and a shame—in fact

they are infamous. Following the awareness and information spread by the Western society and their ideas on human rights and freedom, we must do something about the interpretation of these verses. The consequences of the jihad are not peace but war and suffering. So what is important is not the fact that the Koran supports jihad. The point is how we apply the Koran's teachings to ensure peace.

There is no difference between the current Koran verses and the one Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers read. But the time is radically different! The circumstances then are not the same as what we have today. But for extremists, the circumstances do not matter. What is abhorrent is the literal application of those ancient practices in our current circumstances. This, we must admit, has had a devastating effect on the mindset of many Muslims across the world. It is essential that every human being reads and understands the meaning of the Holy Koran, bearing in mind the circumstances.

Consequently, it is absurd to fail to recognise that this is no longer tenable in the world today. That is not how we should proceed. It does not mean that we too must continue in the same way. Jihad does not honour the Prophet. The verses in the Koran and the Hadith that support jihad may have served a purpose during the times of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh)—but not any more.

If Muslims are to follow their religion as it is, then they will behave, think, and act like Muslim extremists. In any case, natural laws dictate that everything tends to change with time as dictated by the laws of nature. The same applies to religion. The understanding of Islam by those who came before us is not the same. So we should be objective and refuse to follow the footsteps of our ancestors who fought many wars because of ignorance.

What has made us to come to the point of infamy with our religion is our firm belief that the Holy Book dictates that we should not modify any part of it or interfere with it—1,430 years after it was revealed. It would seem then that the Holy Book is serving some other unclear purpose instead of serving those it was originally intended for—Muslims. This is the reality of our situation as Muslims all over the world.

We all know that nothing in this world lasts forever or was made to remain static. Our Creator wanted the world to be dynamic and adaptive to changing circumstances so as to allow societal progress. Modern scientists have offered incontrovertible evidence that indeed the galaxy and earth movements affect the way human beings think and behave. As a consequence, it also affects our way of life. The level of awareness and our capacity to process information has been changing over the years from generation to generation. What we understood to have been God's revelation to us fourteen centuries ago surely cannot remain the same in the twenty-first century.

It is obvious that the extremists' interpretation of the Koran is wrong. In terms of directing and modelling its young generations, they are a real example of a failed society. What is needed is not just reconciliation between extremists and other Muslim society but between Muslims and their Holy Book.

My personal experience has consistently shown me that the highly respected sheikhs teach Muslim youth unfiltered Islamic principles through their speeches. There is constant reference to fatwas (legal opinions) and other religious teachings, which is what the youth seek to apply literally.

We now have the awareness and can compare our words with the current results in our societies. It seems

that we want to water the plant of violence with our religious speeches, yet we do not want to see the fruits of the plants we water—terrorists and mindless youths. In fact, that miserable situation in the Muslim world is well known. Throughout the world, terrorists support tyrannical Muslim governments. They also support change through revolution—not democracy and elections. This practice has to stop.

The majority of Muslims now want to review the values that the Holy Book teaches. It is apparent that Muslims yearn for the day when the texts in the Holy Koran will be reinterpreted. The purpose should be to make their religious belief system compatible with their real-life situation.

Since the formation of the United Nations, there are new conventions applicable to the world community. Also, democracy as a method of governance has spread wide. Therefore, Muslims should amend Koran readings that preach violence. It would be shameful to deny again and again that such principles exist in our Holy Koran.

Unless Muslims agree to review their traditional belief system that informs their perceptions of the world outside of the Muslim fraternity, there will always be wars between Muslims on the one side and the rest of the world on the other. Reviewing of the interpretations of the Koran is the answer.

The challenge to reinterpretation is that any attempt to review the meaning of the Koran text cannot be supported by the traditional false belief in the Holy Book and the Prophet's Hadith. The first perception that people should understand from the meaning of their Holy Book must be very clear and without any ambiguity. It must also be objective. However, any attempt by believers to interfere with the Holy Koran is prohibited.

[b] The jihad concept

Jihad means fighting against non-Muslims when a religious fatwa is issued. It also involves fighting against Muslims. Fatwas are issued by jihadist scholars. These so-called holy wars are propagated by ruthless militia groups and non-forgiving political leaders. The jihad has its provisions and preferences. It means fighting against infidels—all non-Muslims are considered as infidels.

The psychological effects of these labels on Muslims include breeding hatred, hostility, insensitivity, and lack of trust and cooperation between the Muslim community and others. The jihad is therefore a result of use of such labels in the same sense in the Muslim community. There is no doubt that these negative effects have had devastating consequences on the relationship between the Muslims and the rest of the other world.

Islam jihadist movements believe in jihad. All Muslims are taught that the jihad in Islam is very important. That is why they see nothing wrong in killing because it is part of their religious belief. They fight to comply with their religious text without considering consequences, such as war and suffering.

Sunni[1] Muslims consider it the most important worship for Allah while the Shia[2] Muslims believe it as one of the pillars of Islam. Therefore, the jihad concept is extremely popular in the Muslim community. As a philosophical and

[1] The Sunni are the majority in most Islamic countries outside of Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain. Sunna—translated variously as the 'trodden path', 'the way', 'example', or 'habitual practice'—refers to the example or path of the prophet Muhammad and his followers.

[2] The Shia represent the second largest denomination of Islam. Adherents of Shia Islam are called Shias or the Shi'a as a collective or Shi'i individually.

religious principle, it is engrained in the minds and souls of those who hold it. Throughout history, it has its footprints in the lives of the majority of Muslims.

The edicts of the jihad fields forbid believers of Islam from calling death upon those who killed in the way of Allah. Jihadists are honed for war by Allah—a fact that is beyond human comprehension. Martyrdom, booty, captivity, slavery, forgiveness, and the erasure of sins from God are some of the things associated with jihad. God's satisfaction and their enjoyment in paradise and sharing of the spoils are some of the motives for jihad.

Extremism does not just mean a negative view of the so-called infidels. It implies error and injustice on the part of God since he is the one who created these infidels and criminals—as they refer to them. We are led to believe that they are not only our enemies but also enemies of God. The extremists have given themselves the responsibility of forcefully correcting all things they perceive to be wrong.

With determination, they seek to find the perceived enemies—wherever they are—and kill them. In the end, they hope that non-Muslims will embrace the extremist understanding of God and his creation. This is because they think they are right while others are wrong. They do not want to reconcile their views with those of others because God is with them and not with the others. Islam extremists are at war with themselves and against non-Muslims because of the jihad as articulated in the Koran and Hadiths.

Extremists go to outrageous levels to justify what they hold as the truth. For example, Muslim refugees are convinced that their hosts have some grudge against them since God says in the Koran, Surah Al-Imran 3, verse 119 that 'Ah! Ye are those who love them, but they love you not though ye believe in the whole of the Book. When they

meet you, they say, "we believe" but when they are alone, they bite off the very tips of their fingers at you in their rage saying: "Perish in your rage; God knows very well all the secrets of the heart."'

Islamic writings detail many rules about jihad—many of which are not true. The only official jihad in Islam is fighting against infidels. Other elucidations are only opinions and views of some later sheikhs which have no religious evidence. Therefore, this explanation is limited to the jihad of fighting—not other form.

If terrorists practice the wrong faith, then their opponents must prove them wrong using the Koran. The dispute is about their religious belief system which is not logical. Therefore, it is not enough to declare that they are politically and logically wrong. We need to use the Koran to prove to them that they are wrong. If not, then they have reason to continue with their jihad.

Extremists claim that their religious views are true according to the religious texts. In contrast, their opponents are either ignorant of the true meaning of Islam or they simply have selfish ideas. This is very common in the Muslim society.

After a jihad, the fate of non-Muslims depends on the mercy of the militant command (emir). They must submit themselves to the authority of Muslims or to be killed. On the other hand, Muslims involved in jihad have their own verdicts and holy names. Once an individual takes part in jihad, one of two outcomes awaits him: either he dies in the cause of fighting in the way of Allah (God) and goes to heaven or stays alive and enjoys the fruit and victory of the war.

What is seen in the Muslim world is competition of those fighting using prejudiced jihad principles and the

horrifying results. The effect of the jihad is continuous fighting, hatred, unrest, and beheading of the innocent. Children, women, and innocent civilians are killed in the Muslim city markets in the name of jihad.

The Muslim society is led by political tyrants and religious hardliners who have no mercy on infants and their mothers. The constant thoughts about enmity, hatred, and revenge make it difficult for them to live decent lives. Their lives are full of tension, confusion, and internal turmoil. For this reason, it is clear that the owners of these thoughts have *no religion*. People with such extreme views do not live a dignified life because they lack a spiritual relationship and strong connection with their lord. Their ideas are completely opposed to the wisdom of the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

However, negative religious labels used for unbelievers can also be used against Muslims. They can also be applied to Muslims by a religious scholar. On this, the major problem in the Muslim community is infidelity and hypocrisy. To this end, the religious scholars that Muslims recognise can decide to give those negative labels to anyone they want to discredit in order to harm them. This way, no one is safe because a fatwa can be decreed upon anybody by religious sheikhs, so long as one does not have a good relationship with them.

The discrimination on the basis of religion and belief system has caused untold enmity and hatred among human beings. Besides, it is against the coexistence of humankind. On a very regular basis, we see the devastating effects of these religious beliefs on the world, especially in Muslim nations. In fact, the psychological impact of these religious beliefs on Muslims is obvious. When Islamic militants are held in American jails, they are treated as subhuman beings,

without any responsibility or the accountability by Western governments.

The Muslim understanding of jihad and its practice not only spoils relationships among human beings but also violates the spiritual relationship between believers and their Creator. Since originally, religion is about the relationship between God and His people on the basis of the spirit, love, compassion, good thinking, and cooperation, while the bad beliefs have a negative effects on Muslims. They lead to anxiety, confusion, fear, and mistrust.

The religious label—infidel—is used to portray non-Muslims as enemies of God, enemies of the Prophet and of the religion. The principle of jihad is based on such religious labels against non-Muslims. Its results such as violence, hatred, and segregation are perpetrated by the souls and minds of Muslims, just as they were perpetuated by their forefathers.

Those who do not practice Islam are seen as criminals by Muslims. Yet it was only the foolish ones in the Arab society of those old days who always disturbed the Prophet. It is this kind of historical happenings that have led most Muslims to believe all non-Muslims are criminals.

Most non-Muslims have no ill-motive against Muslims, based on their faith. Therefore, the phobia of infidels is not only limited to Arabs, who expressed their bitterness towards the Prophet (pbuh) and the start of Islamic call in the Arabian peninsula, but also on those people who did not know the Islamic faith or never got a chance to get sufficient information about it.

Yet extremists seem to be saying, 'How can you advise them, are they not infidels? How can you trust and cooperate with them, are they not infidels?' Is it not God that says, 'Never will the Jews and the Christians be satisfied with you

unless you follow their form of religion'? Do you want to be like them and go into the fire as they do?

In the same breath, extremists argue—is it not God that says, 'O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily God guides not a people unjust.'

These are formal edicts by the jurists which Islam commentators use to explain the rulings of jihad and its benefits, such as booty, slavery, and certificate of martyrdom, and preferred cruelty to the unbelievers. They are the prescribed provisions for the jihad and related practices.

After a terrorist attack in Kenya last year, Muslim leaders and non-Muslim leaders came together and released a statement that says, 'Fighters from the Muslim society (extremists) do not follow their religion. Religion does not order killing of infidels and religion is meant to be peaceful.' This is not true. Extremists are religious adherents, at least in one part of Islam. Koran verses are enough evidence that they are fulfilling the orders of their god, according to their belief system. The Muslim political and religious leaders' statement that is often quoted says that 'terrorists are not true Muslims. Islam does not command what they are doing'. This is not true as per the current Islam understanding based on the direct meanings that can easily be drawn from the Koran. If Muslims believe that terrorists' understanding of Islam is not correct, then they should embrace efforts to reinterpret and review the whole Islam understanding.

If Muslims believe jihad and its provisions and fighting against unbelievers, how do we get the security and stability in our Islamic homelands? This is contrary to what we originally think and give our energy; we think of jihad

and fighting against unbelievers and that attracts another fighting and a lot of bloodshed as our situation is now.

The universal law, which governs the whole world, does not work on a favouritism and discrimination with some people against others. Everyone must get what he or she thinks and believes; for Muslim belief, the concept of fighting against infidels and expecting God's appreciation of that action is enough to determine the believers' fate according to what they have in their heart. I wish Muslims sensitised the relationship between our beliefs and our current social and political situation. It is scientifically proved and well known—the direct relationship between the life standards of a people and their belief systems. Life innovation, creativity, knowledge and science discovery, people's lifestyle, and quality of life standard have direct relationship to the kind of belief system and cultural qualities that a nation holds.

Definitely, the invisible world governing source, which governs all our life systems, will send the same thing we think and believe, and there is no incompatibility from your thoughts and your actual life. That is why we—as Muslims—are getting a lot of fighting and instability in our own homeland. That problem from our youngsters is there because of our belief system and the philosophy we hold about the life and human beings around us. This is a warning signal that I should bring to the attention of all Muslims. How can someone hope for himself goodness and evil and misery for others and, at the same time, hope to have a quality life? This means you think you deserve goodness from God and others worth the agony.

Whatever you believe, you will attract the same from the universal law of attraction. Based on that, Muslims commonly believe in the jihad concept, its provision of

fighting, violence, and encouraging fighting against unbelievers. This makes the youth love violence and fighting even against their fellow Muslims. Either we drop completely the violence against anyone or it becomes a common thing with us and our society. There is no way only Muslims can become peaceful and non-Muslims suffer in this world or vice versa. Why? Because natural laws are not subject to the wishes of the people; Islam does not incite envy and hatred for others. It is even forbidden from the believers, these bad manners, but it was made by the people who administrated Islam for a long time.

Writings in our Holy Book that we believe as true from God and which we read daily are not something easy in our cultural behaviours. The social, political, environmental, and religious beliefs have a significant effect on our psychology and mind habits. That is why it is important to be very conscious of our surroundings and the belief system we hold. The Islam religious belief is governed by the Koran texts and the sayings of the prophet Muhammad (pbuh). There is no way we can emphasise the Koran verses clearly encouraging fighting, jihad, and war. Then we hope for a peaceful Muslim society? The reverse is also true as our situation is now. Getting peaceful, educated, and hard-working youths in our Muslim community depends on the direct effect of the religious texts we are reading.

Therefore, religious labels are extremely devastating and unacceptable because of their impact on the minds and behaviour of Muslims. How do Muslims reconcile their negative beliefs about those they view as infidels and non-believers, yet they interact with Christians and even live together? Since they consider non-Muslims as enemies, should they not expect the same hate from Christians?

It is strange that Muslims do not see anything odd with the way Christians treat them in most cases. Christians usually wear a friendly smile and interact with them without prejudice or hatred. Muslim asylum seekers get everything they need which they could not find in their own countries. They enjoy peace, respect, security, freedom, justice, social welfare, education, and health services.

All these things they get without any form of discrimination. Yet this is not compatible with what their religion teaches. Their beliefs do not allow them to conform to what they see practically in majority Christian countries where they seek asylum. But to them, whatever their religion says must be true. Mostly, they think that God's Word must be true and that there is no doubt about it. Therefore, they conclude that no matter what Christians do for them, they are not genuine—even where there is nothing to indicate doubt on the actions of their host.

Muslim clerics never consider it their responsibility to improve the meaning and understanding of their religion. Neither do the bodies that are supposed to implement it. Many Muslim clerics do not have clear functions and proper structures of implementing the teachings of the Koran.

Everyone has a duty to serve God and his religion the way he or she perceives it. Each one has to learn the Koran by heart. After this, a true adherent is supposed to worship God and practice the daily traditional rituals. The main problem, however, is that everyone has a right to give himself the religious title he likes based on how he perceives himself and the prestige he gets from the believers.

One can be either a sheikh or a Ma'allim or indeed become anything else that he chooses. There is not a well-established system or procedure on how one can obtain these religious titles. It depends on what the stream people

would like to call him. This means that the Muslim society has failed to manage and organise its faith system just like it has failed to ensure quality life for its members.

It is normal, therefore, to get many fatwas (legal opinions) flying on the streets here and there from any one of the religious sheikhs. And for many Muslims, these legal opinions must be obeyed so long as they have been issued by their sheikh. That is why we often see many contradictions when it comes to Muslim religious holidays.

Different sections come up with a different day for marking religious festivities. Why? If one were to ask. The answer is simple: there are no any established systems for determining the days and other events essential in the life of a Muslim. It is chaos galore!

The solution is not to deny the reality but to rectify the errors. And those to rectify the errors are those who have God's authority to do so. God gave the job of correcting anything to do with religious understanding to the clerics. God says in Surah 4, verse 59, 'O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority among you.'

Those mentioned in the Koran can be equated to a people's elected representatives. We have to understand that instead of asserting that Muslim youths who understand the Holy Book as it is are very wrong, we have to close loop. Yes, I agree that they are wrong because of the negligence of their fathers and forefathers, who never bothered to find out how their children learn Islamic principles.

Terrorists are wrong because they lack sufficient knowledge in human affairs and the value of human life. The difference between the terrorists and other Muslims is not the belief system itself but the living standards and their life experience. Terrorists, who are mostly youths, do not

have enough knowledge about world affairs. Such is because they never got a chance to test the enjoyment of life. Yet they do not have anything to lose; they do not have a decent life in this world anyway.

The Muslim youths see themselves as subhuman beings without hope of getting human rights like to education, free speech, political affiliation, or religious beliefs—enjoyed in other societies. Because of this, they are like refugees of God's heaven, and they are supported by their religion. The Koran and the Prophet's Hadith offer encouragement about the goodness of life in the hereafter if the youth are killed in the service of God.

The Koran verses are very clear, and adherence to them is the duty of all Muslims, and for sure, Islam extremists are trying to implement the meaning of those verses. What then is the solution? There are several good points which can bring a balance between the religious beliefs adherent and the real life of modern days.

That is why it is important to review the religious writings and introduce the time and the context principle. The words and terms we use in our homes, schools, and mosques affect our children and determine what they do in their own lives. Hostile words and horrifying stories about facts and imagining human conflicts in the name of religious, tribal, or political differences are what make our countries war-torn and many of its people refugees in other countries. Words are what create our perception in everything.

So let us consciously choose the words and the vocabulary we are to use in our day-to-day activities to teach our children. Jihad verses in the Holy Koran, which are misinterpreted, and the religious labels such as infidels, atheists, polytheists, criminals, and enemies of God convey

a negative religious image into our children's minds. Their behaviour is influenced by the negative philosophy and religious belief system. To change our deteriorating security and political reputation in the world, we have to change our core values in life and the surrounding environments. Wars to gain political and economic scores in our Muslim countries are not worth supporting for our well-being and peaceful coexistence.

On one hand, Muslim extremists have a point, based on their faith and religion. On the other hand, the whole world has lost the way in its fight against the extremists. The world is fighting the symptoms of the disease—not the disease itself. The symptom is extremist activities while the real disease is in the reading, interpretation, and application of the teachings of Islam. The verses that refer to jihad are the true genesis of the current misunderstanding by Muslim youth. The verses need to be reinterpreted for better understanding.

Mobilising believers in the early days to defend themselves was not bad at all. However, the problem is using these Koran verses in the modern world. Defence or attack systems are necessary for any nation anywhere in the world but only when there is a purpose and a clear policy. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did this in a very efficient and inexpensive way and managed to build a huge empire in large parts of the world.

Until now, that psychological and spiritual military system is working and can mobilise millions of volunteers in the Muslim world without a huge budget or any promise of worldly rewards. It is not like a civil war but a voluntary war which has moral principles and goals to be achieved in the battlefield. In effect, all those Koran verses encouraging fighting may have had a purpose at that particular point

in time. What is gravely incorrect and unacceptable is the indiscriminate application of those verses now.

Our consciousness in the way we are acting, our beliefs, and our lifestyle are vital. According to the religious jihad writings mentioned in the previous chapter, the negative culture came from the belief that we are doomed. Therefore, we should put in place radical religious and social changes.

According to God's law and the law of nature, everyone harvests what she/he planted. That is what is happening in Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, and many other Muslim countries. Fighting was planted in the minds and hearts of their youth. Our current situation is not the way it is because of someone else's oppression but our negligence and refusal to deliberately use our conscience. Choose the words you use in communicating to your family, friends, and neighbours, and then our social and political situation will automatically change.

PARTRIDGE
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Chapter 2

What motivates extremists?

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[a] The lost glory

Muslim glory existed in the first part of Islam growth in the Arab peninsular, when Omar ibn al-Khattab,[3] the second caliphate of the Muslims, had conquered the whole of Middle East (Iraq, Syria, and Jerusalem) and parts of North Africa. These military successes happened within two years; Omar conquered the very old and tired Persian Empire in a short time. Also, he gained victories in North Africa and some

[3] Omar, also spelled Umar, was one of the most powerful and influential Muslim caliphs in history. He was a senior Sahaba of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. He succeeded Abu Bakr as the second caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate on 23 August 634.

parts of Europe. One of the most famous heroes in those days' military wins was Tariq ibn Ziyad.[4]

In those days in Muslim history, there was light compared to the then dark world. Only Muslims had a new vision for humanity and the world at large. In the Muslim community of those days, there was some kind of democratic thought, freedom of speech, and a universal justice system for all. In addition, there was some kind of invention, application of philosophy, and equitable wealth distribution in the emerging new society.

Because of these developments, people readily accepted the social and political changes spearheaded by Muslims. However, the military victories won by Muslims did not mean that their opponents were unintelligent—ready to be conquered. It only shows that there was a need for new ideas and change in society. And Muslims had a good mission and saw themselves as having something new to offer others. They did not just believe that they have a message to deliver to others. Instead, they were implementing the universal Koran principles on the ground. To them, good human values were in short supply that time. Acting on their newfound belief system and motivated by their self-esteem, they had a strong will and energy to easily conquer old empires and win them over within a short time.

The Muslim community has never seriously addressed the issue of why we lost our glory. Although nobody is suggesting that the glory was stolen by infidels, what is clear is that it did not just go away on its own. The main cause of the loss is the negligence of its caretakers.

[4] Ziyad was a Muslim Berber general who led the Islamic conquest of Visigothic Hispania in AD 711–718. Under the orders of the Umayyad Caliph Al-Walid I, he led a large army from the north coast of Morocco, consolidating his troops at a large hill now known as Gibraltar.

The glory was lost because of lack of or absence of clear thought and logical thinking. Muslims prefer religious dogma to logical and rational thinking. For about fourteen centuries, we have witnessed the fall in standards among Muslim faithful. With time, Muslims have tended to accept the status quo and violent culture. It has now become part of their belief system and permanent way of thinking. Anyone who raises questions against that bad culture is considered as heretical and is fought in the name of the same religion.

Did infidels take the opportunity of the absence of reason in the Muslim world to progress? If not, who would you blame then, yourself or the others? If they too (infidels) had opted not to reason, the world would be some ugly and dark place.

Since the precious human mind is absent, it has been very easy to manipulate and mislead the Muslim society; they have to fear God in the sense of obeying their political and religious leaders and trust them without questioning. They are not in a position to believe they have civil rights and that they deserve a better life rather than the one they currently have.

The education Muslims receive merely imitates that of other nations. It does not have any genuine meaning to them. They have never tested the truth and the real meaning of education in a practical way. There are no real education values because there are no opportunities to test the results of the education and science. It is a requirement in the world that one needs to have at least some papers to show that he or she has got a particular degree or level of schooling. That is why education is never given its pride in some places of the Muslim world.

Muslims never get a chance to apply scientific principles in their daily lives, yet they are honourable guests to the

developed societies. Since there is a ready answer from the infidels for all the questions that can happen in people's minds, there is no big problem because things will be taken care of by the infidel. They have to spare time to enjoy their lives and pursue personal prestige and ego satisfaction.

Citing these early conquests, Muslims seem to believe that by fighting infidels, they will bring back their lost glory. That the wars they wedge will result in similar victories which will solve their social, economic, and political problems. This strong belief by Muslims has resulted in deep grievances and hostility between Muslims and other nations whom they consider conspirators. This notion is dangerous because it has disrupted peace in the entire world. Extremist Islamic movements are growing by the day and are now spread throughout the world. They carry the message that all problems in the Muslim world are caused by the conspiracy of non-Muslims. They also believe that the perceived hostility from non-Muslims is driven by the influential Jewish society.

This has now become a religious dogma which is unchangeable, immovable, and has been made a permanent slogan in worship places. 'Oh! God, destroy the infidels, atheists, your enemy, and your religion's enemy.' That prayer is common in the Muslim world especially every Friday in the mosque. We pray, 'Oh! God, destroy . . .'—then God destroys us since we ask for, and always think about, destruction. The universal law of attraction affects us directly; then we get the kind of thoughts and intentions that we have had.

Instead of directing our efforts towards solving our problems, we waste our energy on plotting hostilities, hatred, and evil thinking. We focused on infidels, forgetting

their contribution to human needs. The absence of logic and intellectual discourse creates in us futile envy and resistance.

Since we show infidels hatred and hostility, they have also turned against us. Such negative energy has not given us any better results. Poverty and ignorance in the Muslim world is increasing day by day, month by month, year by year. Wars and inside fighting in Muslim countries are increasing. Why? Because the universal law of attraction is working against us. We get what we desire: hostility and malice towards others by us has given birth the same within us. We lost our glory in the ancient times. Al-Andalus (holy land) is no more.

The idea of having an ever suspicious mind is quite perverse in the Muslim world, and that is why some religious clergy who tried to interpret Koran and Hadith texts in a reasonable way were branded rationalist, which is a suspicious name in Muslim society. So the fight to restore the lost glory has so far not yielded desired results since the superpower countries undoubtedly have the means to defend themselves; this most certainly renders and makes the efforts of the Muslim extremists' exercises unfruitful.

Over time, we have developed the notion that God infinitely loves us and says as much in the Koran. Because of this, we mistakenly believe we do not need to think and search for the truth beyond what we were given by our God through religion. The misguided belief that we do not have to engage ourselves in the exercise of thinking and searching is anchored in Koran verses. For example, Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 3 says, 'This day have those who reject faith given up all hope of your religion yet fear them not, but fear me. This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion.'

Similarly, Al-Ma'idah 6, verse 38 says, 'Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they all shall be gathered to their Lord in the end.' The question which begs to be answered is, which book is the verse referring to? Is it the Koran or is it the book in which God keeps everything about his creatures? Could it be God's store in which he keeps all the dates of this world? Of course God does not need a store to keep a date! But a metaphor which brings the idea near into our perception may help to bring the message to our domain.

Many Muslim scholars interpret this book as the knowledge which God has by himself but not the Koran. Indeed, no one can claim that the Koran has everything in the universe. In fact, no book in the hands of human beings can have all things.

The interpretation and subsequent understanding of the meaning of these two verses in the Koran quoted above have left their unfortunate imprints on the lives of Muslims. They understand that the Koran verses teach them not to think further. And despite the many years spent by some sincere Muslim scholars exhorting Muslims to rethink their position, they insist on being mentally off duty! To them, God will do the work anyway as decreed by the Koran. Also, there is some genuine fear that the mental work can create a lot of questions like the Greek philosophers provoked in their heyday, and that can compromise the practice of religious faith.

We benefit from the contribution of the so-called infidels in many ways. First, we buy and use their products. Second, even the weapons we use in war are theirs. Yet we are not ready to learn from them and, if possible, thank them for the inventions.

In our fight against infidels, it seems the gun we are using is pointed at multiple targets, including ourselves. Although our intention is to use it against our enemy and God's enemy, the unfavourable gun kills both us and our perceived enemies. Instead of firing towards their direction, it fires in every direction, including towards the possessor. Perhaps it is time the extremists answered the question: who designs and manufacturers guns?

How can anyone raise his or her hand and ask such questions? God gives us everything we need in our lives here on earth and in the hereafter as clearly articulated in the Koran. To some people, there is no need of such questions and reasoning, because we are not supposed to question the Koran. We seem to be avoiding the questions so as to fulfil God's command to us in the Koran! Questioning is always the sister of doubt in God and his religion. So it must be avoided by all means. When we refuse to think on a religious basis, evil takes advantage and the truth is abrogated.

Some political leaders have come out to rationalise their seemingly eternal rule over the people and their possessions, including land. People have to surrender their rights and be totally submissive to the kingdom. In addition, they have to acclimatise their names and make people to kneel before them. Since we do not manufacture our own weapons to fight against the infidels, it is absurd to fight someone using his own weapons.

We should thank the infidels for their unrelenting efforts to make the world a different and enjoyable place. What the infidels have done for human kind, in the field of knowledge, science, technology, and governing systems are an unimaginable grace, which must be appreciated by all, including Muslims. They have done a lot for the humankind's well-being. Sometimes, they have overdone

themselves in the various fields of human advancement to break ground after ground of knowledge for the human race to have better opportunities in life. And of course, they did not steal the glory of the Muslims!

To the extremists, I want to say that the lost glory cannot be found through fighting which leads to displacement of millions of Muslims. We only need clarity of thought about the issues at hand to bring back the glory.

When Muslims were the leaders of the world, it was not because of the fighting and jihad. It was because they believed in and applied some good universal principles that were scarce in other nations those days. As Muslims, let us return to reason so that we can rescue our Muslim brothers and sisters who worshipped status and give them their freedom to worship God.

To this day, we still possess one of the most valuable principles of the human race in our Holy Book, Koran. That is the absolute justice principle. We were once known to stand for justice even if it was threatened by our own personal interests. Infidels did not steal the glory; it became antiquated, was forgotten, and has never been reclaimed.

[b] Governance is for God

Islamists have made the religious dogma 'Governance is for God' their ultimate goal and slogan of their struggle against their governments. Several teachings of the Koran support this principle. Such teachings are the main cause of infighting in the Muslim world.

The political disputes in the Muslim world are not prevalent in other nations or groups in the world. Islamic political views are supported by the fundamentalist Koran teachings, hence the political chaos. The name of God is

used as the hidden leader of political party in the Muslim world. The extremists are the army which defends him and his governance. That imagined god is a politician who never makes decisions by himself. They make decisions on his behalf because he exists only in their minds.

In Surah Al-Ma'idah 5, God says, 'If any do fail to judge by the light of what God hath revealed, they are no better than unbelievers' (33). 'If any fail to judge by the light of what God hath revealed they are no better than wrong-doers' (45). 'If any fail to judge by the light of what God has revealed, they are no better than those who rebel' (47).

The Muslim Brotherhood[5] in Egypt spearheaded the emergence of Islamic political movements in the Muslim world in the beginning of the last century. These movements believed in the principle of 'Governance is for God' as articulated in the Koran writings and started opposing their governments.

According to that principle, Islamists have a right to rule Muslim nations on behalf of God. They believe that any non-Islamic group in power in any Muslim country is ruling unlawfully and must be removed by any means. In the process, so they argue, any loss of lives, property, and destruction of country in the cause of God is logical because of the sacred perception.

Such beliefs and actions that follow are the main cause of the chaos and the permanent conflicts in the Muslim world. In their opinion, God is demanding his right to govern and he will continue demanding his rights until he

[5] Founded in 1928 by the Egyptian schoolteacher/activist Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni entity, is one of the oldest, largest, and most influential Islamist organisations in the world.

gets back his governance. This, they believe, will happen even if the infidels say no.

The Islamists as self-proclaimed representatives of God want to rule the Muslim world without being accountable to anyone. They believe that they are above being accountable to anyone except God, whom they represent.

They refuse to recognise official governments because they do not consider the leaders as representatives of God. They argue that God has not given them the power to rule. That way, they must be removed by any means. That explains the reason for the riots, fighting, and total unrest in many Muslim countries.

Islamic movements exist essentially to fight on behalf of their god. But God is invisible—you cannot see him or talk to him directly, except through prayer. So extremists should know that we cannot negotiate with a god who is absent. Instead, we must endeavour to find out his will from Koran teachings. Otherwise, if we aim to defeat others, it is difficult to end the wars and achieve lasting reconciliation and peace.

This is a critical situation in the Muslim world now. Islamic movements should appreciate that the god they fight for is the same god that created other human beings. We must find a way of living together without displeasing others. Since no one worships idols, any rule, if properly chosen, is the rule of God.

The application of 'Governance is for God' has led to lawlessness and fighting. The extremists do not respect or recognise the state laws, lawmakers, and the whole ruling systems in the Muslim world. That is why many governments

in the Muslim world from Afghanistan to Iraq and Somalia[6] have failed. The tendency now in many Muslim states is to live without functional governing systems or a respected official authority.

Muslim extremists argue that the laws applicable in Muslim countries are not valid because God himself must make laws for his people. They refer to legislators as infidels who are not Islam adherents. To majority, sharia law is God's law for all human beings and should be introduced where they conquer others. It is sad that this belief also applies to Western countries. And they argue that if Western societies do not accept sharia laws willingly, they must be forced to do so.

And what is the source of such extremist views? The answer is to be found in the Koran which says, 'And this he commands judge thou between them by what God has revealed, and follow not their vain desires but beware of them lest they beguile them from any of that teaching which God has sent down to them. And if they turn away, be assured that for some of their crimes it is God's purpose to punish them. And truly most men are rebellious' (Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 52).

It is also written in Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 53 that, 'Do they then seek after a judgment of the days of ignorance? But who for a people whose faith is assured, can give better judgment than God?'

Also, Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 54 says, 'O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protector: They are but friends and protectors to each other.

[6] Somalia was without a formal parliament for more than two decades after the overthrow of President Siad Barre in 1991.

And he amongst you that turns to them for friendship is of them. Verily God guide not a people unjust.'

Muslim religious movements that do not recognise the authority and laws of Muslim countries should not be allowed to exist. If they do not recognise the value of law and order and understand the meaning of sovereignty, they should all be done away with.

There is no way extremist movements should be allowed to operate in countries where even average citizens do not subscribe to their views. It is true that many Muslim countries at present face many challenges and dangers in regard to handling extremist movements. Three main examples are the Boko Haram[7] in Nigeria, Mujahideen[8] in Afghanistan, and al-Shabaab[9] in Somalia. We must do something to solve this problem. Hiding our heads under the sand like the proverbial ostrich will not help. These groups must take responsibility for their actions and denounce the social evils and the rotten culture they propagate.

If the religious belief system is on one valley and the other governing system is on another valley, the current disorders in Muslim world will last forever. Therefore, we

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7 This means 'People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad'. Led by Abubakar Shekau, it is a terrorist, militant, and Islamist movement based in Nigeria with additional activities in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Its strength varies between 500 and 9,000. They have been linked to al-Qaeda and ISIS.

8 This refers to guerrilla-type military outfits of radical Islamists, specifically in reference to the Taliban in their role as guerrilla force in the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Since the phenomenon of radical Islamic irregular forces has become more widespread in the wake of the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan, the alternative term 'jihadist' has also gained popularity.

9 Meaning 'the youth', or 'the youngsters', it is an Islamist terrorist group based in Somalia. In 2012, it pledged allegiance to the militant Islamist organization al-Qaeda. As of 2015, the group has retreated from the major cities but imposes strict forms of sharia law in the regions.

cannot survive unless we review the teachings of our Holy Book and make them logical so that they become a source of peace, spirituality, and tranquillity.

Our religious belief system controls what we do daily and how our minds think. Rarely do we subject the teachings of the Koran and Hadith reason and logic. We look at the world through our religious prism. That means, any changes or developments in the Muslim world have to be supported by religion. Initially, such used to come through modern science and technology.

Any idea, which gets its roots from religion, is not subjected to logic and its rationale examined. The only thing one has to do is to quote Koran verses or Hadiths from the Prophet. Therefore, they appeal to emotions and not logic and reason. That is why it is important that political and religious Muslim leaders form an official religious institution to regulate the faith. It should be able to draw a balance between what is religious and secular human development.

In the current situation, Islam does not have an official regulatory body for the whole Muslims. In every Muslim country in the world, individuals take the responsibility of religion as revealed by God. In most cases, the interpretations are subjective since all interpret the way they want or understand.

Anyone who assumes the position of sheikh can call for a fatwa (legal opinion). Many youths in turn take it as the Word of God—when sometimes it is not. This then affects all their lives. Fatwa in the Muslim nations is what brings chaos to Muslim nations, making it impossible to have peace and stable governments.

The situation can be blamed on negligence by Muslim leaders over a long period of time. Now is the time to wake up and reorganise the religious belief system to make clear

the separation between the human responsibilities for themselves and God's destiny.

[c] Martyrdom (Al-shahid)

Al-shahid means a person who dies in a battlefield in the cause of God's way, which is fighting against infidels. In the Islamic faith, a martyr is the highest rank of honour and respect that someone can reach in the society and for God.

Several Koran verses and the Prophet's Hadith encourage believers to attack infidels with the expectation of getting rewards from God. No one can draw himself nearest to God by anything else but by invading infidels and dying in the battlefield. There is a confirmed Hadith, from the Prophet, that says, 'He who dies when he has not taken part in invading the infidels and by any chance did not think of invading infidels, some part of hypocrisy happens to be in him.'

The best thing that a Muslim can expect to get a reward for from God is to die as a martyr (al-shahid). It is a religious and social status many compete for. Those who die in battle are considered lucky and are recognised to be martyrs for God and the society.

Muslims believe that someone who dies as a martyr can intercede on behalf of his relatives, such as mother, father, brothers, and sisters. In brief, the rewards for martyrdom are lofty and inconceivable.

The word *shahadah* is interpreted as 'testimony' meaning 'to observe, witness or testify' in Islamic teachings. In another meaning, *shahadah* means 'martyrdom'. Several Koran verses, Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) Hadiths, and very many stories praise al-shahadah. Therefore, when Muslims advertise the death certified (al-shahadah), they

encourage youth to be martyrs by committing criminal activities. The result is the nonsense killings and devastating suicide explosions, which have become daily happenings around the world.

The violent acts are the stem of our true culture and have been around since the beginning of the revelation by Prophet Muhammad. The extremists only wait for an appropriate moment to swing in action. So of what value is it to praise the death certificate among the Muslim youths? Instead, we should encourage the youth to learn and work harder and make their life better.

The standard of living today is measured by economic, social, and political indicators. At personal level, people mainly require food, shelter, and freedom from disease. So why do we make it look like the human needs in this life are the same as what we need after the death?

We assume that we need the same possessions we have now in the hereafter—a fact that is wrong. Yet our hope is to get everything we miss in this life in the hereafter. That means life in heaven is a continuation of life on earth. That means there is no real change! That only makes sense if we use human imagination and perception. Although we need material things in this life, we shall only need spiritual encouragement and connection to our god in the hereafter. After all, we shall have left our very human bodies and become pure spirits.

Several religious writings support death certification. This makes many Muslims desire the promises in the hereafter rather than use effort to live better lives on earth and achieve the same. The writings are like suicide regulations for those suffering a severe depression. It is an easy way to run away from responsibility and facing life's challenges. Such a form of gaining rewards from God and,

at the same time, instantly getting all they missed on earth is appealing to youth with limited knowledge.

The practice of al-shahid makes Muslims lag behind other societies in terms of scientific research, discovery, and competition in the field of knowledge. With such a belief, the youth think more about death; their goal is to die in order to get rewards.

It is quite obvious to all that terrorism is a result and fruit of the al-shahid culture as practised by jihadists. Tolerating al-shahid is equal to encouraging death rather than life, a fact known to all modern Muslims. That means in that culture, people compete for death, not life. Important actions that are valuable to society, such as education, invention, discovery, and general success in life, are not taken seriously. So the main goal the youth compete for is to die in the battlefield of fighting against infidels. The current death tolls and destruction that result from terrorist activities should be squarely blamed on the teachings about al-shahid.

When a nation—any nation—produces people who prefer dying to living and using their mental and physical effort to better their lives, that nation is in trouble. It also poses a danger to others who want to live a decent life in the community of nations.

There are several examples of promises for martyrdom. For example, Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him, the messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, and his family says, 'I swore to my God that myself in his hand, I wish to raid the infidels then slay, then raid, then sly about three times.' Muslims believe this verse.

He also says, 'Fighters for the sake of God—and God knows who is struggling in the process—such as fasting status, and trust God for the Mujahidin in the process;

either he die then enter a paradise, or bring him back safe and sound with a reward or boot.'

All religions and cultures respect their martyrs, whom they perceive as having suffered because of their religion and values. However, what is different in the Muslim society is the psychological impact and the proceeding huge honour in that perception. Dying in the way of God is the easiest way to make up for the lost good living. It also makes up for the failures in one's life. It seems like a shortcut to gaining all our losses. People have made killing and dying a business.

The promised rewards for a martyr are the same rewards Muslims want and compete for in this life. Fighting and dying itself is a big business. Youths are paid to fight for the sake of it and end up dying in the battlefield. Whether it is in this life or hereafter, those who encourage such acts only do so in self-interest. It is all about promises: do this and you will get that.

What the youth should know is that to die and dying is inevitable. But we all need to work hard for survival. The gains in the hereafter that appear effortless are just that—promises. Attacking others and fighting for rewards in the name of God creates an unproductive and suicidal society.

The promise of rewards is an irresistible and unimaginable opportunity to our poor youth. That makes them an easy target for the tyrants, dictators, and other fundamentalists who want to promote that ideology. Competing for desired goals is a natural feeling for every human being. If the best way to compete is to become religious martyrs, so be it. That is why we have seen many meaningless killings in certain parts of the world.

But the results are scary. In the process, many lives will be lost and many nations will end. People have to kill

themselves or kill others and go directly to heaven and get the certificate of being a martyr for God and the society.

In the Muslim world, dying is the best certificate someone can use to show his or her worth. The Arab media reports that anyone who dies in the riots as a *shahid* goes to paradise. The official media calls the dead people al-shahid (martyrs). That means death is not a bad thing or something to be avoided by all means. It is something to be demanded for, celebrated, and wished for. So the sense of balance in our society is upside down. If we do not name things by their real names, we will not be changing the reality. However, the psychological impact on us is quite huge. Changing and facing the reality is the only solution.

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Chapter 3

Islam extremism and Kenya

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[a] Is the reward of kindness anything but good?

Since independence in 1963, Kenya has had frosty relations with Somalia. The same has been the case with Kenyan Somalis who feel marginalised and also sympathise with Kenya's treatment of Somali. After the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in Somalia in 1991, Somali citizens who are themselves Muslims became victims of terrorism. Many fled and were welcomed in Kenya—mainly as refugees. Kenya became their home while other countries denied them asylum. Even some Muslim countries that share the Muslim faith, language, and cultures with Somali were not receptive to them. Despite the friendly

gesture, nonsense killings and suspicion continue to this day.

It is possible that some Somalis came into Kenya with Islamic extremist ideas. Here, they got a lot of freedom to spread their ideology among Muslims and non-Muslims without any intervention or concern from the government and its security agencies. This would not be the case in other countries.

Many Somalis moved into many different countries around the globe. They were assisted and welcomed in those countries. However, Kenya remains the only country in the world that has unequivocally accommodated Somalis. Many live in the cities while others are in refugee camps. In general, Kenyans are friendly people who value other human beings and their rights. To them Kenya is a second home because they are accorded hospitality and equal treatment.

Somalis have learnt from Kenyans how to live together—regardless of religion, language, physical complexes, among other differences that exist between a people. Through association, they have also learnt courtesy like saying 'Ahsante sana' (thank you very much). There is no equivalent word with such emotional touch in the Somali language.

Privately, Somalis call Kenyans slaves because they were taught so by Arab slave merchants who captured Africans from the interior and sold them overseas in the Americas and Europe for centuries. On their part, Kenyans refer to Somalis as *Waryaa,* a term derived from the Somali calling word *Waryaa*.

On the overall, the conflicts in Somalia are worsened by clan differences which result in vicious fights and killings. Therefore, Kenyans have extended their love and kindness to Somalis at the time of need. Somalis now understand the value of human life. They appreciate the value of

education—something they had neglected for a long time because of religion—and now take their children to the schools. Their children attend some of the best schools and study the Kenyan educational system—mainly 8-4-4.

Somalis are mainly traders, so they have opened up many businesses in Eastleigh and other parts of the country. Culturally, Somalis learnt trade for Arabs. Most of the time, they are astonished when Kenyans buy goods from them which they pay for dutifully but still say 'Ahsante sana!' There are no incidences of tribalism, discrimination, fighting, or verbal abuse. Practically, Somalis have seen the meaning and the spirit of Kenya's popular tune and slogan:

> Hapa Kenya hakuna matata
> Wageni wamekaribishwa
>
> Here in Kenya, there is no problem
> Visitors are welcome

Somalis have seen the reality and the spirit of those words in Kenya. Most will never forget this precious gift from Kenya. Somalis should respond in the same way so as to reward Kenya and its people for their kindness, humility and resilience. Kenyans seem to be following the words of the Koran, Surah Al-Insan 76, verse 9, which says, 'We feed you for the sake of God alone no reward do we desire from you, not thanks.'

Somalis can reciprocate the fact that Kenyans have hosted them for over a quarter century, tolerating the insensitivity and misbehaviour. In return, the Somalis have also learnt interacting in businesses unhindered, equal opportunity for all, openness, and democratic values, among other good behaviours.

Although it seems very difficult, after the many massacres in Kenya, Kenya should continue helping Somalis until they establish a working government in Somalia. That is the biggest reward Kenyans expect from their politeness, tolerance, and patience with Somali refugees. Not the criminals.

[b] Why extremists target Kenya

As discussed below, terrorists have been targeting Kenya for a long time. There are several reasons why they target Kenya. These reasons are contrary to the common perception that Somali-based terrorists attack Kenya in response to invasion of Somalia by Kenya Defence Forces (KDF). After all, Islamic terrorists have no country and nationality. They do not represent any territory or country. They do not want country or government system; they need only chaos and lawless places because that is where they can operate well.

First, they have lost hundreds of thousands of potential soldiers from Muslim Somali ethnic community. Kenyan's political and social attitude of working together with Somalis is appalling to them. The Somalis gave up their temper, intolerance, fanaticism, and anger and adopted normal lives among Kenyans. That was a big blow for the terrorists' war strategy in the Muslim world. Tribalism, hatred, envy, and lack of trust became a matter of history and just a faded picture in their mind. So the terrorists have no local source where they can get soldiers.

Other Somali businessmen have borrowed the ways in which Kenyans do business and have chosen to live in peace and pursue business. Terrorists had hoped to invest in the culture of asceticism and demeaning of this life in Muslim society. That harmony and living together between

the two different societies—Somali ethnic community and other Kenyans—is against the interests of the terrorists. That is why they have recently started to discriminate by slaughtering civilians along ethnic and religious lines.

Second, they hope that Kenyans will become angry and start to deport all Somali ethnic community. This is a new desperate attempt to create hostility, anger, and killing among Kenyan Muslims and Christians. They want to pull in Somali ethnic community into their bad-smelling cave to create youth employment for terrorist activities. But fortunately, Kenyans have the ability and moral authority to measure their actions and understand the dirty tactics used by terrorists.

Third is the fact that the KDF has chased them from Kismayu port where they were collecting a lot of revenue to sustain their evil war. Al-Shabaab terrorists were getting millions of dollars from the Kismayu sea port. This they lost after KDF entered the global war against terrorists.

The terrorists fight, not for the sovereignty of Somalia or for the patriotic spirit for Somalia and its people. They only became disturbed and angry after losing that national revenue they were stealing from the defenceless poor citizens.

Fourth is the historical, social, and political bad relationship between the two neighbouring countries—Somalia and Kenya. There exists doubts and mistrust because of political disagreement and territorial disputes which have affected mutual relationship between them and made impossible any political, security, and social cooperation since 1991. That territorial dispute between the so-called Great Somalia and Kenya Government has negatively affected the Kenyan–Somali ethnic relations. Examples are the border skirmishes and rule through emergency at the dawn of Kenya's independence. A case in point is the Shifta

War, where Somalia sympathised with Kenyans of Somali origin. Could it be payback time? Also, Somalis from north eastern Kenya feel marginalized. It is high time we took affirmative action.

However, the relationship has improved over time. There are many political, social, and economic developments in the country with Kenyans of Somali origin playing a significant role in Kenyan affairs and in their own regions.

Another factor is the perceived close ties between Kenya and Western countries—especially USA and Britain. Terrorists consider these two countries as their sworn enemies. In fact, some of the major attacks have targeted Americans and Israelis living in Kenya with fatal results.

Other factors that led to these attacks are the porous borders between the two countries. This makes it easy for the terrorists to sneak into Kenya and retaliate whenever their bases are under attack in Somali. We also have to remember that some bribe their way into Kenya to commit these crimes. It is high time we eliminated corruption especially among the security agencies manning Kenya's borders.

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[c] Terror acts in Kenya (1970–2015)

What spoils peace in Kenya are the chilling acts of Somali militants who have unleashed on Kenya some of the most savage and inhuman terrorist acts and killings. The most sombre were the bombing of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on 7 August 1998 that left over 200 dead and the Westgate shopping mall, Nairobi, attack killed over 80 people. Both attacks were linked to the militant group al-Shabaab.

However, Kenya's reaction and response was not excessive and did not target Somali religious institutions and business activities. Apart from those attacks, there have been many similar terrorist attacks.

The aim of these attacks is to create religion-based hatred by Kenyans against their Somali citizens. They can also reignite Somalis to racial and clan hatred, as played out by Arabs. They want to spoil that new culture acquired by Somalis from Kenyans for over a quarter century—that Muslims and non-Muslims are one. Although some react with anger, Kenyans in general have remained calm, reasonable, and united against the extremists. President Uhuru Kenyatta, in an official reaction after the Westgate massacre, said, 'They cannot intimidate us and we are not ready to learn anything from them.' Such is the spirit that should be encouraged.

According to the US Embassy, in the past there have been at least seventeen attacks involving grenades or explosive devices in Kenya. At least 48 people died in these attacks, and around 200 people were injured. Nine of these attacks occurred in North Eastern Province, including locations in Dadaab, Wajir, and Garissa. Four attacks occurred in Nairobi and four in Mombasa. Targets included police stations and police vehicles, nightclubs and bars, churches, a religious gathering, a downtown building of small shops, and a bus station. The table below lists some of the terrorist attacks, number killed, and the year.

Terrorist Attack
1975: The first bombs to strike independent Kenya exploded. In February, there were two blasts in central Nairobi, inside the Starlight nightclub and in a travel bureau near the Hilton Hotel. They were followed by a more serious blast in a Nairobi bus on 1 March, which killed thirty people.
1976: During the Operation Entebbe hostage crisis, Kenya briefly served as a refuelling stage for the Israeli C-130 Hercules transport planes on their way back to Israel after the Entebbe raid. Perceived as Western interest and Israeli support, this incident led to anger from Islamic extremists.
1980: The Jewish-owned Norfolk Hotel was attacked by the PLO. The second bombing happened on the Norfolk Hotel on New Year's Eve 1980. In that attack, a bomb flattened the Norfolk Hotel, killing twenty people and injuring eighty. The attacker was identified as thirty-four-year-old Qaddura Mohammed Abdel al-Hamid of Morocco. 7 August 1998: Al-Qaeda terrorists bombed the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. 2002: Al-Qaeda's attacked an Israeli-owned Kenyan resort in Mombasa and attempted to attack a plane carrying Israeli tourists.

28 November 2002: There were missile attacks on an Israeli plane after takeoff from Mombasa airport. Subsequently there was an attack on Kikambala Hotel when they were receiving Israeli tourists. Almost simultaneously, two shoulder-launched Strela-2 (SA-7) surface-to-air missiles were fired at another chartered Boeing 757 airliner owned by Israel-based Arkia Airlines as it took off from Moi International Airport.

July 2010: Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda, that killed more than seventy people watching a World Cup final soccer match at a restaurant popular among foreigners.

13 June 2010: During a NO campaign rally, a petrol bomb was thrown into the crowds as the meeting dispersed at dusk, sparking a stampede as people fled. Some witnesses reported that there had been two separate explosions in Uhuru Park in the centre of the city. Five people were killed and as many as seventy-five were injured. The meeting was called by a church leader to campaign against a proposed new constitution in a referendum.

17 September 2011: A grenade shell was recovered within the premises of the office of the prime minister. However, police cooled off the issue, saying it was not targeting anybody.

1 July 2012: There were two simultaneous assaults on churches in Garissa in which seventeen people were killed and about fifty people were injured.

30 September 2012: The Sunday school of St Polycarp's church in Nairobi was attacked with grenades. According to newspaper reports, one child was killed. Kenyan police blamed the attack on al-Shabaab sympathisers.

21 September 2013: The militant group al-Shabaab killed over eighty people at Nairobi's Westgate shopping mall.

14 March 2014: In the Kenyan city of Mombasa, two terrorists were arrested while driving a car carrying two improvised bombs.

19 March 2014: Kenyan police unintentionally parked a car outside their office that was carrying a massive cache of terrorist explosives, including 130 pounds of plastic.

1 April 2014: In the Eastleigh district of Nairobi, six people were killed and dozens more injured when terrorists exploded bombs at two separate locations about three hundred metres apart.

9 April 2014: It was reported that twelve shops in the Nairobi city centre were being investigated for funnelling money to terrorists.

23 April 2014: A terrorist car bomb exploded in Nairobi's Pangani quarter, killing four people.

3 May 2014: Twin terrorist attacks in the port city of Mombasa killed three people.

4 May 2014: On the Thika Highway in Nairobi, terrorists exploded home-made bombs on two commuter buses nearly simultaneously and about a kilometre apart. According to the report, at least three people were killed and at least sixty-two others injured.

16 May 2014: At Gikomba Market in Nairobi, twin explosions claimed the lives of more than ten people.

23 May 2014: A grenade was thrown at a police vehicle carrying two suspects in the city of Mombasa. Two people were injured.

16 June 2014: At least forty-eight people were killed when suspected al-Shabaab militants from Somalia stormed into a Kenyan coastal town and launched a major assault on a police station, hotels, and government offices, officials said. Around fifty heavily-armed gunmen drove into the town of Mpeketoni, near the coastal island and popular tourist resort of Lamu, late on Sunday. Witnesses said they first attacked a police station, before starting to randomly shoot at civilians, some of whom had been watching the World Cup in local bars and hotels.

Late 2014: Two attacks, believed to have been carried out by al-Shabaab, killed sixty-four persons in Mandera County.

22 November 2014: Gunmen attacked a bus travelling from Mandera to Nairobi, killing twenty-eight persons, mostly teachers and government workers heading to Nairobi for the December holidays.

2 December 2014: Al-Shabaab militants attacked and killed a further thirty-six quarry workers, many of whom were non-Muslims, near Mandera Town.

April 2015: Gunmen stormed the Garissa University College, killing almost 150 people and wounding several others. The attackers claimed to be from the al-Shabaab militant group and indicated that they were retaliating over non-Muslims occupying Muslim territory. The militants took several students hostage, freeing Muslims but withholding Christians. Over 500 students were still unaccounted for.

Chapter 4

Unreligious Islamic beliefs

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[a] The god of the tribe

The true meaning of Koran is very straightforward and clear. It does not need any human interference through misinterpretation. My reading of the Koran confirmed that tribal dogma is not from the Koran or derived from the original concept of the Islam religion. Dogma results from a social ego—the competition and the fight against other religions and other nations' civilisations.

Because of human competition, a particular nation's ego needs to be separate from all other nations and religions. So through the history and over time, Muslims developed a different religious dogma from what the Koran teaches.

The ego of the new religion became well known in the Muslim society, and they completely forgot the original Koran principles, as written in Surah Al-Baqarah 2.

Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 62 says, 'Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before Prophet Muhammad]—those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness—will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.' This verse clearly shows that God recognises all religions and will reward all his people without discrimination or preference for any nation against others. Therefore, God is for all and has enough unlimited mercy in his kingdom to give to all.

The Koran tells Muslims that Jews said that, 'They are the children of God and likes them.' The Muslims said the same or more. They said they are Muslim so that God is with them and against their enemy all the time. They said only Muslims can enter paradise; they said all non-Muslims go to hell once and for all—forever. As stated above, any Muslim who does not believe is not a real Muslim and he or she will go to hell among other infidels.

However, the Koran teachings and the Muslims view on some issues are totally different. For example, Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 136 says, 'Say you; "We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, And the Tribes, and that given to all prophets from their Lord; we make no difference between one and another of them; and we bow to God in Islam."' A religion with such a sense of unity in those days must be a religion for all human beings. There should be no discrimination or hatred. It is the only religion that believes in all prophets and religions. From the holy writings, Islam does not have

a separate completely different belief system from all other religions. Despite that, Muslims only believe partially.

A scholarly study of all the holy scriptures shows some form of interrelationship. Most religions were originally found on the same principles. Then, prophets came in to renew that original religion according to the time and the needs of the human beings. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) believed in all religions and all God's prophets—at least those that came in the Middle East.

Nowadays, Muslims behave as if they do not believe in all God's messengers except Muhammad. Similarly, they do not believe in all God's books except the Koran. In fact, the original message in the Koran is against that stand. It is therefore true that because of nationalism, nations create not only a separate religious doctrine but also an imagined god who is always with them and is against their competitors. That imagined god is working now in the Muslim world.

All warring factions in the name of religion or political differences have support from their own god—complete with those who are willing to die for their cause and al-shahadah (martyrs). None of them bothers to apply reason to their actions or stop the nonsense killings because they believe that they are on the right way and their opponents are on the wrong side.

Also, the Koran warns Muslims in many places and on different occasions against the mistakes made by those who were given the book before them—Jews and Christians. The purpose of this warning is so that they do not repeat the same mistakes.

Surah Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 20 says, 'Both the Jews and the Christians say: "We are sons of God, and His beloved. Say: Why then doth He punish you for your sins? Nay, you are but men, of the men He has created: He forgives whom

He pleased and He punished whom He pleased: And to God belonged the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between; and unto Him is the final goal of all."'

Unfortunately Muslims repeated the same mistakes and made even more. The genesis of this conduct is limiting God to a tribe. Instead of believing in an all-powerful universal God, we create a god that can work for us according to the issues and the interests we want to accomplish at a given time.

So every nation has its own imagined god for the tribe or nation to work with her in hard times and against any perceived enemies. Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verses 111–113 says, 'And they say: "None shall enter paradise unless He be a Jew or a Christian." Those are their vain desires. Say: "produce your proof if you are truthful.""Nay,—whoever summits his whole self to God and is a doer of good—He will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." The Jews say; "The Christians have naught to stand upon"; and the Christians say; "The Jews have naught to stand upon. Yet they profess to study the same Book. Like unto their word are what those saying who know not."'

Contrary to the above, Muslims believe that God does not accept prayer from anyone else, except that from Muslims. To them, all non-Muslims' prayers, even with positive intentions, end up like dust in the air—not with God.

The teaching goes something like, God does not hear the prayer of non-Muslims because he does not recognise their religion. All Muslims must believe so and, in addition without exception, that all non-Muslims will go to hell. Why? One may ask. Because non-Muslims refuse to believe that the last Prophet is Muhammad and that the last religion is Islam. As a result, anyone who does not believe or has

doubt about the validity of this Islamic principle is not a Muslim even if he or she claims to be one.

All Muslims are instructed to recite and believe this doctrine from a very early stage. The teaching takes place before they can reason or learn anything on their own. In my case, I was lucky. I learnt the same way, but I never took it to heart. I suppose it was the intention of God that I should learn about Islamic religion on my own. When I got to study Islam after a long time, I was able to reconcile my natural instinct and the true Islam religion.

I was able to understand the true meaning of the Koran without biased interpretations as done by some sheikhs. Many are known to add their opinions (when interpreting) based on the prevalent sociopolitical circumstances.

Minor religious differences or political disagreements create a new god for the warring factions. None of the parties is ready to make the sacrifice and confess to not having a god but operating according to its own whims. The result—every party, as a must, says 'God is with me and against my enemy.'

Have you ever sometimes imagined what would happen if all youths knew and believed that our religion emphasises the human coexistence? What if all believers went further and accepted all God's prophets and holy books? Although most Muslim youths have read Koran verses that support this view, it is difficult for them to change because they were programmed in early childhood by society and sheikhs into a different doctrine. Such dogma has become dominant in their minds, so there is nothing they can do about it.

Their basic belief can be compared to apartheid—meaning to separate everything. This can be seen in the following stereotyping: human separation, religious and belief system separation, Muslims and non-Muslims

separation, and separation of all human beings from God. When such a dogma becomes strong in the mind, it does not need the support from the Koran or anything else. It operates as if it is the absolute truth—with its own life. When someone believes he knows the truth, no one can convince him otherwise.

I believe that the origin of humans' stressful situation and instability in life is ignoring the oneness principle. The Koran teaches God's oneness, all prophets' messages teach oneness, and all holy books teach oneness—a concept that has been widely ignored. If we were to teach those Koran principles to our children train them to live out in these principles, I have no doubt that we would be having different results in the world, in our life, and in our own society.

Our Creator—the one who has control over this world is the one we believe sends messengers. Therefore, it cannot be that he can send different messengers with different messages. God did not create us to be enemies of one another. Therefore, the religious excuse for enmity between religious believers and provocation among them is pointless and false. We must find a way of how we can live together peacefully.

[b] Polygamy: An archaic practice

God instituted marriage as a way of allowing human beings to make families and continue creation. The family unit is a symbol of human life's success. It is a sacred relationship between the female and male. Ideas on marriage have passed through different stages depending on religious beliefs and culture throughout human history.

Marriage serves several purposes: reproduction, fulfilment of sexual desires, morality, companionship,

and spiritual fulfilment. Marriage comes with huge responsibilities. It is also a sensitive and careful regulation. Before marriage, couples must understand its importance. The family is the unit that makes up a nation. So any nation that fails to handle marriages carefully can collapse morally, socially, security-wise, and even economically.

It requires careful balance between fulfilment of sexual pleasure and the religious and moral chastity—a very delicate thing. Some cultures are very strict about the chastity from having sex before marriage. Yet marriage is not easy. Even some mature people avoid it.

In some cultures, marriage is based on the social status. Where some tribes or clans are better than others, intermarriage among the society is difficult or impossible. Many girls and women, especially in some of the Arab countries, cannot marry into what are considered noble families—a factor that kills their future and their whole life.

Many Muslim women grow older or die before having sex—even once in their lifetime. The tribe nobility extremism has led to sexual abnormality in some specific societies, such as pederasty and child abuse. Making the marriage procedure easy and affordable—as Islam religion suggests—is the best way of having a healthy and responsible society.

Every nation has its own laws on marriage, family, and relationship between a husband and wife. Many have evolved depending on the progress of the society and its awareness development. Issues that affect marriage relationship include evolution of laws, information awareness, religious faith or lack of it, lifestyle, and the economic situation of the specific society.

Another important fact is the practice of polygamy as taught in the Koran. Some people go ahead and bear many children without any responsibility. For example, virile

young men believe that God has permitted them to marry four women. Also, they read that they have permission to change any one of them and get another new one. The result is unattended, uncaring, unloving, unfeeling children who live miserable lives. Most of them probably die within five years or so after birth.

As if not enough, those who survive are venerable to misbehave or join criminal organisations where they are used. That is the situation in many Muslim countries especially Somalia and Yemen.

It should not be that the main aim of Muslim youths is to satisfy their sexual needs. I know of some youths who marry one woman after another until they reach the maximum number of four. I have personally met a teenage Somali boy who is a father of twenty children by different mothers. It is also usual to find a child-mother suffering the pain of polygamy—jealousy. Such mothers can teach their children to take revenge on their half brothers and sisters. So polygamy is a headache and resentful practise devoid of marriage, love, and happiness.

Marriage—whether for procreation or for sexual fulfilment—has responsibilities on both partners. So all of us must consider the consequences of the pleasure and the effects it has on our partners—especially young girls. The delicate duty of telling the difference requires informed and knowledgeable Muslims. That should take root in the Muslim world.

With four wives, the youths are then overwhelmed by the demands of the wives, children, and general family-related issues. When unable to withstand the pressure and perform their responsibilities, many surrender and become irresponsible. They, in many cases, use religious beliefs—arguing that God will be taking care of all things.

While neglected, boys in such families become venerable to extremist cruel activities such as terrorism. Girls too face a similar fate—if not worse—such as prostitution.

The reason for having many wives is twofold: first, to fulfil the man's sexual needs. The second is because of the pressure of youth virility. It is believed that such laws help avoid sexual offences and immorality. The second reason for polygamy is that adultery is forbidden in Islam.

So when a man wants to fulfil sexual desires without being involved in adultery, he has to marry a second, third, and fourth wife.

So is it time virile Muslims considered other sexual solutions to marrying very many wives? Why can't they have temporary sexual relationships where they use family planning methods? Islam has that provision in its judicial system called *mut'a* (pleasure). The pleasure principle is allowed in Islam. Even Prophet Muhammad was permitted the same. Some Islam authorities like Sunnis and sheikhs abandoned it, but it is still practised by the Shia.

In summary, there are two solutions: short-time marriage or friendship marriage which is recognised legally and socially or use of family planning methods. That solution is recommended if we are to have stable marriages. Then marriage will be a mutual, social relationship which does not damage the couples or society at large.

That means it is a mutual private contract between two willing persons based on the law and social customs. Polygamy as a type of marriage is harmful and dangerous because of jealousy, hostility, and social unrests.

[c] The call for the prayer

Also known as *salat*, prayer is a ritualistic practice in Islam. A call is made from the mosque, indicating that it is time for the compulsory prayer. There are five obligatory prayers in a day. On hearing the call, people start preparing themselves for the prayer. Appearing below is the transliteration and translation of what a caller to the prayer says:

Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar
[God is the greatest, God is the greatest]
Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar
[God is the greatest, God is the greatest]
Ashadu an la ilaha ill Allah
[I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but God]
Ashadu an la ilaha ill Allah
[I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but God]
Ashadu anna Muhammadan rasoolullah
[I bear witness that Muhammad is the Prophet of God]
Ashadu anna Muhammadan rasoolullah
[I bear witness that Muhammad is the prophet of God]
Hayya'alas salah [Come to prayer,]
Hayya'alas salah [Come to prayer,]
Hayya'alal falah [Come to success,]
Hayya'alal falah [Come to success,]
Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar
[God is the greatest, God is the greatest]
La ilaha ill Allah
[There is no deity but God.]

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It is a symbol for Muslim believers' prayer for five times a day. The call for prayers is a religious matter that reminds Muslims to pray five times a day. But it is unfortunate that this call is sometimes a nightmare to non-Muslims. Muslims who go to Western countries as asylum seekers practice their religion without hindrance. Has it ever occurred to them that some of their religious acts injure others' rights and freedoms? Why should they disturb others through their method of worship?

Prayer is supposed to be a link between a person and his god. Islam requires its followers to pray five times a day. This is an essential pillar of Islam. People who fail to practice it are looked at as lesser believers. In the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), prayer was (just like today) a spiritual connection between the believers and their God. It was an inward feeling of the believers about their lord. Through prayer, they would feel the presence of God's mercy and achieve practical peacefulness and happiness in their mind. Whenever the Prophet had bad news or disturbing feelings, he would say, 'Comfort us this Bilal' which means that 'Bilal call the prayer, then we will feel comfort and peace and put aside our worries.'

That and other similar stories from ancient believers show the role of prayer in their lives. It was simply a connection with their god. That is why prayer is important and eventually became one of the pillars of Islam.

Over time, from ancient believers to later opinions of Muslim scholars, prayer has become just a custom. Sometimes, it is made of just deeds and ritual sayings which do not make any real sense in the heart of the doer. Young generations inherit it as a custom which they are supposed to do. They have not gotten the meaning and the wisdom behind it. That is why terrorists, like those that attacked

Westgate Mall, do the prayer in spite of killing innocent people. They were doing that prayer because they were told to do so. It does not mean a spiritual link between them and their god.

However, the loudspeakers and microphones used to call Muslims to prayer are a source of noise pollution. This is especially the case where mosques are situated in residential areas with majority non-Muslim populations. As already indicated, the noise is a form of nuisance which disturbs non-Muslims, especially the sick and children who are close to these mosques.

Our misunderstanding and misplaced dogma, especially from the extremisms' understanding of Islam, is what makes Islamic prayer a factor of stress and worry. The call for the prayer, though an important religious principle, should not harm or disturb the lifestyle of others and especially denying them sleep and comfort. Take the case of Somali Muslims from Somalia. Since the overthrow of Siad Barre in 1991, majority of them came to Kenya, especially in Nairobi. Kenya too has a significant Muslim population. So Kenyans were very friendly and tolerated Muslims—allowing them to practice their faith the way they want without hatred or discrimination.

The minority Somalis, now as refugees, were accommodated in estates with non-Muslims as the majority. The Somalis went ahead and built their own mosques even in Christian-dominated areas, near churches, and other areas designated for public services. However, the call of the prayer is a nuisance.

Non-Muslims have to tolerate these prayer calls. As if to make a bad situation worse, more calls for prayer and reciting of the Koran always follow in the month of Ramadan—at times throughout the night. Islam does not condone noise.

We have to care about the welfare of our neighbours who may not believe in our faith.

It is possible that Muslims do not deliberately do these prayer acts to hurt non-Muslims. However, they may not be conscious of the fact that they disturb others—hence the need to bring these issues to the fore for debate.

Apart from a few modern-day Christian churches that use loudspeakers, the Christian prayer and other faith practices are generally done with discipline and in tranquillity. Perhaps Muslims can learn one or two things from Christians, but again, are they aware of the consequences of their behaviour to non-Muslims? Christians have exercised patience about the call.

Do Muslims care about the concerns of non-Muslim neighbours? Do they deliberately do that to harm Christians and non-Muslims because they deserve it? These questions are valid because some Muslims believe in that notion. They argue that there is no problem since they do so in the name of God.

Muslims rarely talk directly with one another about the social and religious issues that concern them. Long periods of tyrannical rule and lack of freedom of speech and free social interaction have led to fear characterised by hypocritical behaviour.

Anyone who tries to point out any social misbehaviour and religious misunderstandings risks being discarded, isolated, or even killed by society. Therefore, no one is ready to risk his life by advising or criticising the society. That means, even small social problems easily spread with speed through the community. What they fail to understand is that lack of criticism or warnings can make every lie be treated as truth after sometime and be accepted by the community.

Another problem is, there are no proper civil society groups or organisations among other nations to sensitise the society about social and political problems and warn of the undesirable consequences.

Prayer is a problem to Muslims because they are supposed to do it five times a day. It is even more trouble if the doer believes that he or she must pray in a mosque. What if the mosque is several kilometres away? Is it practical in real life? The fear for many is the threat by extremists that Muslims must pray in a mosque, else, they go to hell. This call creates psychological pressure in the minds of many Muslims. Where it is not possible, feelings of guiltiness abound. That may be the reason many Muslims lack happiness and excitement.

In many democratic countries with constitutions, there is provision for freedom of worship. There is nothing like a state religion. So as long as Muslims are human beings, they have a right to worship the way they want.

What has not been addressed is the responsibility in terms of interfering with others' freedoms. So even refugees and other asylum seekers in the majority Christian countries are tolerated based on the laws of the country. Maybe it is time non-Muslims directly took up the issue with Muslims. They must express their misgivings on the way Muslims treat them.

Many Muslims find it hard to live their normal lives and, at the same time, practice their religious beliefs. Some are faced with very critical situations: either to sometimes fail to adhere strictly to their religious faith or attempt perfection and continue living in a miserable life.

For example, they believe that prayer must be done on time regardless of the current situation or circumstances. So what happens if you are in a train, plane, or a serious

meeting with high-ranking business people? Must you pray? Is it a must to pray in time or can you postpone and do it later? What if you are driving, in a traffic jam, in the sports ground, in a factory with all machines running, or on the highway? Does God dictate that you must pray?

In such situations, the believer looks like a mad person because his or her behaviour is not a normal person's in the eyes of others. The believer suffers stress and worry daily. That believer needs to be in a private and comfortable place all the time to be able to do prayers in time, which is not possible for working people. A society who belongs to this belief system must be a handicap society, which never competes with others in the productivity.

The original teachings of Islam do not necessarily encourage loud calls for prayer. The Hadith of the Prophet says, 'There is no damage for you or for others in the Islam.' This was narrated by Sacad Ibnu Khudriyi. That is the main objective of the Islam religion. Islam is not designed to damage anyone; it is designed to help and encourage people in their own interest and well-being in this life and hereafter.

The Islamic prayer is a spiritual contact with our lord. It is supposed to be a special opportunity to reunite with our Creator. There is no point of it being a source of stress and worry to others.

The original version of Islam is easy to follow, and even prayer is made easy. However, we have been suffering for a long time because of the doctored extremist point of view of Islam supported by some Arab cultures.

There are general Islamic principles that advocate flexibility in everything in life. If those principles can be understood as core values of the faith and implemented, they can lift Muslims from their religious confusion. Principles that simplify Islam are totally forgotten because for a long

time, no one emphasises or sees their importance. Instead, the principles are considered as pretexts of lazy people who do not want to practice the hard Islamic views as taught by extremists and Islamic scholars.

In the following pages, I will discuss some of the principles as a general knowledge for those who may want to know. For example, Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 286 says, 'On no soul doth God place a burden greater than it can bear; it gets everything good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns, pray "our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which thou Didst lay on those before us; our lord! Lay not us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness, Have mercy on us, thou art our protector; Help us against those who stand against faith."'

Also, Surah Al-Nisa 4, verse 28 says, 'God doth wish to lighten your difficulties for man was created weak in flesh.' Surah Al-An'am 6, verse 152 says, 'And come not nigh to the orphan's property, except to improve it, until he attain the age of full strength; give measure and weight with full justice; no burden do we place on any soul, but that which it can bear; which it can bear, whenever you speak, speak justly, even if a near relative is concerned; and fulfil the covenant of God; thus doth He command you, that you may remember.'

Surah Al-A'raf 7, verse 157 says, 'Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong and makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits for them the evil and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them. So they, who have believed

in him, honoured him, supported him and followed the light which was sent down with him—it is those who will be the successful.'

Surah Al-Hajj 22, verse 78 says, 'Strive in His cause as ye ought to strive, with sincerity and under discipline He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion.'

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) gives us examples of prayer only. Islamic prayer is not hard and inflexible. There are times when Muslims can pray only one time instead of five times. The messenger of God himself gave us an example. He did all the five prayers at once. When he was asked why he did that, he answered, 'To make my nation easy for their religion.'

Also, when someone is on journey or has some difficult situation, he/she can only pray three times instead of five. Also, he or she can pray half the normal number of the sections. These principles prove that the way someone does his/her prayer is not fixed. So there is no point for Muslims to suffer and, at the same time, inconvenience non-Muslims. The way someone does her/his prayer depends on the circumstances and the prayer's situation that s/he lives in.

We should have the sense to show care and respect for others. That is the true aim of Islam. In its original writings, respect and caring for others is a core value of Islam. We are aware that in the time of Muhammad, there were no loudspeakers. So this can be considered as an unpermitted addition to the religion, which creates inconvenience between Muslims and non-Muslims. Therefore, having the social sense is a very important attribute if we are to live together in a peaceful neighbourhood.

To live with non-Muslims in a peaceful manner, we must review our stand on some of our religious practices—the call for prayer included. Otherwise, non-Muslims will

not want to live among us. That has bad economic effects, such as properties in Muslim-dominated areas losing value and being sold at cheap prices. We should not behave like we do not care about others' well-being. We must appreciate their kindness and humility in tolerating our practices.

We must understand that the call for the prayer is an option that has just been added—not a must. We can still pray without any call for prayer and the prayers will be valid. Our prayer should not infringe on other people's rights, safety, happiness, and health.

The cause of stress and inconvenience is lack of proper Islam education or deep understanding of the aim and purpose of the religion. We must all understand that the purpose of religion is not to cause stress and problems to its believers. It is supposed to bring peace of mind and happiness to its adherents. If we look carefully and with mindfulness at our religion, the inconvenient perceptions created by false concepts can be eliminated. Most Muslims follow opinions of some Muslim scholars, which have no religious validity on other Muslims and do not have any evidence in the Koran writings.

Islam is by nature an easy, dynamic, and very kind religion. That is the real understanding of Islam. There are general Islam principles that support this position. For example, Surah Al-A'la 87, verse 8 says, 'And we will make it easy for this to follow the simple path.'

Since Islam is a flexible religion, there is no point of harming others in the name of call for prayer or any other religious excuses. We should behave well in the presence of others. As a Muslim, I do not want to be insulted by others or look like I am irresponsible and careless. I know my religion is very respectful and kind, except the interpretation and the cultural additions. That is how I will treat others too.

Chapter 5

Islam in its proper context

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[a] God is one

Sharing values, similarities in religion, and a common ground is the essence of all worshipping one God. The fact that the origin of all human beings is the same is more important than other worldly human classifications. Humans have a natural need to belong and be accepted. That is why most of their relationships are based on a shared identity and similarity in lineage. That is the reason why nationality, culture, religion, and geographical spread play a role in human existence.

In the Middle East, Christians fight to defend their sacred religious places. As for Jews, they fight to defend their Promised Land. On their part, Muslims want to get back

Jerusalem which once belonged to them. The three main protagonists use any available means including sophisticated weapons and other modern weapons.

However, human beings have formed divisions based on one's blood, flesh, colour, and even language. Such divisions have weakened the desired sacred and spiritual relationship. That has led to factions that fight wars—not just in the name of religion but on factors like nationality, colour, and for economic resources.

In fact, extremists fight against all humans including Muslims. Through war, they lost their rationality to envy and hostility. So if there is only one God, which one do the fighting factions represent or worship?

Your god is one is the original real identity for all human beings. That should make us love one another and live in peace because we are all God's children. It is enough for our identity.

Our relationship should be spiritual and sacred—just as we relate with God. All the parties in the Middle East conflict believe that they are doing God's command as revealed through their specific religions. The question that begs to be answered is, are these different groups represented by the same god or does each of them have a different god? The god of Jerusalem is the same as the god of Muslims and Jews; the god of Christians and Muslims is equally the same. This is not just my belief and opinion but a firm declaration of the Koran.

It is not necessary for God to swear for us just so that we get convinced of age-old facts such as this one: 'We are one spirit that came from God and God is equal for us all and He is one.' Oneness of God means oneness of humanity. Any division among human beings using any means is tantamount to creating several gods. One is one.

The heaven is one; also, the earth is one. The sun is one just like the oxygen we breathe is one. Therefore, the spirit from God is one. I like that oneness concept. Therefore, any human excuses for hatred, hostility, and discrimination is baseless and calumny.

Nature is a witness to God's oneness because of its similarity and provision of gifts to God's creatures without favour. For example, we all get rain, sunshine, and even fertile soils in equal measure. Therefore, God cannot give responsibility of eliminating some people to others. Also, there is no way of claiming that there is a religion which does not recognise another nation's religion, yet we share the Holy Spirit.

God swears on what he knows, but we do not know what it is really. The aim of swearing is to confirm to us that our god is one. Surah As-Saffat 37, verses 1–4 say, 'By those who range themselves in ranks; and so are strong in repelling evil. And thus proclaim the Message of God; verily, verily your God in One!'

Surah Al-Anbiya 21, verse 108 says, 'What has come to me By inspiration is that your God is one God: will ye therefore bow to His will in Islam?' Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 163 says, 'And your God is one God: there is no god but Him, most gracious, most merciful.'

Surah Al-Anbiya 21, verses 92–93 say, 'Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single Brotherhood, and I am your lord and Cherisher: therefore serve me and no other. But later generations cut off their affair of unity, one from another, yet, will they all return to Us.' In that sense of unity and brotherhood, Islam obliged its believers to believe all messengers from God and that all holy books came from God.

Surah Baqarah 2, verse 136 says, 'Say ye: "We believe in God, and the revelations Given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all Prophets from their Lord; we make no difference between one and another of them; and we bow to God in Islam."' Therefore, this means that all the classifications among human beings have no religious basis. They are mere ego demands or mischievous inspirations.

The media and newspapers in general carry stories daily on the terrorism acts perpetuated on the Muslim world. It is therefore difficult for others to believe that Islamic texts teach the oneness of all human beings and their god.

God does not need the assistance of anybody to fight enemies, that is, if we assume he has enemies. The thought that God has enemies only exists in our human imagination. God does not suffer any weaknesses and, therefore, does not need our help to defend himself from anybody or anything.

The idea of defending and killing others in the name of God exists in our personal imagination. We cannot be referring to the god that created heaven and earth and all that is in it. That is a ridiculous, baseless assertion.

We may differ on a variety of issues and for some specific reasons. But rather than view this as a weakness, we should understand it as strength. It is a sign of the need for us to complement one another in one way or the other. We need to constantly remember that we are one and that we are sharing everything on this planet. That means, quite clearly, that our God is one. There is no need of spreading hatred and bad intentions towards one another or others. We have to enjoy that universal principle and eschew the burden of war.

Already, thanks to God, democratic countries are enjoying the fruits of oneness. They welcome any visitor

into their countries and share with them everything they have. They enjoy enough of everything because they accept to share with others. That is a living example of those who accept the grace of God. Democracy is the grace of God that has been blocked in the Muslim world.

[b] Islam recognises other religions

There is no evidence in the Koran that supports separation of all holy books and God's messengers. The revelation from God was only one, and all the different prophets carried the same message with minor changes as dictated by the day-to-day needs of the changing society. So over the centuries of Islamic history, Muslim rulers, Islamic scholars, and ordinary Muslims have held many different attitudes towards other religions. Attitudes have varied according to time, place, and circumstance.

There was a time Prophet Muhammad had to defend himself and his followers against aggression from Arab pagans. Citing this incident, some Muslims believe it is their duty to fight against everyone who has a different idea or a belief system different from theirs. This, they argue, allows them to continue worshipping God. That mentality among Muslims is the cause of unrest in the world.

The Koran mentions all holy books and encourages followers of a specific religion to fulfil the requirements of their book. Surah Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 69 says, 'If only they had stood fast by the Torah (Law) the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed Happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course: But many of them follow a course that is evil.' This Koran verse means that Islam recognises the Torah and the gospel as the Word

of God. So the Law, the Gospel, and the Last Revelation from God, Koran, are one.

Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 136 says, 'Say ye; "We believe in God, and the revelation give to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them and we bow to God in Islam."' Therefore, there is no religious justification for hatred and hostility in the name of God or religion.

Islam recognises all God's worshipping places such as mosques, churches, and temples. They all are equal and have the same rights in regard to respect and sacredness. Surah Al-Hajj 22, verse 40 says, 'If did not God check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down Monasteries, Synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated.' That shows that there is no difference between a mosque and a church or any other place of God's worship. They are all considered holy by the Koran.

Another main factor is that Muslim scholars who established the discipline and the conditions of Islam prayers suggested this: 'It is better for Muslims to do their prayer in a Church instead of a common place if they could not get a Mosque.' That means places that are dedicated to God are better than the common places. It is as good as commanding Muslims to respect and take care of not only the mosque but churches and synagogues as well. Unfortunately, Muslims harp on a doctrine that is far from the real teaching of Islam.

These teachings are not just limited to the worshipping places. They include the holy books, the messengers, and generally the whole religion. This reality as evidenced by Islamic teachings is different from what is popular now.

Islamic teaching is clear on the need for unity, humanness, and the need for peaceful coexistence. Several Koran verses teach the privileges and the mercies that God gave to the Jews and the respect of their religion and belief system. For example, Surah Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 46 says, 'Why do they come to you to get decision, when they have their own Law before them? Therein is the plain Command of God; yet Ever after that, they would Turn away. For they are not really people of faith.'

Surah Al-Ankabut 29, verse 46 says, 'And dispute ye not with the people of the Book, Except with means better than mere disputation, unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong and injury but say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow in Islam."' This is a powerful inspiration for all humanity. Unfortunately, the mainstream Muslims do not preach or practice the spirit and these teachings.

Muslims get religious messages advocating for jihad and fighting against infidels five times or more a day. So such a universal powerful message escapes their hearts and minds because of the evil message spearheaded by extremists. I do not know what other religions teach about Islam. But my reading of the Koran tells me that Islam clearly commands Muslims to believe in all prophets and all other religions from God.

Islam considers religion as a continuing process from God in different times. During the thirteen years that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) led his followers against the Meccans and then against the other Arab tribes. Christian and Jewish communities who had submitted to Muslim rule were allowed to worship in their own way and follow their own family law and were given a degree of self-government.

A Muslim cannot be a true Muslim unless he or she believes in all the messengers and all the holy books from God. That is the real message in Islam.

The current generation of Muslims appears to have a different doctrine from that of the Holy Koran and the path of our predecessors. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his successors showed no hostility to other human beings during their time. They even believed in the other holy books revealed to Jews and the Christians. Even the fighting and jihad were meant for Arab polytheists and was mainly for defensive purposes.

Today, Muslim extremists distinguish human beings based on their religion. What is their excuse? They use certain aspects of religion to justify separation so as to satisfy their ego's demands. When it comes to true worship of God, Muslims, Jews, and Christians can pray in Jerusalem simultaneously without any problem.

In my opinion, the difference does not result from religious service and the purpose of serving God. The main cause is the difference in culture and civilisation among the mainstream nations—Christianity, Islam, and Jews—which are fighting for supremacy. The idea of Islamic supremacy is found in the formula 'Islam is exalted and nothing is exalted above it.'

Abraham, Moses, Hebrew prophets, and Jesus were all prophets of Islam, but according to Muslim tradition, their message and the texts of the Torah and the gospels were corrupted by Jews and Christians. This is not true.

Once people know that their differences are not caused by the spirit and difference in God but personal ego, they can take corrective action. Then, they will have no problem praying anywhere or with anybody because God is everywhere. Also, He has no problem with his people

praying together. For example, the claims over holy places like Jerusalem are not because of religion or God but human ego.

Islam and its teachings have universal principles which are the main purpose of the Holy Book. These principles allow alternatives to certain circumstances because of the need for survival and self-defence. Muslims have not made clear regulations on the use of these Islamic teachings. Therefore, there is no clear direction on the function and use of these Koran verses.

It is apparent that the hostility we witness nowadays is not based on any religious discourse. In truth, it is based on the human ego, which is anxious to portray itself as superior to others. So when Muslims stop using false religious excuses to discriminate against non-Muslims, current hostility will automatically end. And the truth of religion and God's intention will come to the surface.

Prophet Muhammad showed us the way during his time when he shared a mosque with Christians from the Najran tribe. The Christians prayed in a portion of the mosque, while the prophet prayed in another section. This fact is even recorded in history. It was not seen as an extraordinary or strange happening in that time because Islam recognised all prophets from God and all holy books. We should know that we can worship God in one mosque or church.

[c] Morality, values, and ethics in Islam

The word 'morality' comes from the Latin word *moralitas* meaning 'manner, character, and proper behaviour'. Morality generally refers to a code of conduct that an individual, group, or society hold as authoritative in distinguishing

right from wrong. Such an ideal code of conduct is often espoused in preference to other alternatives.

Moral values are generally common to all human beings irrespective of religion and cultural backgrounds. Islam champions the cause of morality. Moral values are one of the main bases of every religion that God ever revealed to his people. Moral is a synonym of the spirit that God breathed in Adam after he created him. All nations, companies, and even individual lives are built on good moral principles. Personal good behaviour is emphasised even in many constitutions.

Surah Qalam 68, verse 4 says, 'And thou stand on an exalted standard of character.' Moral values are the glue that holds together human interactions ensuring living together in a peaceful and cooperating manner. Good behaviour and kindness for all human beings are the core value of every good religion. The core values are the natural guiding principles that dictate the behaviour and action of all people regardless of their background, culture, or religious belief system.

Moral values are the spiritual instruments for calibrating and distinguishing what is wrong from what is right. Without such a moral sense, we can be confused and fail to differentiate between the dichotomies of two important terms—evil and good.

The Islamic moral system comes from its main statement of belief in one god as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Islam considers the human race as a part of God's creation and as his subjects.

From an Islamic viewpoint, the rationale of human life is to worship God by leading this worldly life in accord with the divine will and, in so doing, achieve peace in this world and everlasting success in the life of the hereafter. Muslims

look to the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet as their moral guides.

Al-Qur'an 2, verse 177 says, 'It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or West; but it is righteousness—to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing.'

Our morality includes loving truth, justice, and kindness, not discriminating, and serving those in need.

Surah Al-Anfal 8, verse 58 says, 'If thou fear treachery form any group, throw back their covenant to them, so as to be on equal terms: for God loves not the treacherous.' Why do Muslims not throw back openly and clear the covenant of their enemies? Why do they take the advantage of their being unaware? The answer is simple: because they have no moral values.

Below are some of the Islamic values:

Values of justice:

> And whenever you speak, speak justly, ever if a near relative is concerned; and fulfil the covenant of God. (Surah Al-An'am 6, verse 152)

> God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and

> he forbids All shameful deed, and injustice and rebellion; He instructs you that ye may receive admonition. (Surah An-Nahl 16, verse 90)

> O ye who believe stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety; and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that ye do. (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 9)

Prevention of injustice:

> But the wrong doers have no helpers. (Al-Baqarah 2, verse 270)

> And soon will the unjust assailants know what vicissitudes their affairs will take. (Surah Ash-Shu'ara 26, verse 227)

The value of preventing any kind of injustice is emphasised in many Koran verses. However, many Muslims fail to appreciate the fact that what is important is the application of the principle, not merely reciting the verses then claiming to believe the principles.

The values of kindness and sharing are a well-known fact among Muslims. Even non-Muslims cannot fail to notice it among Muslims, whether in good or bad times, rich or poor. Even for the extremists, they give but kill at the same time.

Killing is considered part of the Muslim culture because the Koran supports the jihad principle. So to them, to give while killing is not a problem. In fact, there are many good values in all Islam writings. But balancing the teachings and applying correct interpretation requires training and concentration. This, however, is lacking in the Muslim society today. Yet the Koran commands and demands of its followers high moral standards and good values.

Surah Az-Zumar 39, verse 7 says, 'No bearer of burden of another.' That means no one is responsible for another person's mistake. Every individual with an identity bears personal responsibility for their actions. There is no point of killing innocent people who have no idea of what is going on.

Even during jihad, Muslims would notify the enemy including warriors in the field that they were going to attack them. Otherwise, it was forbidden to raid people without giving them notice.

The road map of life that guides human beings is the moral values they have had from the beginning till now. Any person can tell you what is wrong and what is right from his or her own consciousness. They do not have to refer to their particular culture or religion.

Why is that so? Because our natural human instincts and morality are planted in us by our Creator, God. All historians testify that Islam in its early days stood for universal values for all human beings without discrimination or segregation.

After the first one century of the Islam calendar, Islam principles were corrupted and misused by some groups for selfish reasons. In the same period, clan-ruled regimes such as Umawiyin, Abasiyin, Zaydiyin, Abidiyin, and Othmaniyin became royal families. They then, in a way, acquired sacred authority—previous belonging to God only—on Muslims

for about twelve centuries, without any kind of responsibility and accountability. They corrupted morals to the extent that Muslims became confused, developed un-Islamic behaviour, and abandoned the sense of human values.

We learn from the first written human history that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) worked together with people of different nationalities. There was an African like Bilal al-habashi, Salman Al farisi (Persian), and Suhayb Arumi (European). He had no preference or discrimination.

The people of those different nationalities were companions of Prophet Muhammad with different responsibilities. They cooperated with the Prophet in his specialised field. Tolerance and lack of discrimination was the symbol of that Islamic generation.

> O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others; it may be that the latter are better than the former; not let some women laugh at others; It may be that the latter are better than the former; not defame not be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other By offensive nicknames; ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, to be used of one after he has believed: And those who do not desist are indeed doing wrong. O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much as possible for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other, behind their hacks, would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it but fear God; for God is oft-returning, most merciful.

The forgiveness principle is well-known in Islam. Many Koran verses mention it. But Muslims have not embraced the culture of forgiveness for a long time. Although Muslims apply religion in every aspect of their lives, they are not religious when it comes to revenge against perceived enemies. Since they consider themselves weak, they think forgiveness is the duty of those who are in a stronger position, not the oppressed. Forgiveness, kindness, love, and serving others are the real religious principles that every religion must embrace.

The jihad concept and its provisions are not a permanent religious principle but a political and security strategy. The Koran emphasises and encourages the religious and spiritual principle of forgiveness. Surah Al-Nisa 4, verse 149 says, 'Whether you publish a good deed or conceal it or cover evil with pardon, verily God doth blot out sins and hath power in the judgment of values.'

Surah Al-Imran 3, verse 159 says, 'It is part of the Mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over their faults and ask for God's forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs of moment then, when thou hast taken a decision, put they trust in God.'

Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 109 says, 'Quite a number of the people of the Book wish they could turn you back to infidelity after you have believed, from selfish envy, after the truth hath become manifest unto them: But forgive and overlook, till God accomplish his purpose for God hath power over all things.'

Surah An-Nor 24, verse 22 says, 'Let not those among you who are endued with grace and amplitude of means, resolve by oath against helping their kinsmen, those in

want, and those who have left their homes in God's course let them forgive and overlook, Do you not wish that God should forgive you? For God is oft-forgiving Most Merciful.'

The above-quoted Koran verses remind Muslim believers, especially the extremists, to know that God's worship through its revelation is not only the revenge, hatred, and fighting. There are also other good principles like forgiveness, love, kindness, and peaceful coexistence.

But we should always be careful when looking at morality as a universal fact. A non-Muslim can be as moral as a Muslim can be. There were people in the early days of the Prophet who were morally upright but did not accept Islam. The Prophet remained always good to them. He knew that one who is morally good can come to know the truth of his message better. And it happened in case of so many companions of the Prophet. We should also believe that if we are morally good, the people around us, though not Muslims, will appreciate it. Nor should we expect all individuals to accept Islam to be morally good. Morally good are good, Muslims or non-Muslims.

Muslim extremists do not want to understand the common morality as practised by all human beings. Being happy about terrorising and killing innocent people without any reason is immoral. What is uglier and even more shameful is the use of religion as a pretext for these evil and satanic actions. Fighting to score political goals lacks any moral value, especially when operating under the name of Islam.

There is a place for those who lack moral values. The Arab poet Ahmad Shawqi said, 'Nations are their moral values, if their moral values went out, they also went out too.' Individuals who carry out terrorism acts should be ashamed of themselves. They claim they love and follow

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), but they ravage and behave in a reckless and hopeless manner. There is no logic and reasonable way extremists can claim to be representative of Islam and Muslims. What they use are religious excuses and long-time traditional understanding of the jihad concept. That cannot be used to justify their savage behaviour and immoral, nonsense killings.

Muslim extremists ignore the permanent universal principles of religion, which never change throughout the ages, but fall for political, short-time decisions made by religious leaders. Such are not permanent principles that believers should continue practising or believing in.

When we fail to focus on the big picture, which is the important moral values, we resort to insignificant issues and pay with our lives. The result is civil wars in the Muslim world where millions die just to capture one village or a town, such as Kismayu in Somalia, Syria, Yemen, among others. Yet the loss of life and destruction through fighting does not have any value or relevance. Muslims who have embraced Islam must listen and obey the moral values.

To get a proper understanding of Islamic morality, we have to research what are the signs of the Koran that deal with morality. What are the words used and their meanings as understood in classical Arabic to negate the change of meanings with time? Only then will we get a clear understanding. In the meantime, we should accept the Koran as the words of Allah, and as such, it must be the best way possible.

We need to learn the culture of forgiveness and tolerance. We cannot build a civilisation and good life without forgiveness and tolerance. All human beings need to cooperate and learn from one another. For over five centuries, Christians—in their worship places and

in religious speeches—emphasise forgiveness, kindness, love, and spiritual mystic manifestations. Such has a lot of meaning in the sense of connecting to God and service to human kind.

Here, I mention Christianity because I have no complexity or sensitivity about any religion. Not because I have converted to Christianity, as some people may think—that is what my own religion taught me in many ways. My religion—Islam—taught me that there is no religion which is separate from other religions. All religions—especially those revealed in the Middle East—have the same successive route from one stage into another.

The messenger of Allah, Abu Hurairah, said that 'The example of me and the other prophets before me is, like a man who built a house, well done and completed, however, the subject of a brick from the angle of the corners Making people roam and admire him and say: Would you put this brick? He said: I am building block, and I am a seal of the Prophets.'

Because of that I do not believe in separation or preference of one religion over another. The prophets were doing the same job within a different time and society. They do not have any responsibility to separate God's people and put hostility and animosity among them in the name of God and his religion. All the misunderstanding and sensitivity among the existing religions and their believers is caused by us. It has nothing to do with God and religion.

[d] Combining the Koran's principles

Just like any other Muslim faithful, religious extremists recite Koran verses and pray at least five times a day. They are equally good at appealing to Muslim youths to wage

war in the name of jihad. This may look fine since the Koran commands them to do so. No one can deny them the benefits they earn from fighting a holy war. As the Koran says, God will surely reward the fighter in the hereafter.

But as enthusiastic believers who are conscious about the idea of God's blessings, why do you propagate hate messages only? Why don't you look for other verses with positive messages? The Koran has messages on positive principles, such as kindness, love, forgiveness, compassion, and justice. When interpreting the Koran, it is good if you can combine different verses. If you purpose to implement all Koran commands at the same time, you will be in a very good place.

However, if you can strike a balance between good principles such as love and kindness with the bad such as jihad, hostility, and hatred, then you are in a better position to implement the whole Koran commands and your reward from God will be doubled. We have seen love extended to Muslims who are refugees in non-Muslim states.

So faced with a choice between a love and a hate principle, let the principle of love prevail. Love lasts longer than hate. This way, you will be very good at the discrepancy game, playing the different principles for your own benefit. The prince of believers, Umar ibn-al-Khattab, says 'I am escaping from the God predetermination to the God predetermination' when he refuses to go into the place with plague and an epidemic. That is a good principle that we should all emulate.

If you concentrate only on the bad principles, who will preach or teach about the good verses? Surah Al-Anbiya 21, verse 107 says, 'We sent thee not, but As a Mercy for all creatures.' Do you show mercy to all creatures? Also, Surah Al-A'raf 7, verse 199 says, 'Hold to forgiveness; Command

what is right; But turn away from the ignorant.' In addition, Surah Al-A'raf 7, verse 200 says, 'If a suggestion from Satan Assails thy mind seek refuge with God; for he hears and knows All things.'

I have never heard of a case where religious terrorists forgive or show kindness to anyone they suspect or perceive as a spy of their enemy. Mostly, they have no time for basic human actions such as kindness and compassion for others. They only terrorise and slaughter suspects as though they are sheep whose flesh is to be eaten for lunch or dinner. Why? Yet God says in Surah At-Tawbah 9, 'If one amongst the pagans asks thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of god and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge.'

Why are they not keen to act on these Koran verses? I know why. They cannot adhere to it because it is not in tandem with their policy. If the teachings do not support their savage acts, then they are not on their agenda. It is just that they may read it when referring to other jihad verses in the Koran.

Do you really think Prophet Muhammad behaved the way you are behaving? I was wrong when I thought that the new caliphate leader, Mr Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, will listen and consider Steven Soltloff's mother's request that mentioned him personally and requested that he has to release her son. The mother praised the justice and the kindness of Islam as applied by Muhammad in his time. I agreed with her. I hope God will listen to that mother just like he did to the lady who complained about her husband. Surah Al-Mujadalah 58, verse 1 says, 'God has indeed heard and accepted the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint in

prayer to God; and God always hears the arguments between both sides among you; for God hears and sees all things.'

I was wrong to have thought the new caliphate in Iraq would listen to the request and prayer of that journalist's mother. Warlords never get the good messages from God because, mostly, they have no time to reconnect with their god. Caliphate Abu Bakr for ISIS did not consider the request of Steven's mother nor remember that if he did not listen to her, then God will listen. The Koran says, 'God does not guide the unjust people.' Proper political decisions need guidance from the Creator of the universe. Instead, warlords depend on ego guidance that is based on fear and lack of confidence—which told them to behead him. For what reason? What wrong did he do? What do these barbaric killings contribute to their agenda? Absolutely nothing!

What can be the reason to obey some of God's orders justifying the barbaric killings (according to their own interpretation) and ignoring God's other orders that speak of forgiveness, kindness, and justice for all? Consider the following words from God in the Koran! Surah Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 9 says, 'O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that ye do.'

After that, can you claim you are vigilant about God's religion? Do you know that the one who was truly defeated morally is the one who was defeated in the battleground? After you beheaded that one person who does not have any power to harm you in front of the camera, while all the people in the world were watching you, you were defeated morally and soon you will be defeated in the field too. Nobody is waiting for you to succeed. And by the way, who

is the owner of the weapons you are using now? Are you the manufacturers of the guns and ammunition in your hands which you gladly show off? Take it from me, my friends, you are losers! I have no doubt about that.

Have you ever heard in the history of Islam that Muhammad beheaded someone in his struggle against his opponents? In fact, he welcomed pagan delegates from the Najran clan into his mosque when he did not have somewhere else to accommodate them. Do you know that that happened? I hope you do, but you act contrarily because you were taught a different opinion to justify jihad and war against infidels. I reiterate that the one who is defeated morally is the one who is defeated in the field. That is what the principle has been for all the nations throughout time in human history.

In the Muslim society, there are not many ideas in the market that could inform different ways of understanding issues. There are countable Koran verses which we recite in the Arabic language that help to understand the Holy Book and its meanings. Therefore, some have no option on how to understand the meaning of the religion and the demands of the Koran. What can the solution be if someone gets extremist ideas of radicalisation encouragement directly from the meaning of the Koran verses?

Muslims need to replace hatred and war concepts with love, kindness, passion, cooperation, and tolerance. Fighting and enmity cannot go on forever. These are temporary and short-time solutions. But love and cooperation are universal principles that are permanent. Anything can only survive by adaptation and flexibility. If something becomes stagnant and stuck, it must die and be forgotten forever. Therefore, Islam should be flexible and adaptive to current events and situations in human lives.

As Muslims, we have a responsibility of making our religion peaceful, accommodating, and prosperous. Our energies must be directed at the correction and reinterpretation of religious curricula in order to make it work for human development and coexistence. That is the real challenge Muslim leaders have today. We should be rid of short-time solutions that are dictatorial and targeted at killing innocent people without a proper reason and fair trial and judgement. We have spent so much energy on short-term, temporary solutions. Muslims can solve the vice once and for all if genuine efforts were directed at reviewing the curriculum and reinterpretation of Islam texts.

There is always a conflict between the Koran text and the human consciousness. Sometimes, you see incompatibility between what your conscious mind and soul tell you and the belief system you uphold. Which one is more important? Which one would you choose? Whatever your decision may be, you are in trouble and in a state of perpetual confusion. Since there are not any other subjects in Somalia except those on religious concepts that take up all the time, many have become mentally ill because of the incompatibility between the inherent human mental and religious doctrine. Many of those religious youth devoted to religion have gone mad.

There are many concepts in the Koran which cannot work together at the same time but can be chosen to suit a certain time. For instance, as we have seen, the war and fighting principle versus the kindness and love principle are incompatible. The Koran says in Surah Al-Anbiya 21, verse 107, 'We sent thee not, but As a Mercy for all creatures.' At the same time, we have another principle for holy war which is stated in At-Tawbah 9, 'God has purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return)

is the Garden (of Paradise): They fight in His cause, and sly and are slain: Promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Koran: And who is more faithful to his convenient than God? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded; that is the achievement supreme.'

These are examples of Koran principles that are at variance with each other. So what do you think? How can we implement all the orders from God at the same time? Also, which one do you think is a permanent universal principle? Which one would you say is temporary given the obtaining circumstances?

The principle in the Surah Al-Anbiya is permanent. It is a universal one, and God says, 'We sent you not, but as a mercy for all creatures.' We sent you not for war, fighting, and violence. That means the war Prophet Muhammad and his companions went on was a necessary evil which is for survival and self-defence. Not a principle. Not warship for God. Not a choice.

Another example for the different principle in the Koran is as follows:

> When the prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his consorts, and she then divulged it to another and God made it known to him, he confirmed part thereof and repudiated a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said, 'Who told thee this?' He said, 'He told me who knows and is well-acquainted with all things.' (Surah Al-Tahrim 66, verse 3)

> And among his signs is this, that He created for mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily in that are Signs for those who reflect. (Surah Al-Rum 30, verse 21)

These two verses relatively explain the same issue: dependency and the love that exists between a man and a woman. Altogether, they are talking about two different things: the first is that which we can call a private issue between the Prophet and one of his wives. The second is that where the Koran is talking about the same issue but concerning couples though from a different perspective. The one in Surah Al-Tahrim is a private one. However, the one in Surah Al-Rum is a universal principle which is permanent and applicable at all times. Therefore, someone has to understand the Koran within certain contexts. The topic, too, has to be accorded its own merit. 'Hold to forgiveness; Command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant.' That principle can be pitied against this one: 'When the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem of war but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them, for God is often forgiving most merciful' (At-Tawbah 9, verse 5).

The belief system in the Muslim society, which is based on the Koran verses are the words of God. So they have the same values and the same meaning. There should be no obstacles placed between the words and the meanings they are intended to convey. Suppose that all Koran verses are God's words. All God's words, however, do not have the

same meaning and are not on the same topic. Also, God does not speak in the Arabic language only. God speaks in a language that is natural and which appeals to human feelings and consciousness.

By those who range themselves in ranks. And so are strong in repelling evil. And thus proclaim the Message of God. Verily, verily, your God is one. Lord of the heavens and of the earth and all between them. And the Lord of every point at the rising of the sun!

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Chapter 6

The Koran and change

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[a] The concept of abrogation

What is the meaning of abrogation? Abrogation means to end an Islamic law officially and put in its place another one. There was a time when this was necessary based on the circumstances. Prophet Muhammad and his companions widely practiced this principle. Therefore, during Prophet Muhammad's time, the understanding of religious texts was well known. Prophet Muhammad and his caliphates knew that what they were doing was incontestable.

So abrogation means removing one religious principle and replacing it with another one. That is a well-known Islamic principle which was applied many times in different

circumstances during the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It is a very good universal principle that can resolve the longstanding starkness and oldness of Islam writings. That principle allows deciphering the meaning and understandings of religion depending on current interests.

As already stated in chapter 13, this should be done by the charged with authority committee. They are the only ones with the authority to handle that responsibility. The Koran gives Muslims the religious consent to change any verses that go against modern thinking.

These include those used by religious extremists who used to claim that they command them to fight against infidels. Such should be changed to new principles that encourage peace and tolerance.

In the first months of Islamic prayer, Muslims were ordered to pray while facing the Jerusalem mosque (Qudus). Then for the same reasons, they were ordered to face Mecca (Qibla). This was really a significant incident and historical change of the religious principles. Muslims preferred to face Mecca when praying instead of Jerusalem. That feeling of Arab Muslims was fulfilled by the dramatic step of Qibla changes. At the same time, God granted their prayers, meaning Jerusalem was accepted by God. Therefore, the abrogation concept is there in Islam and can be applied whenever it is needed. In it, 'We see the turning of thy face for guidance to the heavens: now shall we turn thee to a Qibla that shall please thee. Turn then thy face in the direction of the sacred Mosque: Wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction. The people of the Book know well that that is the truth from their Lord. Nor is God unmindful of what they do.' (Sorah 2: Al-baqara, verse 144.)

The practice of abrogation was common and was done according to the needs and circumstances of the time.

Al-Baqarah 2, verse 106 says, 'None of our revelations do we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but we substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that God Hath power over all things?' It is with this in mind that Caliphate Omar stopped the implementation of the theft punishment because there was starvation at that time.
That was how the first generation of Muslims (including Prophet Muhammad) read, interpreted, and understood the Koran. Therefore, the problem is not about the Koran verses that encourage Muslims to fight against infidels. It is the refusal by Muslims to understand and implement the Koran in light of modern complex society.

If religious extremists were truly sincere about their cause, they would serve their cause better by further researching to attain accurate or near-accurate understanding of Islam. Otherwise, there are many questions that they cannot answer about their own religion. In my opinion, I do not think they care much about religious principles. They are more focused on waging political wars. What is written in the Koran is the least of their concerns. In any case, I cannot clearly see the spiritual relationship between them and the Creator of the universe.

The abrogation principle has been there since the time of Prophet Muhammad. But no one takes it seriously despite being very good. It can remedy all the problems that we are suffering from now. In order not to abide by it, very poor excuses have been given. Among the implausible reasons given has been that the Prophet was left with his god alone.

The closed mind of the Muslim not only spoils their lives and prospects for future prosperity but also distorts the meaning and effect of the religion itself. What then is the meaning of the noble principle which the Prophet himself used many times within his life of prophethood? This life of

about twenty years turned out to be useless to the Muslims for their whole lives. That is a big mistake by the Muslim society.

Surah Al-Anfal 8, verse 65 says, 'O Apostle! Rouse the believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred, if a hundred they will vanquish a thousand of the unbelievers, for these are a people without understanding.' After a day or so, this principle was abrogated and never used. That was the wisdom applied then and which could also work in our present-day situation.

Also, Surah Al-Anfal 8, verse 66 says, 'For the present, God Hath lightened to your task, for he knoweth that there is a weak spot in you: But even so, if there are a hundred, you are patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred and if a thousand, they will vanquish two thousand, with the leave of God: for God is with those who patiently persevere.' That time, religion was dynamic and pragmatic. It worked according to the circumstances of the society and its needs.

If there were a principle saying twenty of you has to face one hundred of the unbelievers, now it is saying one hundred of you have to face two hundred of them. Back then, it took just a few days to change the rules governing fighting. That bad excuse which makes Muslims not to apply their mind to other aspects of their religion is what is responsible for the current situation in Muslim societies.

There were at least two other well-known cases in the Muslim society: one was about the period widows could wait before they remarried. Previously, it was about twelve months, as verse 240 in chapter 2 tells us. Then it was removed and replaced with one that reduced the waiting period for a widow to just about three months. Surah 2, verse 234 supports this change.

Another principle that changed was on inheritance. Surah 2, verse 180 states, 'It is prescribed, when death approaches any of you, if he leave any goods, that he make a bequest to parents and next of Kin, according to reasonable usage; this is due from the God-fearing.'

Surah Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 41 states, 'As to the thief; Male or female, cut off his or her hands; a punishment by way of example, from God, for their crime; and God is exalted in power.' Caliphate Omar halted the fulfilment of that theft verse with the reason that there was drought from the seventeenth to the eighteenth year in the Muslim calendar. That halting of the law of the cutting off of hands by Omar Inu-khidab is the correct meaning and application of the law in Islam. It does not mean that it is something stiff and permanent; instead, it is dynamic and flexible.

Islam scholars have commented on that abrogation principle. They explain that it is there because of God's wisdom of wishing his people easy life, not hardship. God wants his people to have it easy in everything. Islam scholars have also declared that the abrogation principle is only for the laws, not for information.

Why have Muslims consistently refused to apply this useful principle of their religion? It is simple, because they think the principle specially applied only when Prophet Muhammad was alive. But there is not a shred of evidence anywhere that shows that it was only meant for the Prophet. It is a social need to face up to the reality of life and its dynamics. After the death of the Prophet, the people who were sent were alive and interacted in different situations of life. Therefore, there is need for the law to be flexible now more than the time of the Prophet.

And even though the prophet had gone, he had left his representatives in charge of the affairs of religion. His

followers and the Koran itself attest to this: 'O ye who believe obey God, and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority among you; if ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to God and His Apostle, if ye do believe in God And the last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination.' This verse shows that the absence of the Apostle did not mean absence of authority. His authority was there and everywhere all the time. In our current circumstances, those charged with the authority can be the members of parliament. Every nation in the world now has members of parliament or members of the legislative assembly whose primary duty is to make relevant and suitable laws for the nation.

There is no need for anarchy and confusion. God, his messenger, and the people have all delegated the work of reviewing the constitution and laws to the members of parliament.

The abrogation concept was active and very useful at the time of Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Why did Muslims dismiss this concept after the death of Prophet Muhammad? They dismissed it because of the disarray among all Muslims. And there is context to it. If all Muslims agreed on any one thing, it will be law. That was the excuse of not using the abrogation principle till now. However, that excuse is ill-fitting because of the following reasons:

1. Prophet Muhammad worked as an executive prophet about thirteen years in Medina. During these thirteen years, the Prophet, in his social work, would replace existing laws with others at will. And God approved of his changes! What's even more interesting is that God approved the changes many times over, and if this happened that time, what about the life of current

Muslims and going into the future? It is obvious; Muslims need that principle in their daily lives.

2. All Muslims have never been unanimous in resolution of any one controversial issue. And it seems not likely to happen anytime soon. What is possible is the agreement by the majority on something. They never said majority of the Muslims, but they used the term unanimous resolution, which has never happened, unless it is a perception of some people who ruled the way they wanted. This situation mirrors what happened with Saddam Hussein's (Iraqi president) election in 2002, which was 100 per cent as declared that time by the electoral body.

3. The method and process of consensus building in Muslim society at that time is not clear. I have no idea as to when and how consensus developed among the Muslims on the concept of abrogation. Nobody has an answer that contains a definite time this is supposed to have happened. Is it not fair to conclude that Muslim consensus on any one particular Islamic law or principle has never happened? Because of these reasons, a Muslim parliament can claim to remove all irrelevant and outdated laws and replace them with workable ones.

The process of identifying the laws that could be lined up for abrogation and making new and suitable ones is now well over due. This is a task best suited for members of parliament. And of course, they are the ones the Koran is referring to when it speaks of 'charged with authority committee'. It is that simple. The principle of abrogation is

enough to solve the problem and the confusion brought by archaic principles such as jihad.

[b] Empowering the charged with authority committee

As human beings, we are in charge of our lives and have direct responsibility for everything that happens in the world, including our personal lives and belief system. Muslims forget that for centuries, they have had a responsibility to understand the real philosophy of Islam and find out the true wisdom in it.

However, instead of contemplating the objective and meaning of their Holy Book, they have remained mere followers of the religion. That approach has allowed Muslims to interpret religion according to their own interests and claim that both God and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said so. That is because no one requires accountability from them by asking why and how.

The Koran itself has a provision for interpreting and reviewing the meaning of the religion. This power is vested in a committee that has been given the mandate. Surah An-Nisa, verse 59 says, 'O ye who believe obey God, and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority among you.'

Most problems in the modern world that persist to this day come from the Muslim world. One may ask why. There are many causes of that phenomenon which do not just have one answer. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the main causes and their solutions.

We cannot state for a fact that there is a nation that does not have its own challenges. All nations face economic, social, and security problems. It is normal and common for nation states to face and confront their own challenges. The

only difference is whether or not that nation is ready to face the unique challenges and derive long-lasting solutions.

In the Muslim world, there are two main problems: political and social challenges on the one hand and application of their religious beliefs. Whereas political and social problems are understandable because almost everyone all over the world is affected, Islamic beliefs remain a huge challenge. In the Muslim world, there is no political stability, democratic governance systems, transparency, accountability, and proper rule of law and order. This is not really exclusive to Muslim nations because many other countries in the world are in turmoil.

The second challenge is, however, mostly a unique and Muslim problem. That is what I will describe, prescribe, and then suggest solutions. From the onset, Islam is a vast complicated system. It has several aspects: spiritual matters, which concern the individual and their personal relationship with their God, and a political system, which has a lot of different sections and schools of thought. It also has general ethical principles, such as kindness, love, forgiveness, tolerance, supporting the poor, sharing wealth, among others. Islam has a constitution with its own by-laws, in addition to normal daily rituals and a praying system that must be followed.

Since there is no clear updating authority or religious body to manage the Muslim society, there is confusion and anarchy about the religious duties and their implementation. There are no clear boundaries in terms of responsibility between persons as individuals and governments as state organs when implementing Islamic law. So some individuals use their perceived personal spiritual connection to God to devise political and military strategies which they carry out

in the name of God. Muslims are not able to separate the personal religious duties and the collective religious duties.

The government and national authorities are responsible for collective religious duties. These include policies on diplomatic relationship with other nations and declaring war against other nations. But we find individuals, without consulting or considering the government duties, carrying out these duties. Here is a case where Muslim individuals execute collective responsibilities in their personal capacity—actions that are not allowed. That is how the current confusion in the Muslim society and the inside fighting is made sophisticated and complex.

In the end, this religious confusion and Muslim internal fights affect the world's stability and development. Thousands of soldiers and humanitarian workers are killed every month in Muslim countries while trying to offer help in security or humanitarian crises. In that sense, Muslims' crises are very complicated and need to be dealt with as serious problems.

The main causes of social and security problems in the Muslim world are religious misunderstandings, wrong beliefs, and internal fighting. All the wars are about Islam and Islamic teachings. For example, al-Qaeda, Taliban, Da'ish, Ansaru-suunah, al-Shabaab, and all other affiliated groups are fighting because of the Islam religion.

These wars dictate the need for a serious concentration on Islam updating. If the religious confusion can be adequately addressed, all other Muslim problems can be solved gradually through social involvement. The current unrest in the Muslim society about their religion is unwarranted, and we must be ashamed of it.

Islam religion itself has a suggested solution. It says the *wa ulil amri minkum* (charged with authority committee)

can do the work of reviewing and reinterpreting work of Islam. That is a well-known Koran command among all Muslim faithful.

Some Muslim groups preach the wrong message just to confuse and mislead the people for personal interest and achieving selfish goals. Most are corrupt politicians in Islamic states who tailor the holy writings of Islam to suit their own beliefs. The people affected have lost their rationality and become like instruments to be used for selfish ends.

Islam has very clear and well-established laws and order systems, that is, if the Koran was to be applied as it was revealed. Only problem is, groups with selfish vested interests come up with their own beliefs and want us to believe that they are an official part of Islam faith. For example, the foolish deeds such as slaughter of innocent people by Muslim militants are an embarrassment to many Muslims who reside in countries with a majority Christian population. Such actions sometimes lead to revenge attacks, something many Muslims fear.

Though we feel very bad about that situation, we are the ones who have taught those youngsters and the deep hate in our culture for non-Muslims. Therefore, we should not forget what we have taught them. For centuries, we have never made any considerable effort at reinterpreting or reviewing Islamic teachings.

The awaking call should be catalysed by our awareness from the information we have through interaction with people from other countries. Indeed, we have developed some new cultures and an understanding of the value of human life. It should be obvious to us that terrorism, as perpetrated by Islamic extremists, is savage and barbaric.

We seem to have forgotten that those youngsters are fulfilling our culture and the core values of our belief, a fact which is common knowledge. This is what they have been taught and is repeated into their minds day and night for a long time, to date.

There are two ways of obeying God and the Apostle: first is to respect and follow the written principles that came from God through the Prophet's inspiration (the Koran). That needs to be through the official body of all Muslims, who have the authority to interpret Islamic religious texts. However, that is only possible if they exist. If they do not exist, then there will be trouble.

Second is to listen to our feelings, inspirations, and other intuitive personal connections to our knowledgeable, invisible Creator. Before obeying the Apostle, we must believe that indeed they were sent by God. That way, it is easy to respect and follow their guidance, through the understanding of the official body of Muslims charged with authority because we know they are genuine. That is the way Prophet Muhammad himself preferred to call him or mentioned him: 'One of the God's messengers'.

As followers of Prophet Muhammad, obeying and modelling him does not mean compromising our liberty and mental creativity as many understand these days. As all of us unite and become one in Prophet Muhammad, some Muslims assume that we should not think or be creative in our own ways. That is using the modelling of the Prophet as an excuse for our own failings.

By trying to model the Prophet, it seems many Muslims have lost their way. They have ended up dismissing many ideas instead of contributing to better themselves. They falsely understand the concept of modelling the Prophet as aiming to be the same person as the Prophet by all means.

Some even end up copying his dressing, physical appearance, and many aspects of his lifestyle in that time.

That is a major way to mislead and misunderstand the concept of how modelling the prophet should be in the Muslim society. Prophet Muhammad himself warned Muslims against that mistake in the Hadith (Bukhari) as narrated by Omar Ibnul-khidab: 'Do not extol me like the Christians extolled Jesus. I am the servant of God and His messenger. Said to me servant and the messenger.'

It is thoughtlessness to abandon your God-given talents and mental creativity in the name of modelling the Prophet! The Prophet never suggested to anybody to model him blindly without reason and proceed to do harm to others in the name of religion.

It is a well-known psychological character to search for an excuse for all social and personal failings. No wonder we do give religious excuses for all our mischief and social failures. Statements like 'God says', 'Prophet Muhammad says', 'Others say', among others, have become common on our lips. It is like all the time, we are looking for what was said, whether true or not. We should produce our own original ideas that can solve the current problems facing all human beings.

This is incorrect because there is no religious point of view that supports abandoning our human rights and God-given attributes in the name of religion or modelling the Prophet. About this issue, Surah Al-Imran 3, verses 79 and 80 say, 'It is not possible that a man to whom is given the Book, And the wisdom, and the prophetic office should say to people: "be you worshippers of Him who is truly the cherisher of all for you have taught the book and you have studied it earnestly." Nor would he instruct you to take angels and prophets to for lords and patrons. What! Would

he bid you to unbelief after you have bowed your will to God in Islam?' Imagine! How then did believers of these holy books become savages as we witness these days?

The answer is clear. People who cannot support or care for themselves cannot pretend to care more about the revelations in the Holy Book or any other thing in this world. As Muslims, we are in a miserable situation. Others have tried to help us as fellow human beings, but majority of us do not care to listen to their advice. Yet this book has a universal permanent principle and other principles on current emerging issues. Any religion is as good as its believers. So the Islam religion by itself has no problem. Its problem is the savageness of its believers.

All savage behaviours which other nations shy from exist in the Muslim world. These include injustice, unlimited corruption, lies, and bloodshed. Many bad habits exist in the Muslim world. In spite of God giving Muslim nations an abundance of natural and human resources, they are not ready to respect themselves and comply with the universal laws of God. So if they are not ready to respect themselves, who will respect them? Respect is to deserve, not desire.

The charged with authority committee mentioned in the Koran is important in addressing this issue. It is not about their personality and nationality; it is about the political and legal system of Muslim nations. They are supposed to be elected by the eligible members of that Muslim nation, then they can work separately or together according to the political and security conditions in those Muslim nations. The main thing is to limit the religious madness and mindless excuses in the Muslim society.

We have to beware of the complex stigma of Muslims in regard to the holiness of the Koran. The Koran text cited above shows that it is not true that nobody can interfere in

the Muslim belief system. God gave orders that Muslims must obey those charged with authority committee. The role of those elected charged with authority committee members include:

1. Deriving the correct meaning from the Koran and Hadith.
2. Studying religion and extracting its wisdom.
3. Safeguarding and keeping human rights, including freedom of religious belief.
4. Making ethical and legal laws from the religion.
5. To advice and consult with the political authority and Muslim leaders.
6. Religious awareness and propagating Islam.
7. They are the final body who can give a final opinion in disputed religious concepts in the Muslim community.
8. It is the only one that can issue a fatwa (legal opinion) in any case in the Muslim society.
9. It has the authority to interpret Islam texts according to the needs and the interests of Muslims and non-Muslims, and of course, that is the aim and the objectives of the religion.

They are supposed to implement the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) saying, 'God sends to this nation at the top of every hundred years, someone who renewed her religion' as narrated by Abu Hurairah and came in the Abu Dawud. The idea of renewing the Islam religion is not new. It is the Hadith of the Prophet and his directions. So this new charged with authority committee will renew Islam and make it workable in this crucial time of technology and globalisation.

The book of the Holy Koran and the Hadith will be their only reference and guide. Nothing else! They know how they can choose the right commands from the Koran at the right moment. Other Muslims have to follow the deriving principles from the religion by only those given the power from God. The charged with authority committee will tell the Muslims how to perform their religious duties.

This charged with authority committee has to bring the orders of the religion in stages and into parts according to the needs and interests of the people. Surah Al-Isra 17, verse 106 says, 'It is a Koran which we have divided into parts from time to time, in order that thou mightiest recite it to men at intervals: We have revealed it by stages.' As the text mentions, the Koran did not come together at once in this world. It came during the twenty-three years of the prophecy of Muhammad's life based on the incidents and the needs of that moment. God can reveal the whole Koran one day or in one hour, but he preferred to reveal it in parts from time to time to teach us his wisdom and guidance.

From the Far East to Far West, all Muslim countries can have their own body, which can unite Muslims. Therefore, cooperation and brotherhood can be achieved in the Muslim society. Shia and Sunnis can negotiate the number of the members and all other working procedures. In that situation, there is no fear, wars, inside fighting among the Muslim nations, and captured by one strong nation to another. The whole Muslim world can be peaceful and be able to contribute to the well-being of the world like they were one time in history.

[c] Reinterpretation of Islam

Is our understanding of the Holy Book independent of circumstances it operates in? The answer is no! Wisdom means behaving in accordance with obtaining circumstances and putting the right thing in the right place.

Muslim scholars have a principle on the understanding of the Koran that states, 'Religious judgment must be driven by the special understanding of the situation.' This principle was made by the authorities of Islam a long time ago. There is no religious understanding that is independent of the circumstances and practicalities of human life.

The current independent interpretation of Islam is the cause of the problems we see in the Muslim world today. There is a need for change now. And it must change. Interpretation of holy texts must be based on certain conditions and be subjected to proper regulations. Otherwise, the consequences are dangerous not only in the Muslim society but also for the whole world.

New interpretations of Islamic texts are mainly important in relation to the status of women, relations between Sunnis and Shiites, relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the role of Muslims in non-Muslim societies, and Islamic economic theories.

For example, some messages ban women from travelling without their husband's permission. But this is not a religious ban. It came about because it was not safe for a woman to travel alone.

Many Muslim youth read and interpret the Koran literally. They never stop to think of the true meaning of the text within certain contexts. That has made them an easy target for recruitment into religious extremism.

There are reports that Turkey is preparing to publish a document that represents a revolutionary reinterpretation of Islam. She has proposed a controversial and radical modernisation of the religion. The country's powerful Department of Religious Affairs has commissioned a team of theologians at Ankara University to carry out a fundamental revision of the Hadith, the second most sacred text in Islam after the Koran.

The Hadith is a collection of thousands of sayings alleged to come from the prophet Muhammad. As such, it is the principal guide for Muslims in interpreting the Koran and the source of the vast majority of Islamic law, or sharia. This is kind of akin to the Christian reformation.

These are good developments because critical thinking is a habit of the human mind. But it was killed a long time ago among many Muslims in the pretext of religion. 'Just obey your God without asking or raising any questions,' goes a popular appeal among the Islam callers. Critical thinking is necessary for anyone who wants to benefit from any information—be it religious or scientific.

There is no point in ignoring the voices of critics at all costs. Unfortunately, that is what has been happening from the distant past up to now in the Muslim world. It has continued to deepen century after century in the name of God and religion. The result is now apparent; society seems to be part of the problem instead of being a part of the solution.

To be responsible requires mental maturity and intellectual capacity building. So when people in the Muslim world behave like they need to be looked after by someone else, how can they be helped? Should Western nations come in to direct them? Is intellectual reasoning so complex that we only do things in the name of Islam? This

has been the situation for a very long time. And the result is, the people, country, religion, and peace are all suffering because of Islamic misunderstandings. Therefore, we should not interpret Islam according to what our needs dictate to us. We need to get the true and original meaning of the writings.

Another point that can help towards a better understanding of the Koran is the accommodation of the metaphor principle. Over one thousand verses of the Koran use metaphors many times. This means that the Koran should not be interpreted literally or as it is written, word for word. It communicates to us through what we can perceive but uses names and stories to convey some hidden meanings.

For example, Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 245 says, 'Who is he that will loan to God a beautiful loan, which God will double unto his credit and multiply many times? It is God that gives (you) want or plenty. And to him shall be your return.' In reality, God does not need anybody's loan. He just wants to convey to us some meaning. These words cannot be taken in their literal meaning. However, they make sense metaphorically. There are many such metaphorical writings in the Koran, which the Salafist view says, 'It is what God means. We do not know and we do not interpret it.'

Also, Surah Al-Anfal 8, verse 41 says, 'And know that out of all the booty that you may acquire in war a fifth share is assigned to God.' Do you think God needs a fifth of all we loot in war? I do not think you would agree to that. But I am sure you would agree that the principle of the metaphor in the Koran is necessary.

Many of us cannot reasonably interpret Islamic writings. Texts with hidden meanings are many in the Holy Book. This was even common to generations of the Muslims of years gone that they also started reinterpreting them. And

this does not make interpretation of every Islamic text easy, especially texts that are unusually difficult.

What may be of interest to many is that this style of communication is not new to Islam. It has been in existence for centuries. At some point, it was forgotten for some unclear reasons. Sharia law scholars put forth the principle of metaphor a long time ago. They said, 'The verdict of something is rotating around the reason; existence or lack of existence.' That is a well-known phrase among the Islam scholars. Their plea was for people to seek clear understanding of Islamic principles. The search for deeper meaning in texts rather than taking comfort in literal meanings was their preoccupation. Who does not see the sense in this kind of approach to issues? Does this not contradict what is largely in common among Muslims today?

The Koran is a vast book which does not have just one theme but several. We all have to understand that the Koran does not talk about one topic. Thousands and thousands of Koran verses make reference to different topics on just about everything. Common themes in the Koran include God, nature, spirit, security and wars, peace, politics, human relationships, history, other nations' stories, non-believers, their verdict on the hereafter life, among many others. The Koran is replete with universal principles on just about anything.

You cannot say Islam is a religion of peace only; also, you cannot say Islam is a religion of war and instability. According to all-time texts, it is both. It depends on what you want at a given time and the way you would use it. Emphasising and practicing verses that suit current interests or popular political thought does not make one a master of the situation.

A plethora of principles exist in the Koran that can be switched to suit different interests and situations. For example, there is a principle that can be used to call for war. Similarly, there are very good principles that exhort us not to go to war. And it is not only about war and peace; it is about everything in life. This means that one cannot lack options. It largely depends on your desire and what you see as more important as per what is available at a particular time.

What is good to note is that you have many principles at your disposal which can be switched on and off based on your preference. Although we have many Koran verses that appeal to us to go to war without fear or hesitation, there are other principles against. For example, Surah 60, verses 7–8 say, 'It may be that God will grant love and friendship between you and those, whom you now hold as enemies. For God has power over all things. And God is often forgiving, most merciful. God forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: For God loves those who are just.'

There is a common belief in the Muslim society that Islam writings and their understanding is permanent and never changes till the end of this world. That means whatever Muslims perceived fourteen centuries ago from their religion and the world in general remains permanent forever. Such notions prevent Muslims from acquiring social awareness. In the end, they are unable to reconcile the uniformity between their religious faith and the new challenges in life.

Naturally, everything in this world is constantly changing—from the movement of the planets, global warming to human cells, among others. All are changing in the way God designed in his wisdom and power. The same is the case with religion, which also depends on human

development and discoveries. Some understanding at a given point in time cannot be permanent. Instead, interpretation should be based on the needs and interests of the people it serves.

It is largely believed that nobody should try to develop or upgrade the interpretation of the Holy Koran because, as already noted, it is considered permanent and eternal. That belief is responsible for the ossification of the Muslim society today. We are told that we must understand the Koran the same way ancient believers understood it. But the times are different! We are not living under the same situation given the high level of awareness and information we possess. The current time and its life needs are informed by our modern belief system and totally different world view.

Biologically, our human cells replace themselves constantly. This means that our bodies do not remain the same all our lifetime. Changing and movement is the natural law of the universe. Do not take the Koran as a once-and-for-all document because, in the first place, you were not created complete and permanent. Everything in you grows gradually whether it is physical, mental, or emotional.

If you hold the view that the Holy Book (the Koran) was understood to have said everything in it before, then there is no need to spend time reading and learning it. That means our mental capacity cannot be the same at all times and in every situation. The mental capacity of the people living today cannot be the same with that of those who lived one thousand five hundred years ago. The language and the terminology are not the same. That means there is no point for someone to say that we should understand the words of the Holy Book the same way that our ancients did (Salafism). We are living in a totally different world

and different time in human history. Understanding the Koran the way it was understood fifteen centuries ago is not fair. That belief system creates incompatibility between the people and modernity, leading to confusion and anxiety.

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Chapter 7

Mending fences

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[a] Consciousness as the end of dogma

> Dogmas—religious, political, scientific—arise out of the erroneous belief that thought can encapsulate reality or the truth. Dogmas are collective conceptual prisons.
>
> —Eckhart in *Stillness Speaks*

During the Dark Ages,[10] the Roman Church in Western societies dominated thought by encouraging people to adhere to dogma. However, when humans were released from torture and captivity, their consciousness led to progress in many aspects of life. In the human history, the long struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and intellectuals—eventually won by intellectuals—was an example of the struggle between human consciousness and dogma.

Therefore, dogma is used to refer to religious principles that come from outside into you. They include any other ideology or a belief system that people are expected to accept that it is true, without questioning it. It is a doctrine others program into your mind without you knowing. Neither are you given a chance to reason before embracing the dogma.

Dogma is passed on by individuals in authority who give us incontrovertible truth that we are expected to believe. So most of us grow up holding on to the beliefs of our parents and society. But as consciousness arises within us, we find ourselves more and more questioning what we have been taught. Yet on their part, they did their duties during their time and do not care about whatever happens thereafter. The purpose of this 'outside in' program is to propagate a certain philosophy, which may not survive without indoctrination.

Consciousness is our original self that come from our Creator—the higher invisible infinitive. As the life source of all human beings, consciousness has no one divination or clear meaning. It simply means effective use of our brain and senses. We need to use all our senses such as seeing, hearing,

[10] A term used to refer to the period of the Middle Ages to mark the intellectual darkness characteristic of the time; often restricted to the early period of the Middle Ages, between the time of the fall of Rome and the appearance of vernacular written documents.

feeling, and intuition to arrive at a logical conclusion on issues that matter.

The decisions we make in life must be commanded by our own thoughts and feelings. Whatever the divination of the human consciousness can be, we can define the nature of its function and the effect it makes in our lives. The nature of the consciousness demands that we be suspicious of everything that happens and the intentions. We must ask questions, analyse, think, and experiment about everything in our surroundings. By its nature, we should never stop asking questions and analysing situations.

For any interested persons, the position of Islam on dogma is very clear. We cannot use religion as an excuse for believing in irrational dogma. Surah Al-Ahzab 33, verse 68 says, 'And they would say: "our lord! We obeyed our chiefs and our great ones, and they misled us as to the right path."' Furthermore, Surah Al-Tawbah 9, verse 31 says, 'They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of God, and they take as their lord Christ the son of Mary: yet they were commanded to worship but one God: there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him far is he from having the partners they associate with Him.' That is proof that Islam does not support dogma and creed.

The dogma remains the same all the time even within different situations. It gains acceptance through its apparent permanence, commonness, and refusal to change in any circumstances. One of the major concerns of Muslims is whether something is lawful or not! This is especially the case with Muslims residing in Western countries. It is common to hear the questions, 'Is this halal [lawful] in the Islam? Is it permitted in the religion?'

This causes confusion among Muslim communities in Western countries. The need to look at new things from a

different viewpoint is affected by their own religious stigma. It gets worse when they have to check everything from shopping in supermarkets to mode of dressing and even acceptable behaviour. The questions remain the same, 'Is this halal or not?' At the end of the day, this questioning changes into a serious psychological problem for the Muslim. The greatest question of all is whether or not to drink *khamri* (beer) or eat pork. Therefore, Muslims have to be very careful not to be misled by infidels and their unlawful products, like the beer and the pork.

In the final analysis, it is obvious that Muslims have several—albeit dangerous—unquestionable religious dogmas. Perhaps a few will suffice here:

- God does not accept any good deeds and prayer for non-Muslims. All the efforts from Christians, Jews, and other non-Muslims are worthless in front of God.
- Although the Koran mentions Jews and Christians, it states that paradise is exclusively for Muslims. That is a common belief for all religions, though Christians are taught not to judge others. So the difference is in adherence to it and zealousness in its application. From time to time, Christians tell Muslims 'Please pray for us' in some occasions. Can Muslims ask for the same?
- Slaughter by a Christian is not lawful. It is forbidden for Muslims to partake of an animal slaughtered by a non-Muslim. Because of that, some Muslims find it difficult to live with non-Muslims in towns. Even if illiterate, they have to read the labels on products to confirm that they are halal.
- Non-Muslims are forbidden from greeting Muslims in his own Islam greeting (*Asalamu Alaykum*). If

> that happens, normally, there is no reply. How you can exchange holy greetings with non-believers? That is impossible! Majority pretend to reply while in actual sense they are praying against the person. That happens especially among speakers of Arabic. They reply, 'Wa'alaykum asam' meaning 'Death is on you!'

Muslims use loudspeakers to call for prayer five times a day. This is not only a nuisance but disturbs those not interested. Others may understand the call for God. But Muslims seem to think that no matter who does not like it, they are doing the right thing. Such is a bad attitude that can bring conflict in society.

That is a common notion in the Muslim society that continuous call for prayer can convert non-believers. However, the missing link is the absence of consideration and respect of others' rights. It is important to mention that Christians—despite being the majority—allow Muslims to build mosques even in residential areas. It is unheard of for Muslims to allow Christians to build churches in Muslim-dominated states or have any special prayer rights. Therefore, the reward for such benevolence should not be noise. The noise from the loudspeakers irritates children, the sick, and the elderly who may want to rest in peace. Islam should not be seen as harming others.

It also appears that it is acceptable for Muslims to loot property belonging to non-Muslims. That concept is there with different interpretations and varied implementations. The only questions are when and how?

Also, killing in the battlefield when fighting against infidels means remission of all sins and immediate entrance into the paradise. The language on the day of the judgement

in the hereafter is Arabic. In addition, the language of paradise in the hereafter will be Arabic since it is also the language of Islam. All Muslims make their testimony and prayers in Arabic. Otherwise, such may not be recognised and accepted by God.

In light of new gadgets brought about by technological advancements, Muslims have to determine if they are halal or not. These include Internet, telephones, and even photographs. The moral dilemma regarding their use still exists. However, their use has continuously been adopted because they have improved our lives.

In most circumstances, we become victims of previous dispensations followed by our forefathers. However, that should not be the case. One of the changes consciousness triggers in our life is that it frees us from dogma. The more our awareness increases, the less we have a need to cling to beliefs and doctrines. Truth is not enshrined in dogma. Truth is more a matter of our experience of life than it is a set of beliefs. It is about a life that is genuine rather than holding on to a set of mental positions.

So we should ensure that belief system takes care of our interests. We need to move and acquire awareness through observation and deep thinking.

Human consciousness is the opposite of religious dogma. Whereas dogma is incontrovertible and permanent, consciousness causes us to become authentic, which means we no longer have a need to deceive ourselves by imagining we know things that we really do not know at all. Dogma imprisons us instead of liberating us. On the other hand, consciousness makes us always want to know what is going on. It encourages us to be creative, to renovate and renew things, and progress from one stage to another.

The natural instinct of the human consciousness is to move from one situation to another and create a new environment and new possibility. Caring much about dogma does not support human development and the bettering of our lives. For many people, following principles of dogma institutes the spirit and connection to the unseen power—God. For that reason, adhering to dogma is inevitable. This is the main supporting slogan dogma has. But the reality is, dogma has nothing to do with the spirit or connection to God. In fact, in many cases it is against the spirit and laws associated with God. So dogma is a man-made ideology which comes in most cases in the form of religious adherence.

Islam supports consciousness, thinking, and reasoning. It does not support religious dogma and ancient customs. It wants us to reason and evaluate everything. For example, Koran, Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 171 says, 'When it is said to them: "Follow what God has revealed," they say: "Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers" What even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?'

Also, Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 142 says, 'That was a people that have passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and you of what you do; of their merits there is no question in your case.'

Also, Surah Az-Zukhruf 43, verses 22–23 say, '"Nay!" They say: "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we do guide ourselves by their footsteps." Just in the same way, whenever we sent a warner before thee to any people, the wealthy ones among them said: "we found our fathers following a certain religion, and we will certainly follow in their footsteps."'

This way, the Islam religion supports logic and human consciousness. The Koran also refutes all false excuses. God—in his infinite knowledge—knows that dogma does

not serve or benefit human interests. Therefore, the Koran refutes the idea of using cultural excuse for following our forefathers.

Several Koran verses support and command the rational thinking. Some of them are discussed in the following pages. Surah Al-Imran 3, verses 190–191 say, 'Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of Night and Day,—there are indeed signs for men of understanding; Men who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the wonders of creation in the heavens and the earth, with the thought "our Lord! Not for naught hast thou created all this Glory to thee! Vive us Salvation from the Penalty of the Fire."'

In Surah Al-Anbiya 21, verses 51–68, Abraham, the prophet that Muslims call the father of all God's prophets, says:

> We bestowed aforetime on Abraham his rectitude of conduct, and well were we acquainted with him. Behold! He said to his father and his people, 'What are these images, to which you are so assiduously devoted?' They said, 'We found our fathers worshipping them.' He said, 'Indeed you Have been in manifest Error—you and your fathers.' They said, 'Have you Brought us the truth, or are you one of those who jest joking?' He said, 'Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, he who created them from nothing and I am a witness to this truth. And by God, I have A plan for your idols—after you go away

> and turn your backs.' So he broke them to pieces, all but the biggest of them, that they might turn and address themselves to it. They said, 'Who has done this to our gods? He must indeed be some man of impiety.' They said, 'We heard a youth talk of them; he is called Abraham.' They said, 'Then bring him before the eyes of the people, that they may bear witness.' They said, 'Art thou the one that did this with our gods, O Abraham?'
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> He said; 'Nay, this was done by this is their biggest one! Ask them, if they can speak intelligently!' So they turned to themselves and said, 'Surely you are the ones in the wrong!' Then were they confounded with shame: (they said) 'Though knowest full well that these idols do not speak!'
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> Abraham said, 'Do you then worship, besides God, things that can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm? Fie upon you, and upon the things that you worship besides God! Have you No sense?' They said, 'Burn him and protect your gods, if you do anything at all!'

Abraham instituted rationality in the way of worshipping God. He (Abraham) states very clearly that the worship of God and practicing spiritual activities must be in line with the human intelligence, which in itself may be God himself.

Also, we will see Abraham choosing his god by evaluating his effect and the real power he possesses. That means Abraham was teaching us to choose our god and other related issues on the basis of conscious evaluation. The narrative is found in Surah Al-An'am 6, verses 74–79 as follows:

> Lo Abraham said to his father Azar: 'takest thou idols for gods? For I see thee and thy people in manifest error.' So also did we show Abraham the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth, that he might with understanding have certitude. When the night covered him over, he saw a star; he said: 'That is my Lord.' But when it set, He said: 'I love not those that set.'
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> When he saw the moon rising in splendour, He said: 'this is my Lord.' But when the moon set, He said; 'Unless my Lord Guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.' When he saw the sun rising in splendour, He said: 'this is my Lord; This is the greatest of all.' But when the set, He said: 'O my people! I am indeed free from your guilt of giving partners to God. For me, I have set My face, firmly and truly, towards Him who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give Partners to God.'

That is Abraham, the father of all prophets and representation of God's worship. He names from the small

star to the sun searching for his lord. He only comes to know after they have all set down. Through intuition, he knew they were all changing their forms. Also, if a thing changes its form from one situation to another, it cannot be the Lord. So that means he understood the permanent, unchanging nature of the Lord and decided to worship he who never changes.

Given that the father of all prophets built his relationship with God on the basis of logic and consciousness, why do we still practice dogma in the form of religion? As indicated above, several Koran verses support and encourage use of the human mind through contemplating God's wonderful creation and giving meaning to it.

The real revelation from God encourages the reasoning and thinking approach in a rational way when making choices in life. The Koran teachings as indicated in the mentioned verses support this view. However, as if caught up by stigma, some Muslims never seem to want to analyse and examine different existing human civilisations and cultures with a view of improving their lot.

It appears that there are two classes of people: Muslims and non-Muslims. The Muslim community should embrace UN conventions and international agreements on human rights issues.

The attitude towards dogma can be taken as a small misunderstanding during the long time of the history of Islam. So that is not a major problem. However, what is unacceptable is the refusal of the Muslim society and its leaders to review the dogma. This has indeed persisted for so long. Yet there is no sign of empowering people by giving them the right information and the awareness they need to progress in life. There is only silence and pretence that everything is in order and that Muslims are the chosen

people by God. They think their religion is the best because it spells out everything they need. This they do without question or enquiry.

We should use our conscious mind to understand life and how we can survive. The quality of life we live depends on our perception of the world around us. Our lives should be led by thought which is a function of our consciousness—not dogma. The difference between man and other creatures is his ability to think, create things, and come up with new ideas.

[b] Embracing democracy and human rights

Democracy

Democracy is a universal principle that allows for freedom of worship, among other rights. From our Muslim perspective, we can define the term *democracy* as 'No patrons and no lords'.

The system of government in many Muslim nations is theocratic democracy. That means there is no legal separation between religion and the state. The tension between the two is a central political, social, and moral issue in the world today, resulting in a cultural conflict between non-Muslims and the fundamentalist, ultra-orthodox Muslim community. This has led to the social construction of religious extremism. What is the nature of this cultural conflict and how is it managed?

Many people in the world enjoy unfettered lives without riots and fighting because of democracy. Peaceful and orderly living is possible, only if all Muslims today could embrace democratic principles without hesitation. People in

other parts of the world partake of the benefits of democracy on a daily basis.

That the idea of democracy is around is yet another reason why jihad should be frowned upon or abhorred. Muslims and members of other religions should be free to convert—peacefully—into religions of their choice. That is why many Christians in countries in the West convert into Islam—unhindered. People anywhere in the world should be free to win others over to share their beliefs. Indeed, people should be free to have or not to have a religious belief.

Muslims, especially thinkers and politicians, flee from the tyranny of their leaders to Western countries where they are free to express their views uninhibited. I know of many Islamic movements in the Muslim world that sought refuge in the capitals of Europe and USA between 1960 and 2000. One of them is that Islamic Republican Party under Ruhollah Khomeini.[11] Khomeini was the Iranian spiritual leader and founder of the current Iranian regime.

Many Muslims desperately make attempts to reach the citadels of democracy in the West despite the ever-present risk of being labelled illegal immigrants. Many have died in the Pacific Ocean. Therefore, it is a big contradiction to declare holy war against the West and, at the same time, scramble for asylum opportunities in the same countries. That proves that there is no justification for our hatred and terrorist activities. Extremists should stop for a moment and think about what they are doing and the consequences of their actions. Their actions cannot be justified; they are deplorable, to say the least.

[11] Ruhollah Moosavi Khomeini was an Iranian religious leader, revolutionary, politician, and leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution which saw the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the shah of Iran.

Mosques litter the streets of almost all Western capital cities. There are mosques in New York; Washington, DC; London; Paris; Stockholm, among others. In addition, Muslims have the freedom to talk the way they want and do whatever they want. They get opportunities to spread Islam to others without fear or intimidation. Why then do they misuse the respect and honour accorded them by those they call infidels? Arabs have a saying: 'Beware of the respectable person to insult and the evil to respect and the fool to have mercy with him.' Do they think they are the evil ones that are welcomed into one's bedroom? As members of the Muslim community, we should jointly look down in utter shame!

In many Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East, it appears as though people have chosen a life of perpetual disorder over peace and tranquillity. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are some of the most unstable countries in the world because of religious extremism.

As you know, thousands of the Muslim militants fighting in Iraq and Syria invariably arrived from Western capitals using passports and facilities given to them as immigrants in those very Western countries. In the first place, they have no common decency of showing even a modicum of respect for those who enabled them access the benefits of civilisation. Second, they blatantly and stubbornly refuse to fulfil the conditions upon which they were given those documents. Except the Saudis themselves, no one in the Muslim world can get any Saudi Arabia national document. Yet the Saudis share beliefs and holy places, such as Mecca and Medina, in Saudi Arabia, with very many Muslims across the world. In addition, as Muslims, we turn to the haram when praying.

We share Islam and Prophet Muhammad whose home was in Mecca. Only Saudis derive advantage from that belief system—they do not feel the need to respect other Muslims and let them partake of it. Every year, they receive billions of dollars from other Muslims, yet they do not even say thank you since, *they* believe, they are fulfilling their religious duties. Immediately after the Haj festival ends, they eject anyone who may have delayed in their country. In extreme cases, one may not even be allowed to gather their personal luggage. Though these people have rights that ought to be respected and protected, the Saudis do not believe in the concept of human rights.

The Koran accepts the principle of democracy in many different ways. God says in Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 193, 'And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God. But if they cease let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.' Democracy is worth fighting for. So we can apply this verse in our effort at fighting for democracy.

There are several poignant teachings on democracy in the Koran. For example, Surah Al-Imran 3, verse 64 says, 'O people of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you; that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patron; other than God. If then they turn back, say ye: Bear witness that we at least, are Muslims, bowing to God's will.'

Surah Al-Imran 3, verse 79 says, 'It is not possible that a man, to whom is given the Book, and wisdom, and the prophetic office, should say to people "be ye may worshippers Rather than God's" On the contrary He would say; "Be ye worshippers of Him who is truly the cherisher of all: for ye have taught the book and ye have studied it earnestly."'

Surah Al-Imra'n 3, verse 80 says, 'Nor would he instruct you to take angels and prophets for lords and patrons. What would he bid you to unbelief after ye have bowed your will to God Islam?' All these Koran verses clearly support the concept of democracy but despise turmoil. That means all the people are equal before the law. There is neither lord nor servant. That is the principle of peaceful coexistence among human beings. For years and years, various religions call upon people to engender and enjoy the fruits of peace and stability which lead to a high quality of life.

Surah Al-Nisa 4, verse 75 says, 'And why should you not fight in the cause of God and of those who, being weak are ill-treated and oppressed men, women, and children, whose cry is: Our lord rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from thee one who will help.' If we do not face any of the issues mentioned in the verse, then there is clearly no need of fighting.

The rules and regulations concerning prisoners of war in Islam are covered in manuals of Islamic jurisprudence—based on Islamic teachings—in both the Koran and the Hadith. The historical legal principles governing the treatment of prisoners of war, in sharia, Islamic law (in the traditional doctrine fiqh schools of Islamic jurisprudence), was then a significant improvement over the pre-existing norms of society during Muhammad's time. These are explained in the early reforms under Islam.

Men, women, and children may all be taken as prisoners of war under traditional interpretations of Islamic law. Generally, a prisoner of war could be, at the discretion of the military leader, freed, ransomed, exchanged for Muslim prisoners, or kept in bondage. In earlier times, the ransom sometimes took an educational dimension, where a literate prisoner of war could secure his or her freedom by teaching

ten Muslims to read and write. Some Muslim scholars hold that a prisoner may not be ransomed for gold or silver but may be exchanged for Muslim prisoners.

The Koran, in many verses, discusses the fulfilment of treaties and agreed conventions. For example, Surah Al-Ma'idah 5, verse 1 says, 'O ye who believe! Fulfil all obligations.' Surah Al-Nahl 16, verses 91–92 and 94–95 say, 'Fulfil the covenant of God when ye have entered into it, and break not your oaths after ye have confirmed them; indeed ye have made God your surety; for God knoweth all that ye do. And be not like a woman who breaks into untwisted strands the yarn which she has spun, after it has become strong. Nor take your oaths to practice deception between yourselves, lest one party should be more numerous than another for God will test you by this; and on the Day of Judgment He will certainly make clear to you the truth of that wherein ye disagree. And take not your oaths, to practice deception between yourselves, with the result that someone's foot may slip after it was firmly planted, and ye may have to taste the evil lf having hindered men from the path of God, and a mighty Wrath Descend on you.'

From the above, it is clear that God is giving orders to his believers to fulfil all the oaths and covenants they have made with anyone. Yet again, there is another principle which should make us, as Muslims, avoid slavery and misuse of war prisoners in the name of jihad.

Many Muslim nations have no social order. Then, what is the need for holy or unholy war? It is apparent that many Muslims abhor democracy. To them, it is synonymous with homosexuality—a practice that Islam abhors. In fact, Islam goes beyond mere disapproval of homosexuality. Sharia teaches that homosexuality is a vile form of fornication, punishable by death. However, underneath the surface, there

are implied references to homosexual behaviour in paradise, and it has been a part of historical Arab and Muslim culture.

So Muslims believe that democracy is not good because that is what they have been made to believe. Because of this psychological complex, it is not easy for them to accept democracy as a universal principle.

The irony which seems oblivious to Muslims yet it is staring at us is that we believe that God, through the Koran, orders us to kill infidels wherever we encounter them. That, certainly, is a position crying for a serious overhaul. Things cannot go on the way they are. The current state of affairs is not only disgraceful to the Muslim society as it is but also an unnecessary disturbance to the rest of the world that does not profess the Muslim faith.

What is sorely missing in the life of Muslims is the universal principle of 'No lords and no patrons'. Muslims have a choice between the lives they are living now, which are dominated by pain, suffering, and uncertainty, and that of happiness and fulfilment guaranteed by universal principles.

If they continue on the transient and perilous path of heaping undue praise on fellow humans that they perceive as lords and denying fellow human beings rights, then they deserve the current pain and suffering. Perhaps even worse! But there is no rational substitute for democracy. Even if there were, sooner rather than later, they will appreciate that democracy remains the most preferred social principle used in running the affairs of human beings.

That behaviour of the Saudis and other Gulf petrol-producing nations differs greatly from the character and the cultures of Western societies. The so-called infidels share with others everything they have. They share country, wealth, civil rights, and social programmes that are available.

The value of equality of people and equitable access to opportunities thrives in these Western democracies. Because of the inherent freedoms and human rights embraced by these developed countries, we should be anxious to rise to their levels by any means necessary.

Why is it wrong to appeal to people to fight in the name of religion? Because there is no official fitna (tumult) and torture in the world today! The traditional reason religious believers were called to fight had nothing to do with forcing a belief system down the throats of others. Instead, it was for the fighters to defend the defenceless and, ultimately, spread justice all over the world. The condition of the holy war is that it will go on until democracy and rule of law prevail all over the world. That is a statement from the Koran, Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 193, 'And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression and there prevail justice and faith in God.' If there is mature democracy and rule of law and everyone is free to pursue his or her belief and worship, there is no need of using Koran verses to justify fighting and disruption of lives and social order all over the world. War is not a solution option by itself. It is prescribed for extremely bad situations of human suffering. If there are no ill-treated and oppressed people, there is no need for war.

In any case, humanity has in place an official body—the United Nations—that is charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the interests of all in the world. The main objectives of the UN include maintenance of international peace and security; promotion of human rights, fostering of social and economic development, protection of the environment, and provision of humanitarian aid in case of famine, natural disasters, or armed conflict. Its principle organisations are the International Criminal Court (ICC), which handles international crimes such as those of the

former Yugoslavian leader, the Liberia warlords, among others.

Why do we insist on fighting even when international mechanisms of dispute resolution have been in place for over fifty years? Indisputably, democracy and the UN are the closest ones that can solve the problems that afflict the human race. Any other way is bound to fail and cause more human suffering than it intended to save. This is a perfect reason for us to drop the idea of implementing jihad as a panacea to our problems.

My dear brothers, please climb down from your religious and ideological pedestal and instead seek reason and logic. As a system of governance, democracy has been embraced by many nations across the world. A good number of Muslim nations have already embraced it because it guarantees the human rights of all. Absence of democracy is the reason jihad was conceived in the first place. But now that it is here and it has engendered freedom of worship, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom from oppression, we should welcome it. This, in essence, is what Islam was looking for.

What is important is the principle, not the one who implements it. If Muslims fail to appreciate the universal application of democratic principles, which their religion teaches, their predicament should not be made a burden on the rest of the world.

The role and mandate of the United Nations (UN) is another reason for the argument against violence as a means of making political gain. The founders of the UN had not only noble ideas but wanted a body whose responsibility would be to keep watch against aggression on a global scale. The UN has been in place since 1945.

What may interest keen observers is that all Muslim states are members of this body. This body has its recognised charter and decision-making organs. In this internationally recognised system, slavery is abhorred. No nation can just stride into the territory of another and forcefully seize it without attracting sanctions. Abuse or misuse of power easily gets a nation on the crosshairs of this body. If a member of the UN mistakenly breaks the law, the other members are under obligation to enforce compliance with the law as happened in Iraq when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. All these changes in the new world order make jihad and holy war irrelevant. If all Muslim states are members of the UN, they should obey its constitution and rules.

Slavery in international law is governed by a number of treaties, conventions, and declarations. Foremost among these is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that states in Article 4, 'No one should be held in slavery or servitude; slavery in all of its forms should be eliminated.' Islamic scholars and political leaders accepted and recognised these international treaties so that there is no more slavery allowed in any part of the world. It, therefore, makes a lot of sense for all Muslim states and leaders to uphold and practice those universal principles.

Since the rest of the world chose not only to embrace democracy but also to practice its ideals, then it is only fair that the Muslim community joins them in living by the dictates of democracy.

Human rights

Everything we have from our Creator came through human beings. God used human beings to make religious revelations which are the basis of human civilisations. God

created human beings using his hands and blew the Holy Spirit into them. He even declares in the holy books that he honours us and makes his creation on this earth through us.

Similarly, even human beings—though created by God—are born as a result of human reproduction. All human inventions are a result of God working through them and his permission—including new technological innovations. Concepts like human philosophy, systems of government, science, and constitutions are all products of human thought. By having common rules and standards to live by, we coexist in peace and resolve any misunderstandings amicably. So the recognition of human rights is like recognition of the power of the Creator, who is God. Those who do not have the sense of humanity or refuse to recognise human rights have no real sense of faith in God.

Success and development starts by recognising the value of human beings and allowing them to be responsible for their beliefs and actions. A living example for this state of affairs is the current situation of human rights standards in Muslim states. In Western democratic nations people have freedom of thought. This translates into creativity and the ability to test their imaginations, using their brains to the maximum. Because of such freedoms, they are able to solve problems and attain most of their human needs. That is why they are enjoying peaceful living without any disorders or wars as opposed to Muslim nations that wallow in war and poverty.

If people are denied their basic rights, how can they survive? And why are they denied? Are human rights compatible with Islam? If people are given freedom and human rights, they can devise ways of satisfying their needs and even be able to help others.

An Islamic state is a type of government in which the primary basis for government is Islamic religious law (sharia). From the early years of Islam, numerous governments have been founded as Islamic, beginning most notably with the caliphate established after the Islamic prophet Muhammad and including subsequent governments ruled under the direction of a caliph (meaning 'successor' (to Muhammad)).

The Islamic State, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), is a religious group with carefully considered beliefs—among them that it is a key agent of the coming apocalypse. Its purpose is to return to the original values of Islam and establish Islamic states.

ISIS militants have caused havoc in the Middle East. In 2015, they set fire to oil wells northeast of the city of Tikrit in Iraq. Their main combatants are fellow Muslims, Shiite militia fighters, and Iraqi soldiers. Their aim is to drive them from the Sunni Muslim city and surrounding towns.

IS has declared an Islamic caliphate on captured territory in Iraq and Syria and spread fear across the region by slaughtering Arab and Western hostages and killing or kidnapping members of religious minorities like Yazidis and Christians. Why are these things happening under our watch? They even believe crucifixion and beheading are sacred requirements—yet these are violations of human rights. The main reason is denial of access to enough information and other human rights.

IS and its affiliates slaughter their captives in front of cameras unashamedly and without any sense of remorse. They kill because they have not had a taste of either decent life or the value of peace and security. Their savage acts may appear normal in a society that has never known or celebrated the happiness derived from mental and physical peace.

These are people who have no access to the right information and education and have never enjoyed basic human rights all their lives. So they do understand that people's lives are guided by specific rights and values. In such oppressive societies, people do not exercise their values and rights. It is only when they flee to mainly Western countries and are offered asylum that they realise the difference.

The human resource and its creativity is the most important ingredient in development. A knowledgeable, skilled, and innovative person can coin solutions to the world's problems to create an atmosphere of peace and ensure there is no hunger, disease, and homelessness. This way, they are able to compete with anyone in all aspects of life.

On the contrary, even those with the most fertile lands, minerals, and other natural resources die from hunger and disease because of lack of qualified human resources. Why? Muslim states do not encourage their citizens to be innovative and exploit resources to their benefit. So the people do not know that they have the potential to make positive changes in their lives.

Any country can encourage its people to use its land and other resources to develop. Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan are examples of countries that rose from extreme poverty to create highly free and developed economies. They are popularly referred to as the Asian Tigers. Malaysia and Turkey (Muslim countries) have since followed suit—using their people to develop. It is worth noting that none of those countries have plenty of natural sources. Their strengths and drivers of their economies are innovations by its people.

As evidenced in treatment of their people, many Muslim states do not recognise and appreciate the value of the human

resources. Yet the most brilliant people in the Muslim world are Egyptians. Many have immigrated to Western countries where they are free to experiment different ideas that lead to new innovations.

The other problem, the punishment meted out to offenders based on Islamic law, completely violates human rights. And there are several examples, for various offences ranging from homosexuality, eating pork, and adultery. The punishment for adultery is 100 lashes. Also, Sahih Muslim 17:4194 says, 'Allah's Messenger awarded the punishment of stoning to death to the married adulterer and adulteress and, after him, we also awarded the punishment of stoning, I am afraid that with the lapse of time, the people may forget it and may say: We do not find the punishment of stoning in the Book of Allah, and thus go astray by abandoning this duty prescribed by Allah. Stoning is a duty laid down in Allah's Book for married men and women who commit adultery when proof is established, or if there is pregnancy, or a confession.' Such is the brutality experienced in Islamic states.

Muslim law despises human rights and, at the same time, denies people their basic needs—acts that amount to human rights misuses. Other examples of prescribed punishment by the Koran include skins will be roasted, skins and intestines will be scalded, faces will be burned, sinners will be dragged, faces will be darkened, fire will surround them from all directions, fire will mount right up to the hearts, intestines will come out of bellies, severing limbs, among many others. Such deter the purpose of punishment which is to correct. How can you get back a cut limb if wrongly punished?

The prescribed punishment and bloodshed in the Muslim world today is a result of human torture and misuses that happened a long time ago. Although the militants are

human, their barbaric character is akin to that of wild animals.

With such brutality, we can never have everything that is good in this world. Neither can we continue enjoying what others have in their foreign lands. We have to marshal all our resources and energy to defeat the shameful acts and demands of Muslim youths and their financiers. Only in this manner can we establish democratic governments that will guarantee social rights.

It is sad to note that all human freedoms recognised in many countries across the world do not exist in Muslim societies. In modern times, that makes the Muslim world the darkest place in this new world. That explains the absence of creativity, imagination, and freedom of thought in Muslim countries. The result is breeding extremists who kill not just non-Muslims but fellow Muslims day in and day out. Countries that are destined on this route cannot—without changing—survive or compete well in this new world. If all intellectuals are in custody, then do we want to survive?

Who can continue a wearisome burden without a way out forever? In my opinion, the new techno-ledge can be used to change the dependency and satisfy human needs in the oil-rich Arab countries. Soon the world may care less about security in the oil-producing Arab states because alternative forms of energy are now common.

Unless we prepare our fellow Muslim fraternity to love quality things, security, stability, and decent life will remain a pipe dream. Each day, hundreds of security personnel supporting security and human distress die in line of duty. Since Muslims do not contribute anything, they are a liability to the human race.

While at it, it should be remembered that the human beings we are talking about in the Muslim world are only

men! In the context of human rights, women are not supposed to talk to men. For long, women have suffered under Islamic law in various ways, starting with more severe punishments—when compared with men—for same offences to more controlled lives. It may appear like they are not in the list of humans!

To start with, girls are forced to stay at home, indoors. The same applies to mature women who are supposed to stay indoors until the day they go to their final resting home—the grave! So in essence, women are allowed only two suitable places: their husbands' home or their grave.

In the eyes of the Muslim society, women are associated with sensitivity, shame, weakness, and evil spirits. In any event, there are many religious writings warning about women. For example, 'Women are traps of Satan', as narrated by Tirmidhi from Abdullah bin Masood (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (pbuh) said. Another states, 'Women are rougher, if she is out devil elevated her', as narrated by Bukhari and Muslim. We also have, 'I did not leave behind me sedition more to men than women,' Ibn Abbas said. Muhammad the Prophet said, 'I looked into Paradise and I saw more poor people. I looked into the fire and I saw people more women', narrated by Imran ibn Husayn, that messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, 'The residents of Paradise are less women.'

'Supplemented by many men than women did not complete unless Asia and Mary Khadija.' We also have, 'O women Give charity I saw you majority in fire.'

Some Muslim sheikhs dispute the authenticity of some of these Hadiths. But whether they are authentic or not, the words were purported to have been uttered by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) about fourteen centuries ago. The words have had a large impact on Muslims' way of life—especially

the way they treat their women. So whether it is proved or not, it does not make any difference now. The words are already written in the minds and hearts of Muslims and made part of their spirit and culture.

Because of such teachings and other supporting facts, Muslims in general—including women themselves—are suspicious for women. The whole culture does not favour of encouraging girls and women. However, that culture is not strong like in ancient times. Some Muslim parents appreciate their daughters and give them education. But still, women can play a very big role in the Muslim community. They need to be encouraged to better their lives by being offered equal treatment culture-wise.

As a start, women should be encouraged to recognise that they are equal to men in the social standing. The only difference comes in the roles we play.

Therefore, they should have confidence and belief in their ability to do whatever they want for survival without strict restrictions that border on the absurd.

Muslim women in many instances are not ready to act independently from men—whether related by kinship or marriage. The patriarchy society that is the Muslim world does not believe that women can make their own decisions by themselves in terms of relationships and her life affairs. And why is that the case?

Because who are not taught that they have the same ability and mental capacity like men. Such a situation as it is currently in the Muslim society makes the whole society a lame duck because half of the society—women and children—is unproductive. Their knowledge and skills are not harnessed creatively and wisely to contribute to economic development.

And many forms of abuse against women exist. Take the issue of dressing! Instead of burying the girl child alive, the male dominant society bury her alive by way of the heavy cloths that she has to endure and forcing her to stay indoors.

Are Muslim women supposed to be ashamed of their bodies—including all their physical structure? Are they inferior in value compared to men? If the answers are not in the affirmative, why then are they forced to wholly cover their bodies? Could the answer be in that old adage of helplessness, saying, 'I am a woman? What can I do?' or 'If I am a man I will do this and that.'

Still on clothing, one may ask, is the hijab a religion or a culture? The hijab the Koran mentions means a decent dress—not any less, not any more. Hijab, as mentioned in the Koran, does not mean bury women—physically, mentally, and spiritually. It just means to dress in good manner that will make the woman feel good about herself, her dressing, and her style.

The truth is, the current style of hijab is an old Arab culture, which was there before Islam came and asked them why they are killing the girls. Koran says in Surah Al-Takwir 81 that, 'When the female infant buried alive, is questioned—for what crime she was killed?' That jealousy made the authoritative political and religious leaders to look for religious justification for negative actions against women. One of them was to introduce the very ugly hijab dress for women with the purpose of hiding them from fellow men—who may try to seduce them.

One of the very shameful extremist practices is imposing the hijab on the infant female. The female child, at about two to three years, is forced to wear hijab as an Islam duty. That means the society bans their infant activities and observation by the soul of the world around them in the

name of God and religion. That infant cannot walk freely and play with her age mates because of hindrance by the hijab. That means, by exhort extremist viewpoints of Islam, they are denied their childhood rights which, in effect, kills their innocent feelings of childhood—no play, no activities.

The best way to stop people from doing something bad or unlawful is to educate and empower them so as to make responsible choices. We should not have archaic rules like hiding women in many clothes or inside the home, for that is a new method of killing their spirit, a fact that is not acceptable in the current human society.

We are all responsible in front of God, society, and government laws for the choices we make. Let the reward or punishment be based on the decisions we make. But if a person is told what he or she is supposed to do or not do, for what reason would they get a reward from God or government?

Women in the Muslim community are taught to be ashamed of themselves and never to appear in front of men or share with them any social or religious activities—just because they are women. This is dictated by a harsh culture in the name of religion that is purported to have come from God. In the end, women took the lesser position in value compared to men in society. Furthermore, they became dependent on men in everything they need, which makes them vulnerable to the dominant men who make all life decisions on behalf of them.

Hijab among Arab women is just as bad as female genital mutilation (FGM) that is practised in Somalia. Is the Somali culture of FGM a religion? Every Somali girl must go through the initiation right. Otherwise, she will not be considered as a mature woman ready for marriage. If one makes that mistake, they are divorced immediately,

and all the people will know and will consider her as not a good or trustworthy person.

Muslim youths opt to follow the path of extremism because they are not taught and, at the same time, they are denied basic human rights. The consequence of poor education is that they lose their self-steam and do not understand themselves. That means, they are ready and willing to imitate anyone who persuades them to commit crime. They lack the knowledge to think about evaluating the consequences of their actions.

Scarcity in the Muslim world of everything—information, education, freedom of speech, debates, and discussions on basic human rights—are the causes of the madness we are witnessing now.

The philosophy that emphasises human rights in Western countries succeeded in producing a sophisticated generation of people who are world citizens. On the contrary, religious zealots that abuse their people have only managed to produce militant groups such as al-Qaeda, Da'ish, and their affiliates.

The consequences of violating human rights are evident in what is happening in the Muslim world. It is a shame that in the twenty-first century, Muslim militants do not understand the concept of human rights. Yet human development cannot take place without recognition and appreciation of the value of people and their rights. First, we have to know our strengths in terms of abilities, and then we can develop our nations through basic principles such as education, training, and equipping our people with appropriate skills. But educating and training someone who does not appreciate the basic value of human rights is meaningless.

No harm will befall us and, indeed, there will be no confusion if we choose to embrace the concept of human rights. These include freedom of worship, speech, and association. This inside fighting and chaos in the Muslim societies is a direct form of humiliating people and denying them their basic human rights.

The denial of the rule of law and trampling upon other people's human rights brings about senseless killings and instability in the Muslim world. If we were to calculate the cost of these oppressive tendencies, we will quickly accept the universal laws and turn against those who perpetrate them. Many nations embraced them a long time ago and have become successful and stable.

If Muslim youths were to be brought up in a democratic environment where they can experience the joy of living under a regime that respects the basic rights, they would agree that there is no need to condone or be part of senseless killings in the name of religion.

There is a strong relationship between the Arab culture before Islam and after Islam and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Koran in Surah An-Nahl 16, verse 58 says, 'When news is brought to one of them, of the birth of a female child, his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief. With shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he has had? Shall he retain it on sufferance and contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil choice they decide on?'

The people who had that belief for centuries and centuries became Islam believers and tried to accommodate some of their old deep cultures, especially the subject of their own dignity and jealousy in terms of their wives and girls.

Take the case of FGM discussed above! FGM is a Somali culture that has been weakened a lot nowadays because of

the civil societies and the Islamic movements themselves. It was perceived before as a religious concept, but now people know it is not. The same applies to hijab, which came from an Arab culture which encouraged condemnation and humiliation of the women. Both are violations of human rights.

Because of social pressure and lack of respect of the Muslim women, Muslim girls have developed their own strategy to survive against that social and religious oppression. They wear hijab whenever they are with Muslims. However, when they get a chance to be with other men, they dress just like any other girl in town.

Hijab did not come by their choice. Also, wearing hijab was never a form of worshipping their god. It is just a social custom in which they have no choice to do or leave. Now, it has become a legitimate cover-up for young girls to meet men or do other unlawful activities, such as stealing, prostitution, or even terrorist activities. Hijab is not just a religious problem. It has now become a very big social problem. Therefore, it must be outlawed by all means.

It is high time that UN bodies like UNICEF, who look after the welfare of children and their well-being, intervened. They should consider this practice in the Muslim world as child abuse because the practice is based on extremist hard-line ideas of Islam. UN agencies must recognise officially the abuse of the girl-child and protect the rights of young girls and women.

If these values and principles are not implemented soon, the cost in terms of loss of human life and property to the Muslim community would be astronomical. It is a kind of demonstration and demand of their rights.

[c] Learning from Western societies

To some extent, the incompatibility of Islam, as represented by sharia law, and basic tenets of Western society have been illustrated several times by outbursts of mainstream Muslims justifying Muslim practices like marital rape and the beating of women. The first such incident occurred in a show which condoned marital rape, called women who wear perfume 'prostitutes', and which provided guidelines for the acceptable beating of women.

A recent ruling in the UK, Islam Channel, which describes itself as a platform designed to 'convey Islam in its true form to curious non-Muslims and to further educate Muslims', said that the station should be censured for broadcasting the views on women. One of the programmes contained advice that it was 'not strange' and 'not such a big problem' for a man to force his wife to have sex. In another show, a female Muslim asked a panel if she had the right to strike back at a violent husband. She was told that 'In Islam we have no right to hit the woman in a way that damages her eye or damages her tooth or damages her face or makes her ugly.'

Despite the above analogy, Western societies remain the real representatives of the universal laws of liberalism recognised by all human beings. These laws are appreciated because they were developed with certain values in mind—democratic open society and respect for human rights.

Because of that truth and liberalism, many oppressed people in the Muslim world and other nations flee from their own homelands to Western countries as asylum seekers or refugees. It is not the climate or colour of Europeans that attract asylum seekers but the liberalism represented in human coexistence.

Millions of people flee to Western countries every year, some dying in the Pacific before reaching their destinations. One may be tempted to refer to them as the 'Promised Land' because the real holy land is the one that cares for and gives people what they need. In most cases, the refugees find not only physical but also psychological, spiritual, and mental fulfilment.

Western society has no state religion except that of democracy and human rights. They encourage love, kindness, justice, welfare, and defending the rights of the vulnerable. That is the right religion and philosophy, as opposed to hatred, hostility, and discrimination prevalent in Muslim countries in the name of religion.

Take the case of the Somali Republic. When the government collapsed in 1990, Somali people became victims of their own infighting. They did not immediately get any help or assistance from any country—leave alone their oil-rich Arab brothers. It is only later that Westerners and other majority-Christian neighbouring countries came in to offer assistance. They not only gave humanitarian aid but accepted millions of Somalis into their homelands as refugees.

And what did their fellow Muslim–Arab brothers do? Instead of offering help, they even forcefully repatriated Somali pilgrims who had visited their country for Umra or Haj. On the contrary, countries with majority-Christian populations such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and others in Europe came to the aid of Somalis. In the end, many were resettled in the USA, European, and some African countries.

In the case of Kenya, many Somalis were resettled in the cities while others were accommodated in refugee camps. Many have since acquired Kenyan citizenship, complete with national identification cards and passports—especially

those who related to Somalis of Kenyan origin. They have made Kenya their own homeland. To them, it seems even a better deal because their original homeland is dry and underdeveloped with little or no infrastructure or fertile land.

Many have set up huge business enterprises in Kenya and even benefit from government and contracts. They seem to be enjoying, given the many business opportunities they get in Kenya. Despite such progress, majority of Somali still suffer the hatred and hostility induced by mental occupation from Arabs with their backward culture of racial discrimination.

They still do not consider Kenyans as real brothers and sisters. Away from the public, they refer to Kenyans as 'abid', which means 'slaves'. The worst part is solidarity extended to enemies of Kenya such as Islamic militant groups like al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates. Such has led to a lot of suffering negating the very idea of extending liberalism and freedom to people who are not grateful.

In the fullness of time, the most tragic massacres have happened in Kenya—all with links to Somalia and the various terrorist groups operating there. These include the Westgate shopping mall attack in Nairobi, the bombing of churches in Mombasa, bus bombings in Pangani, an attack in Mandera on teachers, and the Mpeketoni and Lamu county massacres.

In all these horrible incidents, hundreds of innocent Kenyans have been killed. Somalis live in Kenya, but some still give Kenya headaches and problems. Why? Because they are still suffering the mental occupation by Arabs, which never lets them beget freedom to see the bigger picture.

In comparison to Europe, Muslim refugees in the Western countries have a well-known common expression

that 'we have seen Islam in the western countries without Muslims.' They also say, 'Between westerners and paradise, only to say no God but one God.' That means to testify the witness of the one god in Arabic. That means in Western countries, Muslims get what they miss in their own countries. It is a candid acceptance that Muslims in Western countries are treated like human beings and accorded their fundamental rights.

Although most of the Western countries are not so big in size, they never tire to accommodate more refugees and asylum seekers from Muslim countries and others. They never say, 'You are aliens and you do not have rights to live and enjoy in our own countries.' Instead, they continue to pay them whatever they have, and because of that, God never gives up on Westerners. He continues to open for them new doors of knowledge, abundant wealth, knowledge, and power.

If there is no freedom of worship, then it is the negligence of the believers, not the Koran. So who bears the greatest responsibility: Muslims or Islam? The Koran is written in words which are supposed to be used by the reader for his or her own purpose. Muslims have a responsibility of managing their beliefs. They have to stop bandying around excuses and reading Koran texts blindly and selectively. Some of the misleading texts read, 'It is written in the Holy Koran' and 'God says so'. That is what God did not want when he gave us a free conscience to choose wisely.

Following the Holy Book without a clear understanding of the reason and the wisdom behind it makes humans idle and without proper control over their destiny. This, indeed, is what is happening in the Muslim world. Muslims need to take full control of their religion and their people. They also need to play a much bigger role in the affairs of the world.

And they shouldn't recourse to poor excuses in the way they live in God's world, for the world of God must conform to the universal laws of God and contribute to the development and well-being of human beings.

God gives us the authority of the statement and word construction as human beings and also hands to us the Holy Book. Understanding the nature of the Koran is very important. This is like Prophet Mohammed's notebook for facing the whole of life's challenges which includes the spiritual affairs for the Muslims, their worship of God, managing the life of his believers, be it economically, politically, for defence, or even for security reasons. It includes issues such as judicial system and wealth distribution. Also, communication with others and the explanation of the philosophy of Islam to them is covered. It was the day-to-today activities of the prophet Muhammad and his companions. Every Surah of the Koran and every verse of it addresses and talks of unique situations and points of view. That is why you may see, sometimes, organised themes of divergent topics in the same chapter or group of verses.

Whenever you want to read the Koran, you must have in mind the relevance of the topic and the circumstances it is trying to explain. If it is on political or security issues, you must understand that it is confined and concerned with a particular time and issue. It will be just some information on the welfare of the human being that someone can refer to as reference material when it is needed.

What is not necessary is for you to try and create or imagine the situation about that time and try to implement the same verses of the Koran to present-day situations. Mostly, this is why we are having crises in the Muslim world in modern times. Some people imagine situations that were obtained in the time of Prophet Muhammad, like

Badar, Uxud, Ahzab, Tabuk, and other fighting in those days, and try to use the Koran the very same way. They want to kill and be killed because there were some people who did so, in the days of Prophet Muhammad. That is where the misunderstandings stem from. The Koran in Surah Al-Baqarah 2, verse 141 says, 'That was a people that have passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and you of what you do! Of their merits there is no question in your case: but those people have passed away, who promised to uphold the law of God.'

It is wrong to claim a monopoly of God's message meant for ancient people. It is the same for all people of all ages. If it undergoes local variations or variations according to times and seasons, then those variations soon pass away. This leads to the argument in the remainder of the Surah that with the renewal of the message and the birth of a new people, a new symbolism and new ordinances become appropriate, and they are now expounded. Those people have passed away, and they are the ones who had promised to uphold the law of God.

In this time of ours, after almost fourteen centuries and a half, you may not need to imagine how the situation was in the days of the Prophet. The time, people, and the power balance in the world have changed. That time has gone and will never come back. So there is no need to wish it comes back. There is a new world, opportunities, and new challenges, which need to be faced as they are, without prejudice or assumptions.

What is permanent is the contest between universal laws and the spirit of the verses of the Koran. All others are occasional and references, when there is need to. There are emotional beliefs about the Koran verses which talk about how equality must be implemented all the time.

For everyone, it is illusionary and impractical and creates confusion and permanent conflict as the situation is now.

If there is anyone who loves the truth and well-being of all human beings, he or she should love and appreciate those who love the truth and dedicate themselves to defending it. Loving them is not the same as loving anybody but God and the truth. Those people who love God have very bad experiences in these days of Islam-related terrorist activities and global insecurity challenges. They were forced to compromise their precious global values because of the security threat by the Muslim terrorists.

After solving all their immediate needs, refugees and asylum seekers in the West awaken their sleeping hatred and hostility. They then start thinking about how they can harm these infidels with the reward of going straight to paradise in their minds. Of course, this does not apply to Somalis only but all Muslims. The fulfilment of the pleas for hatred and hostility are not done by all Muslims. However, what is common among all of them is the culture and deep belief in hostility towards the so-called infidels. Most of them went to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage with a lot of money from those hosting infidels' countries.

That inconsistency and conscious moral conflict in the Muslim society is what is giving me a lot of pain as a Muslim and as a Somali. Westerners are fully aware of all these things I am talking in relation to Muslims and their behaviours. But they do not care since they believe they are doing their duty to those in need.

They also do not care what Muslims think about them because that is not their business. Instead, it is their problem. But I am talking about those things because it is my own problem, my religion, and my people. I am, in the eyes of

others, one of them. That is why it concerns me rather than anybody else.

The other problem is, no one can think of doing anything except what they are told to do. Really, that is a miserable, unaccepted situation, which the religious fatwa for the ill-informed sheikhs represent. Somalis lack the awareness and consciousness to differentiate between a friend and an enemy. That is why they cannot say thank you to those who helped them in times of need.

If you ask them, 'What are the reasons infidels helped you by giving you all that you needed?' They say, 'It is not for their sincerity and kindness for us, but they have a certain aim towards us, which is to change our religious faith and convert our children to Christianity in the future. That is why they are giving us food, medicine, and shelter.' As Somalis, we need to regain our liberty from foreign culture and use our natural sense of human judgement.

Developed and democratic countries know the problems and human rights violations in the Muslim world. Because of that, they always welcome asylum seekers and refugees and encourage them to be in their countries. Westerners, therefore, give the political oppressors in the Muslim world many privileges. Great thinkers, politicians, and religious leaders have benefited most from the values in Western nations. Of course, over time, this has annoyed tyrants and dictator leaders in the Muslim world. They have always criticised Western countries for hosting those they consider their political enemies. However, there are mutual interests between the Muslim and Western countries. Western nations have no option but to fulfil what they believe are noble ideas. They have always welcomed those refugees into their countries.

Fighting against Muslim extremists at this point in time won't solve the problem. Millions of succeeding generations will embrace the jihad concept of blind resistance. The world, therefore, risks getting entangled in a long drawn-out fight whose long-term costs would be too big to imagine. There will be huge losses of resources and human life to be considered. The best way would be to confront the multifaceted sources of the problem: Koran teachings, lack of freedom and good governance, and denial of basic human rights to large swathes of the Muslim population. These are the clearly known sources of the problems hounding the Muslim community. The only well-prepared powers with the moral authority and material capability to address them are the Western powers.

There is no point why someone would kill and spread hatred and all manner of stupidities and look to justify his madness using the Holy Book claiming God says so. That is unacceptable. And in the case where someone finds support for his views in Koran verses, Muslims have the responsibility to correct it and reinterpret it in a way that encourages coexistence and peace.

What one could conclude from this is that some human beings do not seem to possess the quality of responsibility inherent in others. And this is the current situation in the Muslim society: senseless killings, inside fighting for every Muslim country, teeming malice, little regard for human life, hatred, and no respect for self or others. That is the result of surrendering all of one's rights to religion.

The original quality of human beings has been and still remains—consciousness. What, therefore, is important to God in this world are the people. He merely revealed the books so that they act as a guide for his people. Therefore, we must take full responsibility of the consequences of our

beliefs. It is not enough to say, 'I believe it', 'It is my religious belief', or 'I must do and behave like that' and 'Because that is what I understood from the preaching of my teachers'. That is not a good excuse. Yes, you have a right to believe whatever you want and in whichever way you want, but you do not have a right to harm others.

I know my culture. Many of my own people may become annoyed with the way I am discussing this issue. But I would like to remind my precious colleagues of one little fact: it is easier to talk about and discuss religious issues and what is going on today in the Muslim world than to keep quiet, stand aside, and watch. What is going on now in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, and Afghanistan is deplorable. How many millions are dying in the name of God and Islam on a daily basis? How many more should die before we speak?

The governments in Britain and France have started to change their laws because of the security threat from the terrorists. These terrorists have forced democratic governments to change their valuable laws and treat their citizens like the authoritarian rulers in their Muslim countries.

However, I am very sure Western societies will not turn into Berber terrorists. These are temporary security measures which will be fixed soon. Western societies with their level of awareness cannot emulate the hatred and discrimination from terrorists. Also, they will never exchange their precious values of democracy and human rights for the security pressure of those who came in their countries and are instead ungrateful for the welfare they receive. Please be patient and never change your laws because of those savage people.

They have been hosting Muslim political and religious leaders, but Muslim extremists have threatened this peace

and tranquillity in their countries. Now, they are removing their identities, and they may not go back to Western countries again. This is a natural consequence of the long years of extremists and Muslim terrorists' behaviour. They have every right to safeguard the lives and property of their citizens; at the same time, democratic countries never abandon their noble values.

I am not the lawyer of Westerners, and I do not think they need my advocacy or sympathy. But I am grateful about their stand on the truth. That is the only relationship between myself and those who stand for truth, justice, democracy, and human rights. I have never been in any country in the West, whether it is a visit or to seek asylum as a refugee. Neither do I have any intentions of going there. I am just expressing my feelings, that is, love of the truth. Somalis who went into Western countries as refugees receive welfare, peace, and freedom of worship.

Centuries ago, many Western countries colonised other nations, including Muslim ones. Therefore, their influence in the countries they colonised is limited to language and governing systems. But cultural influence remains an eyesore in the colonised countries. It still has effects in the minds of those occupied culturally.

That is the difference between the European physical occupation and the religious and ideological occupation by Arabs in Africa. The cultural and mental occupation subjected to the people has never been done away with. The people are yet to get freedom from their occupants because they cannot demand their freedom for they assume themselves as free. Europeans left African nations easily with some civilisation teachings and governing skills. The current relationship between them is mutual. But Arabs

never left the psychology and the minds of African Muslims. Their cultural effect on them lives on.

Somalis, after they were disintegrated and became refugees all over the world, got the foreign documents such as passports and IDs from their countries of residence. However, no one Somali person has ever been issued a passport of any one Arab country. Not even Saudi Arabia which is the land of Muslims where they turn to when praying. Yet it is the home of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and Muslim holy places like Mecca and Medina. There is no one oil-rich Arab country that has given refugee status to any one Somali family.

Instead of condemning such meanness in Muslim countries, Somalis still fight against infidels who offer them help when in need. We can therefore conclude that this is the effect of mental occupation and cultural colonisation by Arabs.

The cooperation between Western leaders and the Muslim dictators is misleading and poses great danger. Are they compromising their noble values and losing their focus with regard to solving problems afflicting the world? Going to war alongside current Muslim leaders poses a real danger to human civilisation that Western governments have painstakingly built over a long period of time.

The last Arab Spring was an opportunity for change. But it was not a deliberate and mature uprising. That is why it was short-lived. This, nonetheless, does not mean that the concept cannot work in the Arab world. It can work, but it needs persistent support by the world powers. Otherwise, the unrest in the Muslim world could go on for a long time with the potential of spreading all over the world. Short-term solutions are expensive and ineffective.

Muslim leaders should be advised to invest in a proper Islam curriculum. They should be exhorted to practise self-restraint and stop oppressing their citizens. It could turn out to be one of the most effective ways of assisting their Muslim brothers at this critical juncture.

Since the threat from terrorists is imminent, tough security measures are necessary even if they infringe on democratic principles. However, they should not be used by dictatorial regimes in the Muslim world to terrorise citizens. Also, the West should not use terrorism as an excuse to soften or abandon their demand for democratic change in the Muslim world.

Muslim leaders, who are power-hungry, are the source of social misbehaviour which creates youth extremism. Therefore, it is not necessary to cooperate with them because of security reasons and war against terrorists. For a long time, they have used that as a weapon against Western pressure.

It is like they are saying, 'We do these cruel acts and oppress people in an authoritarian manner because we are dealing with Islamists and that is the only language they understand. So please leave us alone to work on your behalf to ensure world security.' Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, announced that, 'If you do not leave me to continue with what I am doing, Al-Qaeda will take power in the Syria and you'll regret it.'

That is a well-known pretext used by many dictators in the Muslim world to perpetuate themselves in power. It is of great concern when military dictators use extremists as reason to do whatever they want. Sad thing is that the world powers tolerate such savage rulers. It is high time Western powers know that such are false excuses so that they can take decisive action against religious fundamentalists.

In that sense, society has full responsibility for its religious, spiritual, political, and social affairs. The Holy Book provides the information that society needs and can use for its well-being. Nothing else, we can only be responsible when we answer the question, 'Who belongs to whom?' If the Holy Book has the absolute authority over its believer, then why were we given the ability to think? We need to not just understand but also question the meaning of the revelations. This inability to think is caused by the absence of discussion, debate, or any attempt and arguing about our religious beliefs. It is also a result of the big misunderstanding over the relationship between us and our religion. That is where Western liberalism that allows free thought and contemplation becomes relevant.

As argued elsewhere, it is high time we review and modify Islamic teachings. Such an action is not against religious principles—in fact, the Koran supports it. It is at the heart of the concept of Islam just like Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, 'God will send to this nation at the head of every one hundred years, someone, who will renew her religion.' This is an authentic Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah. As you can see, this is a very clear text from Prophet Muhammad commanding us to embrace change and grow our understanding of religion.

Chapter 8

The way forward

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[a] The benefits of change

We need to implement changes in our society that will rid us of chaos, ignorance, and self-destruction. Compared to the early periods in Europe of renaissance and reformation, the darkness of ignorance still remains in the lands of Muslims. In Europe, the blood of the Christian scientists slain by the church in the middle ages but if it weren't for the scientist's ideas the world wouldn't have electricity, telephones, trade, and other scientific inventions.

So for how long is the Muslim world ready to resist logic and innovation? When shall we start contributing positively to improving the world and the international community at

large? Do Muslim nations know that the cause of current unrests in their societies is lack of democracy and refusing to implement necessary social and political changes? If they know, what are they doing about it? If not, who will tell them?

Is it possible for Muslim leaders to stop their tyranny and selfish use of power? When will they allow their people freedom of choice and civil rights? And what will happen if all Muslims understood their rights and stood up against tyranny to end their misery by demanding change? It is obvious that if many Muslims knew that change and openness would help reduce poverty and fear, they would struggle for it. Unfortunately, they lack information and empowerment to challenge the status quo.

Use of religion as a defence mechanism is what makes the Muslim society resist new knowledge. Any idea that results in change is seen as a potential threat to Islam. So the feeling is so strong in Muslim nations than in any other society in the world.

The big question to all Muslims is, 'Is the trouble we are in now not enough for us to see and embrace social and political change?' Why do we avoid the inevitable? The fact that we have refused change and democratisation in our countries has led to confusion, madness, death of thousands, and all these human rights abuses.

For long, Muslim societies have been oppressed until many suffer from psychological sickness. It is like insanity thrives in the behaviour of Muslims in every section of life and in all parts of the society. Such is evidenced in the way militant religious groups react to the killings of innocent people such as children and mothers in the markets, the way politicians handle their responsibility, and how the military and security forces treat their civilians.

The source of this madness is deprivation of our rights and abuse in childhood. We do not respect and value universal laws and human rights because we are not used to that system. Physical and psychological abuses in the Muslim world produce extremists who do not know value life and human dignity.

The Muslim world has been resisting change for a long time. Yet resisting change is more expensive and dangerous than the cost of change itself. Since 600 BC, forsaking, imprisoning, and killing intellectuals because of their ideas has been going on in the Muslim world. Any new idea or reason that can lead to change is frowned upon. The energy expended by Muslims on resisting innovative or new ideas is wastage. Keeping and safeguarding archaic culture in the name of Islam at the expense of our well-being is un-Islamic and against the common reason.

In this time of technology and global village, resistance to change is now impossible. We can only delay change and prolong the cure and recovery of the Muslim world. While we delay, millions will die from disease, poverty, and torture and never live to celebrate the fruits of change and freedom.

It may appear natural to defend Islam as it was practised in ancient times. It is only until the society becomes open to new ideas and learns to evaluate and assess them before accepting or rejecting that change will come. We can only reach that stage if we embrace and invest in the culture of democracy and safeguarding the human rights.

Information is power that people can use to make free choices and move forward. Without information, it is inevitable that they remain weak and submit to the current situation. Their leaders have not understood that development and well-being of a people require less energy than the culture of imprisonment and torture.

[b] The cost of change

Social change is necessitated by human evolution through science, technology, and information sharing. And social change goes hand in hand with growth of a people's belief system. New experiences bring about new knowledge that answers new questions.

Change is also dictated by thinking habits and belief patterns of a people. So if someone is not happy with his or her life and wishes to change for the better, he or she must understand that change demands that we change the way we think, our belief system, and the views we hold. We cannot change our lives without changing our belief system and system of thought.

The Koran says, 'Because God will never change the Grace which He hath bestowed on a people until they change what is in their own souls; and verily God is He who hearth and knoweth all things.'

The Koran gives guidance on the changes we need by stating that they must be the change of what is inside ourselves. It talks about our general perception of life, other human beings, respect and relationship with others, and the way our mental set-up operates.

Changing the latest sophisticated luxury private cars or skyscrapers is not the change we need. The change that the Muslim world needs is what is inside our hearts. The Koran in Surah Al-Ra'd 13, verse 11 says, 'Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves, with their own souls. But when God willeth a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back, not will they find, besides him, any to protect.'

The interest of the selfish and tyrant Muslim leaders is obedience from citizens without questioning or

accountability. So to achieve their goals easily, they use all available uncouth means such as:

(a) *Encouraging ignorance and censoring information*—this is the easiest way someone can subjugate people without considerable resistance. Denying people the power of information is a very powerful weapon that makes them defenceless against any kind of abuse or exploitation.

(b) *Impoverishment*—poverty is another useful weapon of the dictators. They want to make people dependent on their mercies so that they can adore them and remain close to them in the hope of being given handouts.

(c) *Anarchy and lack of clear rules to live by*—that makes people look at the dictators for guidance and instruction in every decision they make. In the absence of clear procedures and the rule of law, the dictators' words become the law.

(d) *Allying with religious leaders*—when dictators control religious leaders, they influence their thoughts to fit the interest of the leaders. In the end, religious leaders not only modify and twist religious texts to fit the wishes of the leader but also sing their praises.

The above factors combined make it difficult for people to make crucial decisions affecting them and their respected countries.

Decision-making and choices must be made very carefully. People can only deserve to live and be respected if they make well-evaluated rational choices, not wishes and emotions. National political stands and group decisions must by all means be reasonable. In case of a clash between the rationale of a stand, position, and personal wishes, wisdom or lack of it arises in the kind of choices made.

For instance, if people become tired of oppression and inhuman treatment, they can say no to the regime and demand for change. The dictator leaders may say, 'Who are you to say no to me?' That is what happened in the case of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya. That is an example of lack of wisdom. 'Man Antum; Man Antum' in Arabic which means 'Who are you'. The rest is now history.

The change we need is what is already in ourselves. The kind of beliefs we have, the kind of values we have, the kind of perceptions we have, and the way see the other world—all those things need change. After forty-four years of ruling Libya, an oil-rich country as a dictatorship, Muammar Gaddafi failed to understand the situation in the last mutiny. He could not save himself from a miserable death because of an overwhelmed personal ego and lack of wisdom.

The Koran text is admirable in the way it expresses the concept of change and what is to be changed. That is, 'What is inside of yourself' and 'Until they change it themselves', not the surface or material things. If any nation in the world has to enjoy the life and contribute to the well-being of all humanity, that nation has to invest in its people. Inside the heart, mind, and psychology, those are the areas we need to work on.

The Muslim community with a population of about 1.2 billion cannot be ignored. It is a strong human resource, not forgetting the richness in their countries in the form of natural resources, especially oil, minerals, water, and natural energy. Although they lack nothing, they have not applied their knowledge to development to better their lives. That is why God tells us, 'You have to change what is inside you.'

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Index

A

Abraham 63, 83, 85, 87, 136-8
abrogation xv, 106-7, 112
abrogation principle 108, 110-11
Abu Hurairah 4, 13-14, 48, 97, 120, 175
abuse 16, 149, 157, 159, 161, 178, 180
adultery 70, 153
al-Shabaab xiv, 7, 44, 59, 61, 115, 164
al-shahid xiv, 46, 48, 50
Allah 4, 13-14, 20-1, 48, 63, 90, 96, 153, 155
attacks, terrorist 25, 57-8
attraction, universal law of 26, 36-7
authority committee xv, 107, 113, 115, 119-21

B

belief system xvi-xvii, 4-5, 23, 25-7, 29, 35, 64, 76, 84, 86, 102, 104, 113, 128, 179
bombing 56, 58, 164
booty 14, 21, 25, 124

PARTRIDGE
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C

change, social 32, 179, 184
Christianity 87, 97, 169
churches 15, 57, 59, 73, 85, 88, 133, 164, 176
confusion, religious 76, 115
consequences 17, 20, 69, 74-5, 122, 141, 159, 170, 183
constitutions 75, 89, 111, 114, 149-50
core values 31, 76, 78, 89, 117
criminals 21, 24, 30, 54

D

democracy xviii, 19, 84, 140-1, 143-4, 146-9, 163, 171-2, 177-8
dictators 49, 174, 180
discrimination 23, 26, 28, 53, 63, 73, 82, 92-3, 163, 171
doctrine 66, 85, 87, 130, 134
dogma xvi, 62, 66-7, 129-31, 134-5, 139-40

E

education vii, xvi, 28, 30, 35, 48, 53, 152, 156, 159
Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood 3
enemies 21, 24, 27, 30, 36, 39, 63, 66-7, 83, 90, 92, 99, 126, 164, 169
extremism vi-vii, xv, 6, 21, 73, 159
extremists vi, xiii-xvi, 1, 3-6, 15, 17-18, 21, 24-5, 31, 33, 39-43, 47, 57, 75, 95-6

F

fatwas 18, 20, 23, 29, 45, 120, 169
FGM (female genital mutilation) 158, 160

G

Garissa 57, 59
God, universal laws of 119, 166
governance xiv, 19, 40-2, 148

H

Hadiths 2, 4, 13-14, 17, 21, 45-6, 76, 118, 120-1, 123, 144, 155
hijab 157-8, 161
holy war xiii, 2-4, 20, 98, 102, 141, 147, 149
homosexuality 145, 153
human rights xvi, xviii, 16-17, 30, 118, 120, 140, 143,

HARPERCOLLINS A Penguin Random House Company

147-51, 153, 155, 159-63, 171-2, 178

I

ICC (International Criminal Court) 147
infidels xiii, 4-5, 7, 14-15, 20-2, 24-7, 30, 34-40, 42-3, 46, 48, 63, 107-8, 132-3, 168
injustice 21, 91, 119
interpretation xv, 4, 6, 17-19, 31, 38, 45, 79, 100, 125, 127, 133
Iraq 20, 32-3, 43-4, 100, 142, 149, 151, 171
ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) 44, 151
Islam xv, 4-7, 20-2, 25, 70-3, 76, 78-80, 82-9, 94-7, 113-14, 116, 122-5, 131, 133-5, 160-2
Islam extremists 3-4, 7, 16, 21, 30
Islamic jurisprudence 144
Islamic law 106, 112, 123, 144, 153, 155
Islamic moral system 89
Islamic prayer 73, 76, 78, 107
Islamic principles xiv, 29, 66, 76, 125
Islamists 40-2, 174

J

jealousy 69-70, 157, 160
Jerusalem 33, 81, 87-8, 107
Jews 10, 24-5, 43, 63-5, 80-1, 86-7, 132
jihad xiii, 2-5, 7, 14, 17, 20-5, 27, 31, 40, 44, 86-7, 92, 98, 101, 113
jihad concept 2, 20, 26, 94, 96, 170
jihad principles 7, 13, 92
jihad verses 30, 99
justice 8, 11, 16, 28, 40, 77, 90-1, 98-100, 143, 147, 163, 172

K

KDF (Kenya Defence Forces) 54-5
Kenya ix, xiv, 25, 51-8, 73, 163-4
Koran vi-vii, xv-xviii, 2-6, 17-19, 21-2, 28-30, 37-40, 62-4, 66-8, 84-6, 98-104, 106-8, 119-28, 143-7, 165-7
Koran principles 67, 103

L

laws, universal 26, 160, 162, 167, 178
liberalism 162

HARTRIDGE
A Penguin Random House Company

M

marriage 67-70, 156, 158
martyrdom xiv, 21, 25, 46, 48
martyrs 9, 46-7, 49-50, 64
Mecca 107, 142-3, 173
metaphor 38, 124-5
Middle East 33, 64, 80-1, 97, 142, 151
Mombasa 57-8, 60-1, 164
morality xv, 67, 88-90, 92, 95-6
mosques vii, 30, 36, 71, 73, 75, 85, 88, 101, 133, 142
Muhammad 2, 64-5, 71, 78, 99, 101, 151, 155
Muslim Brotherhood 41
Muslim extremists 3, 5, 17, 31, 37, 43, 87, 95-6, 170-1
Muslim perspective 140
Muslim youths xiii-xiv, 1-2, 5, 7, 15-16, 29-31, 47, 66, 69, 97, 122, 154, 159-60

N

Nairobi 56-9, 61, 73
natural laws 17, 27, 127
non-Muslims xiv, 3-5, 15, 20-2, 24, 27, 36, 52, 57, 65-6, 72-4, 78, 95, 132-3, 139-40
Norfolk Hotel 58

O

oneness 67, 81-3

P

pagans 11-12, 99, 104
peace, religion of 5, 125
polygamy xiv, 67-70
poverty 37, 150, 177-8, 180
prayer xiv, 36, 42, 65, 71-3, 75-6, 78-9, 85, 90, 100, 107, 132-4
Prophet Muhammad vi, 4, 17, 20, 27, 31, 46-7, 63-4, 86-8, 93, 106-8, 110-11, 117-18, 166-7, 175

Q

Qibla 107
Qutb, Sayyid 3

R

refugees 30, 51, 73, 98, 162-3, 165, 168-9, 172-3
religious principles 21, 73, 106-8, 130, 175

PARTRIDGE
A Penguin Random House Company

S

Saudi Arabia 142, 168
sharia 15, 123, 144-5, 151
sheikhs 22, 28-9, 45, 66, 70
Shia 20, 70, 121
slavery 21, 25, 145, 149
Somalia 32, 43-4, 51-2, 54-6, 61, 69, 73, 96, 102, 142, 158, 164, 171
Sunnis 20, 70, 121-2
Syria 32-3, 96, 142, 151, 171, 174

T

Tanzania 56, 58
technology 39, 45, 120, 178-9
terrorism xiii-xiv, 5, 48, 51, 70, 116, 184
Torah 2, 77, 84, 87
torture 5, 130, 147, 178
tribalism 53-4
tribes xiv, 62-3, 65, 68, 83, 85
tyranny 141, 177

U

UN (United Nations) 19, 147-9
unbelievers 10, 13, 23, 25-7, 41, 109

V

values xv, 9, 16, 19, 44, 47, 49, 52, 88, 91, 94, 96, 150-2, 157-9, 161-2

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