



FREE ONLINE NON-PROFIT
QUARTARLY P.D.F. MAGAZINE

Muslim Anger Grows at
Pope Speech

The Holy
MONTH OF

My First Rama'daan
in a Muslim Country

Why Was **Slavery**
Not Abolished Outright?

RAMA'DAAN





I-MAG

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NON-PROFIT
QUARTERLY
P.D.F. MAGAZINE

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ABOUT
I-MAG

I-MAG is a free online non-profit quarterly magazine. The first issue of the magazine was published in February 2005; three more issue came on a monthly basis. A pause of three months followed for evaluating and renovating the magazine. I-MAG became a quarterly in the Fall (September) of 2005.

I-MAG is an acronym of Islaamic Magazine. I-MAG is pronounced in two syllables; "I" as in "eye" and "mag" as in the first three sounds of magazine.

I-MAG aims at presenting a fair and objective image of Islaam. Our magazine is not a dogmatic one, we believe in critique and critical thinking in hopes of presenting intellectual enlightenment in the areas that we cover while adhering to the code of ethics of journalism.

I-MAG sees itself not merely as an electronic publication but rather as an intellectual enlightenment project that plays a part in the social economy; an economy in which responsible and free (free of charge and free of partiality) information is the main merchandise.

I-MAG's slogan "Enlighten Your I" tells a lot about the magazine. "I" stands for Islaam, but it also refers to the first speaker pronoun since we hope that we all would enlighten our "I"s or ourselves. "I" also refers to the "eye" which the design of I-MAG for sure pleases.

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Sarah
WONDERS

SARAH IS A NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL WITH AN INQUISITIVE MIND. SHE HAS A LOT OF QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAAM. SHE ATTEMPTS TO SORT OUT THE MYTH FROM THE STEREOTYPE FROM THE TRUTH. WHEN IN DOUBT, SHE ASKS.

IN EACH ISSUE, WE WILL PUBLISH ONE OF SARAH'S QUESTIONS ABOUT ISLAAM AND THE ANSWER TO IT.

If you have any question about Islaam, do not hesitate to email it to Sarah. She will make sure that you receive the answer to it. :)

Sarah's e-mail address is:
sarah@i-mag.org

Q. I noticed that a girl in my school isn't eating or drinking at recess, and when I asked her if she was alright she said that it is Rama'daan and she is fasting. Could you please explain?

A. Dear Sarah,

The concept of fasting, Sarah, is so engrained in the human conscious that we talk about it almost every day when your mother and mine get up in the wee hours of each morning to prepare breakfast. Got it? Breakfast!

Fasting is, first and foremost, an act of pure piety. It is a form of worship that is entirely private; no body can tell if you sip a drop of water while washing your face, if you decide not to uphold the fast.

Muslims, such as the girl you talk

about, fast from sunrise to sunset during the entire period of the ninth month of the lunar calendar; this month is called Rama'daan. Fasting includes abstaining from eating and drinking, in addition to other restrictions that apply only to adults.

Muslims fast during the month of Rama'daan, which is mandatory, and throughout the year, but this is voluntary, for four main reasons. First, they obey the command of Allaah to fast. Second, they continue the ancient tradition of fasting that was part of earlier faiths, which serves to celebrate the Oneness of God. Third, they practice self-discipline. And forth, they partake in the welfare of their societies by sharing the pains of hunger and thirst and discomfort, with those who have not, albeit temporarily.

Rama'daan is a month of celebration; celebration of spiritual clarity and pure piety; of humility and compassion; and of voluntary and individually bowing to the will of Allaah.

Yours in humanity,
I-MAG Team





archive:
http://www.lqta.com/gallery/categories.php?cat_id=26

If you have any nice photos
 that you would like to share
 with us, please contact:

konash@i-mag.org



Shaikha Bin Own

Photo by
Shaikha Bin Own

[Shai'kah Bin 'Awn]
 Shaikha is 24 years old, she is from
 the united Arab Emirates.

▲
"I'm Dying"

Grandeous Grand Mosque ▶

A photograph of the Grand Mosque in Kuwait during Rama'daan.

Photo by
Majed Sultan
[Maajid Sul'taan]

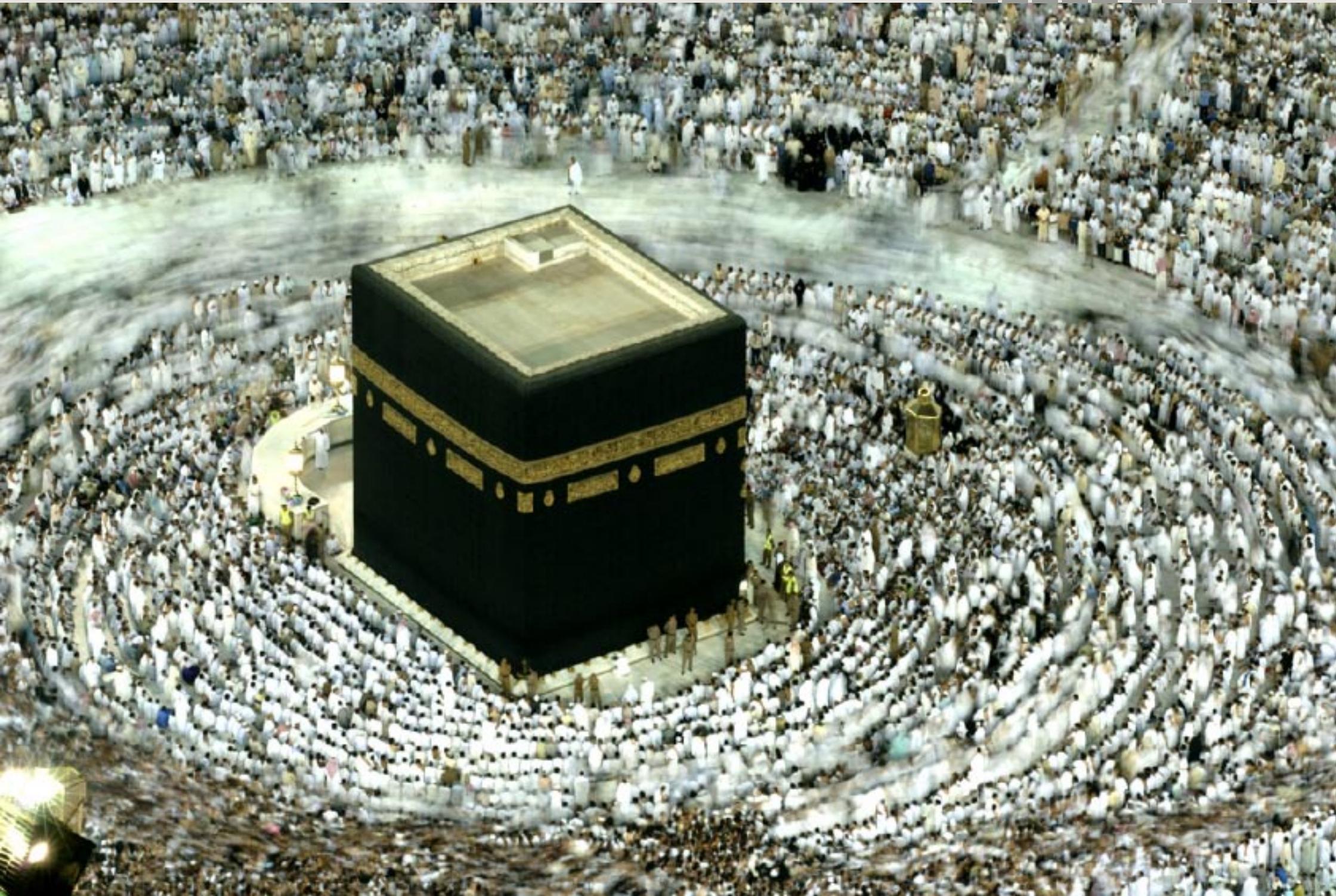
Majed is a 26 years old computer engineer from Kuwait, He is married and has a baby girl. He has a special interest in photography, web design, and swimming.
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Ka'bah In Motion ▶

Photo by
Mohammed Babelli*
[Mu'hammad Baabilly]

**Mohammed Babelli is an engineer by profession; art lover by choice. He started photography at an early age covering summer camping vacations. He has developed his photography techniques over the years through personal experience and also joining other photographers on photography sessions. He has published a book on Mada'in Saleh (available through Amazon.com), and plans further photography books publications on other contemporary subjects.*
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MY FIRST RAMA'DAAN IN A MUSLIM COUNTRY:

Interviewed By **Rym Aoudia** [Reem Awdee']

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STUDENTS FROM THE UNITED STATES SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE

RAMA'DAAN IS A VERY SPECIAL TIME FOR MUSLIMS WORLDWIDE, AND THIS IS ALSO WHAT A GROUP OF NON-MUSLIM AMERICAN STUDENTS IN OMAN REALIZED, WHO ARE HERE FOR A STUDY-ABROAD SEMESTER AS PART OF THE SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM. I SPOKE WITH SEVEN OF THESE STUDENTS AS THEY PERSONALLY EXPERIENCE RAMA'DAAN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AN ARAB MUSLIM COUNTRY AND WITH THEIR OMANI HOMESTAY FAMILIES. JESSICA HANLIN, KRISTEN NORDIN, BRANDON HUFFMAN, DANIEL PICKENS-JONES, JILLIAN KEENAN, MONICA CAMACHO, AND MICKEY HUBBARD SHARED WITH US THEIR EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING OF RAMA'DAAN.

What did you know about Rama'daan before coming to Oman?

Jessica: I knew very little. I just knew that Rama'daan was a holiday in the Islaamic faith and a month of fasting. But the extent to what that meant I didn't know.

Kristen: I knew it was a time of fasting, but the first time I ever encountered Rama'daan was in a novel that I read. It mentioned a character in the desert breaking his fast with grapes. I remember wondering what could possess someone to go a day without food and water in the desert.

Brandon: I knew people fasted for a month, and that was pretty much it.

Daniel: I knew it was a month of fasting and increased devotion and one of the pillars of Islaam. I was also aware that different people practiced it differently because not all of the Muslims I knew in the States fasted at all.

Jillian: I had travelled a little bit in the Middle East before but not in the Gulf region, so I knew about the fasting in Rama'daan. I visited Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, and Jordan, but never during the holy month. I also had Muslim friends in the USA who fasted during Rama'daan.

Monica: I knew it was the Muslim lunar holy month. Muslims fast during the day and get together to break the fast. People also become more conservative.

Mickey: I knew that Rama'daan is

an important holy month and that there was fasting involved with an increase of religious activity.

What did you learn about Rama'daan after coming to Oman?

Jessica: I got a general understanding of Rama'daan that it's more than just a time of fasting from food and water. It's different for each person, but it seems very much a time for thinking, appreciating, praying, being with friends and family, and thanking God for everything He has given. In the United States, I had very little exposure to Rama'daan. I had a few friends who fasted, but it's a huge accommodation to function on normal American schedule and fast. In Oman everyone respects



Daniel Pickens-Jones
19 years old, Music and International Studies double major, McAlester College

Mickey Hubbard
20 years old, Political Science major, Davidson College

Monica Camacho
20 years old, International Relations major, Tufts University



Brandon Huffman
20 years old, Journalism major, University of North Carolina

Jessica Hanlin
20 years old, Communications major, University of North Carolina



Kristen Nordin
19 years old, International Affairs major, University of Colorado at Boulder



Jillian Keenan
20 years old, English Literature major, Stanford University

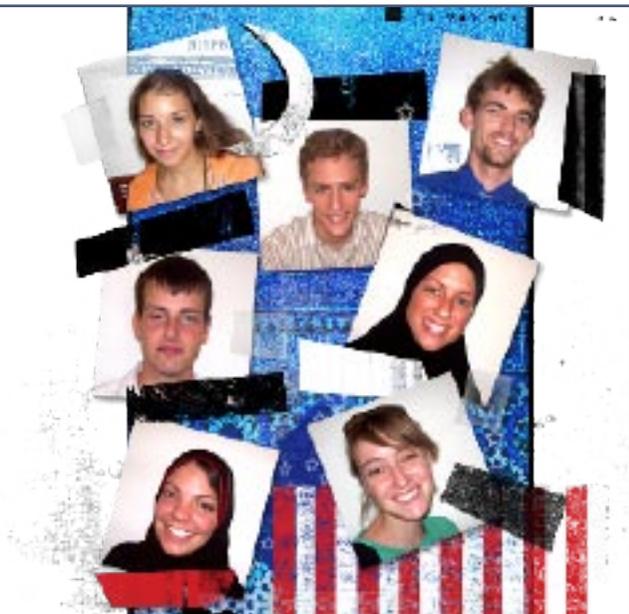
Rama'daan. Business hours are shorter, it's quite during the day and active at night and everyone is doing it as a community. Rama'daan seemed like a good time to make excuses too; to take a nap, go out at night, visit lots of friends and families, and eat lots of food. I also noticed how my host family would get up earlier to read the 'Qur'an and spend more time in prayer.

Kristen: Now that I'm here and it's Rama'daan I began to appreciate its spiritual aspect. It's the first time that I experience it first hand. My host mother said it's time to appreciate what you have and think of those who go hungry during the day. It's also a time of reflection and prayer, and it

has been such an insight into so many things here in Oman.

Brandon: I learned that the experience is more than just fasting. People reverse their lifestyle and it's kind of like a month long holiday. They don't work as much and people get more conservative and go to the mosque more often. I also didn't know that fasting included things like not swearing.

Daniel: Everything that I knew about it was fairly accurate. Some conceptions I had weren't reflected in what I saw because I thought people would be more quite and spend time praying but when I came I found out it was like a big party. I understand it better. I was a bit



surprised that everyone did fast because I thought it was something that more devout people did.

Jillian: I was surprised to learn that during Rama'daan there is a huge emphasis on food, while I thought that a fast would not be about food. My host family spends a huge amount of time planning, preparing and eating their meals during Rama'daan and this gave me the opportunity to try new kinds of Omani food. I learned about traditional food, but what I would like to learn is the history of Rama'daan and if there is a story about it. I

understand that people become more devout -during Rama'daan- and those who don't practice Islaam on a daily basis revert to their faith. It's a very happy time here.

Monica: I didn't realize there was such a mental component to Rama'daan. For example, you can break your fast by having angry thoughts. Fasting is more about internal changes, such as trying to be more loving, to discipline yourself so you stay away from angry material thoughts and have more spiritual ones and to be considerate of the ones around you.

Mickey: I didn't realize how much it interrupted daily life as far as work goes. People also go more to the mosque during Rama'daan and become more conservative. It was obvious that it was a big deal. I remember everyone was watching TV the two nights before Rama'daan to find out when it will start, they then prepared for fasting the next day. Many family gatherings take place in this month. I also learned the specifics of it, such as the actual timings of when it starts and ends.

Did you try to fast?

Jessica: Yes, and I'm still fasting. I've been fasting since the beginning and I plan to fast the whole month. When I first fasted I thought it'll simply be like skipping lunch, but it's more of looking forward to the If'taar meal. It's not just because I get to eat food then, but also because I get to sit with my host family. The first day of fasting was not very hard, but the second day was and some days are worse than others. Overall, it's not a huge sacrifice, but sometimes I would sit in class while fasting and think about the food I'll be eating in back home. Here in Oman it just seems like a way of life.

Kristen: I've been fasting since the beginning. The first three days were the most difficult, but then I started getting used to it. You have to tailor your lifestyle around it and you find ways to make it work for you. Some people sleep during the day and are a lot less active. One of the enjoyable parts of the experience is the family gatherings.

Brandon: I fasted for a week and a half and then I got sick so I couldn't continue. But usually I fast the days when I get back home early because no one eats in the house. Fasting wasn't hard and I think I could fast for a whole year if it involved sleeping during the day. What's interesting is that a few

Muslims didn't fast.

Daniel: I was fasting for the first week and a half, but I had a throat infection so I stopped and I plan to fast again. My experience in fasting was fine. Unlike others, I didn't find the first days hard but later it was. The biggest challenge is not just thinking about food, but trying to get things done in the day. It can be more difficult to get enjoyment out of that when I have little energy. We have a massive If'taar with my family. I was interested in people's reactions who seemed upset that I tried to fast. They felt that I didn't get it and that I was free to do what I want. I would try to explain that I'm doing it for the experience and to realize the satisfaction of eating.

Jillian: I fasted for four days. The first day was the hardest and after that it was much easier. I then developed a throat infection like some of the other students but it wasn't from fasting. But at that point I just gave up on the fasting although it was interesting to experience it. In the first day I couldn't stop thinking about Samboosa and tea. I didn't wake up for Su'hoor after the first day because my family didn't make a big deal of it. I ate Su'hoor alone and then slept, but then I decided that sleep was more important than

food. I was also concerned that if I fast I would gain weight from the extensive eating in If'taar.

Monica: I didn't fast for certain reasons. I knew I'll be under a lot of stress and I figured I needed my energy. I didn't want to add extra stress. I also had some unhealthy habits before that involved going for substantial periods without food and I would break the fast with unhealthy food. I didn't want to bring back bad memories because I was doing that fast for the wrong reasons. I didn't want to fast Rama'daan also for the wrong reasons, or to be forced to do it. As a Buddhist, I simply participated in my side by praying more in my religion. Some Muslims also get very confused when non-Muslims fast. I heard that some Muslims offered non-Muslims food and the non-Muslims were trying to respect the holy month and explained their fasting. It might be strange to participate in a religion that's not your own, so it's hard for them to explain it.

Mickey: Yes, I fasted from the beginning and I'd like to finish the month. I first started fasting because I didn't know how others would feel if I didn't. When I realized that it's ok if I don't fast and that it'll be accepted, I decided to just continue

fasting to gain a little bit of cultural empathy and to see what it's like. It's pretty interesting. I like the purity and cleansing aspect of it. I don't think it works for me because I'm not a Muslim and I don't have the same views towards it. It's difficult without food but I don't think it's that tough. Fasting has also helped me bond with the family because I'm not an exception to the house. When Muslims hear that I'm fasting, they usually explain to me a little bit about Rama'daan, while some laugh and others smile; it's interesting.

The experiences of Jessica, Kristen, Brandon, Daniel, Jillian, Monica and Mickey are indeed interesting. Their first Rama'daan experience in a Muslim country gives us an insight into how Rama'daan is viewed from a non-Muslim perspective. Some Muslims might be surprised when non-Muslims fast because they don't want them to feel obliged to do so while they voluntarily want to. However, it might be challenging for non-Muslims to truly understand Rama'daan if not all Muslims practice it as it should be. Spirituality

is also a vital part of Rama'daan and more of its blessings can be attained by reflecting on the significance of this month and setting goals to come out of it as better individuals. This part could be hard for non-Muslims to realize because it's not their religion, but the students from the School of International Training in Oman have attained a general understanding of this blessed month and their effort in doing so is a positive example of mutual respect between people with different cultures and religions.



Slavery & Islaam:

WHY WAS SLAVERY
NOT ABOLISHED OUTRIGHT?

By Ibrahim Babelli

■ babelli@i-mag.org

On January 1st, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that mandated freeing all slaves in the Confederate States of America. By summer 1865, about four million slaves were freed, and in December 1865 the constitution of the United States was amended for the thirteenth time to permanently effect the emancipation.

President Lincoln, also known as the Great Emancipator, is famous and admired around the world for his role in ending slavery in the United States.

I, being a staunch admirer of Abe Lincoln, became speechless with surprise when a limo driver in New York told me that the Emancipation Proclamation was not as positive as it appears, and that it actually was a major setback for the freedom of black man in the United States.

There are recollections in one's memory that are carved in stone; simply unforgettable. My conversation with Andy, the Jamaican limo driver, was one such instance. My wife and I were driving from a New

Jersey hotel to JFK airport in a private limo that was arranged for us by a kind front-desk receptionist who was pregnant. The receptionist's kindness, I thought, was amplified by her knowledge that my wife was also pregnant with our first child, so she used personal connections to ensure the best limo service for our trip to JFK.

Nouran, my wife, was asleep during the trip to JFK, whereas Andy and I were discussing a school in East Saint Louis that I read about in a book by Jonathan Kozol (a famous educator and campaigner for educational reform in the United States.) When I expressed my astonishment with the disparity between two public schools in Illinois, the first in East Saint Louis (the poorest school district in the United States) and another public school separated by only 150 meters but was one of the richest public schools in the country, Andy said: "This is a direct result of the Emancipation Proclamation."

I thought Andy was joking, but he was not. He was very serious. He explained: "When the slaves were emancipated following the famous proclamation, what happened to them?" I answered that most of them went up north. "This is true," he said, and added: "But what did the millions of freed slaves end up doing?"

I still had no glimpse of where he was heading with his argument when he said: "When the slaves were freed, the state had no rehabilitation programs for them, no training, no education, nothing. Millions of slaves whose skills were mostly in farming and servitude relocated to areas where they had to carve a living for themselves and their families without any proper transition. The only way out from the situation the freed-slaves found themselves in was to work in low-skill and low-paying jobs; mostly in factories in the north, such as in Gary, Indiana. The slaves were freed from slavery to masters, but were in reality enslaved by a capitalistic society that strongly discriminated against blacks and never gave them any chance to get out of the hole they found themselves in following their emancipation. There was no federal, state, or county programs that financed or organized training, education or rehabilitation for former slaves to introduce them to the new jobs; jobs for which former slaves had no training."

Taking a deep breath, Andy added: "And to add insult to injury, the public education system is fully and only financed by property tax, which means that the schools for the poor are financed by property tax collected from the poor. There

was not, and there still is not, a way for blacks out of their dilemma, except through becoming athletes or performers; only a trickle otherwise finds a way out, but barely. The majority of former slaves are still shackled by their ancestors' emancipation."

I had never looked at the Emancipation Proclamation and its consequences from that angle before. The point elucidated by Andy, however, was as clear as it was eye-opening. One cannot fault President Lincoln for emancipating slaves the way he did, especially during the tumultuous period of the Civil War between the Union and the Confederate States. But the fact remains that emancipation was one step that needed other steps to integrate former slaves into the society and rectify their collective situation; no steps, however, followed until the late 20th century and the Civil Rights movement.

In the ride back to the hotel, I remember asking myself: "What about slavery in Islaam? How was it dealt with?"

Fundamentally, Islaam used a gradual approach whenever it sought to improve a habit or correct an injustice or change a practice, except in one case only, namely, the Oneness of God. Islaam came with the

call to monotheism; straight, loud, clear-cutting, uncompromising and immediate. Every other worship or social reform, however fundamental in Islaam, was introduced gradually.

'Salaat in the form of the five daily prayers, which is the second pillar of Islaam after affirming monotheism, was mandated during the eleventh year of the prophethood of Mu'hammad (PBUH). During the first eleven years of Islaam, Muslims used to pray sporadically either with the Prophet (PBUH) or separately in their own dwellings. Fasting was also practiced but the mandated fast came three years after that of 'Salaat.

Wine consumption was also prevalent in the Makkan society and throughout Arabia upon the advent of Islaam, and the majority of Muslims drank it. Its prohibition came in three steps that are mentioned in the 'Qura~n: First came a warning against its consumption, second came a prohibition of praying while drunk, and since mandatory prayer was spread throughout the day, drinking was significantly curtailed, and afterward, a complete prohibition was finally ordered.

Here is a more drastic example: There is an A~yah (verse) in the 'Qura~n in the Chapter of Annoor

(the 33rd verse in the 24th chapter) that forbids Muslims from forcing their maids into prostitution. This A~yah was revealed in Madinah, several years after the Prophet's migration there. Chastity was encouraged and adultery was strongly condemned until prostitution was forbidden outright eventually.

Blood retribution (revenge killing) was annulled twenty two years after the advent of Islaam, and the first blood to be annulled by the Prophet (PBUH) was that of his own cousin. Usury was also strictly forbidden around the same time, and all interest on loans was cancelled, starting with the interest that the Prophet's own uncle demanded from people he lent money to. The road towards this end was paved through previous years by 'Qura~nic revelations and Prophetic traditions that showed the way and prepared Muslims for the fateful day when injustices are to end.

This gradual approach was the choice with which Islaam dealt with the question of slavery, in contrast to the sudden emancipation that followed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Islaam, undoubtedly, accepted the institution of slavery, just like Judaism and Christianity did earlier.

Islaam, however, parted way with earlier practices of slavery, both in religious societies and in pagan ones. Bernard Lewis explained that Islaam: "... brought two major changes to ancient slavery which were to have far-reaching effects: "the presumption of freedom" and "the ban on the enslavement of free persons except in strictly defined circumstances"." [1]

Of the early followers of Prophet Mu'hammad (PBUH), there were several slaves; most notable was Bilaal Ibn Rabaah (an Ethiopian slave) who was chosen by the Prophet (PBUH) to climb the Ka'bah and call for the prayer, despite misgivings by some notable Arabs. Bilaal, and many former slaves, were appointed rulers of major Islaamic cities thereafter.

Lest I lose focus of the main thread, I shall recap the important points here:

- A. Islaam accepted the institution of slavery, as it did with several other institutions at first. It then gradually changed and reformed.
- B. Islaam presumed freedom of every individual as the basic condition of humans; slavery was an aberration.
- C. A free person cannot be enslaved, except in very special cir-

cumstances that are clearly defined.

Islaam closed the door on slavery, and opened many doors for manumission. The only door of enslavement that was left open, and even this is disputed by some scholars, was capture in war.

Islaam came to people who practiced slavery, so it had to deal with an existing problem. The Prophet (PBUH) set the rules for dealing with slaves: "Your slaves are brothers of yours. Allaah has placed them in your hand, and he who has his brother under him, he should feed him with what he eats, and dress him with what he dresses himself, and do not burden them beyond their capacities, and if you burden them, (beyond their capacities), then help them." (This 'hadeeth is narrated in the book of Muslim).

Manumission of slaves was mandatory on several occasions, which included:

- 1. If the owner wrongs the slave or abuses him/her, either verbally or physically, the slave must be liberated. There is no other form of expiation.
- 2. A maid, who has been taken by the owner as a concubine, has her condition of slavery suspended au-

tomatically and permanently upon giving birth to her owner's child.

- 3. The expiation of manslaughter is manumission.
- 4. A child born to a couple with one slave parent is born free.

There are also several other occasions in which the expiation of sin is either manumission or monetary compensation, and manumission is the preferred choice. And to encourage manumission, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "He who emancipates a slave, Allaah will set free from Hell every limb (of his body) for every limb of his (slave's) body, even his private parts." (This 'hadeeth is narrated in the book of Muslim).

There are scholars who have interpreted the acceptance of the slavery institution by Islaam, and the continued practice of enslaving some or all of those who were captured at war, as the only method through which free men could become enslaved. Those are the majority of scholars. Other scholars, however, argued that the 'Qura~n abolished this practice in the fourth A~yah of the Chapter of Mu'hammad, which states: "... then bind a bond firmly (on them, i.e., take them as captives). Thereafter (is the time) either for generosity (i.e., free them without ransom), or ransom (according to what benefits

Islaam), until war lays down its burden.” No other option was given, which renders enslavement obsolete.

An additional practice that was encouraged by Islaam, as reported in the 'Qura~n, is the practice of Mukaatabah, which is a contract between a slave and his/her owner through which the slave buys his/her freedom, by practicing a trade or working in the market. The initial capital for this trade is generally given by the owner him/herself. This is evidenced by this A~yah: “And such of your slaves as seek Kitaab (contract for emancipation) give them such contract, if you find that there is good and honesty in them. And give them something (your-selves) out of the wealth of Allaah which He has bestowed upon you.” [Chapter of Annoor, 33]

The practice of Mukaatabah was meant to give slaves a head start in their new lives as the masters of their own destinies, by making sure that they receive proper initiation into the job market under the supervision of their owners.

This is how Islaam dealt with slavery, which should have ended slavery a long time ago in the Muslim land.

This is not, however, how Muslims dealt with slavery. Unfortunately, many Muslims succumbed to the lucrative business of slave trading, especially from Africa, that they violated their own religious code of ban on enslaving free men and women. The Prophet (PBUH) warned very strongly against enslaving a free man and selling him, and said that he, the Prophet (PBUH), will take up the case of the enslaved man before Allaah against the slaver on the Day of Judgment.

Slavery was a dark page in the history of humanity. Islaam came with a prescription that would have gradually ended this practice, had Muslims abided by their own code of ethics. We, unfortunately, have failed to do so. The only consolation I see is that our failure to uphold the rights of slaves and end slavery was part of a general ethical failure that befell the Muslim nation; a failure that manifested itself in slavery, usury, blood retribution, and wine consumption: all of which should've been abolished had we heeded the call of our beloved Prophet (PBUH).

[1]. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/lewis1.html>



GRAPH
Art

If you have any nice designs that you would like to share with us, please contact:

konash@i-mag.org



By

Ahmad Konash

koansh@i-mag.org

A calligraphic graphic design in Arabic. It reads:

“O Allaah send your blessing on Mu’hammad, the seal of prophets and messengers.”



A RAMA'DAAN Window on South Africa

By Saaleha Bhamjee

■ imraan.bhamjee@fnbisp.co.za

South Africa, post 1994 and democracy, has become a melting pot, where the sights, sounds and flavours of the entire world combine to create a most appetising fusion. A walk around Johannesburg reveals Somali woman, elegant in flowing knee-length burkhas, and long skirts; Nigerian men, their elaborate cloaks, a palette of colour that at once, transports one to a dusty Nigerian road; Pakistani men in kurtas; Bengali women in salwar kamees, dupattas trailing, a flag

of rich hue. Kara Pau, Chicken Tikka, Kebabs. The aromas mingle as do the people. And come Rama'daan, the air grows fragrant with something new: The bouquet of the Islamic Brotherhood. Almost a month before the arrival of our Blessed Guest, i.e., the month of Rama'daan, Spice Shop windows sport advertisements. Wares from around the world are sold in their overcrowded precincts. Dates, fresh and

dry, Zamzam (yes, we pay for it here), rose water, almonds; all manner of ingredients to create the lush feasts common on many South African tables. People busy themselves, shopping for spices, meat and a whole range of other goodies. Some go as far as shopping for 'Eed clothes, claiming that going about that chore during Rama'daan is just too tiring. Others begin spring cleaning. The transformation is evident, robust.

With the sighting of the new moon, the Month is ushered in. Men ready themselves for the first Tarawee'h (congregational night prayer specific to Rama'daan) that will be performed in the many mosques and Madrassahs. The huge number of 'Huffaaz (those who memorize the 'Qura~n by heart and recite it well) in South Africa means that places where the Tarawee'h is performed are as numerous as the seeds in a pomegranate.

The next morning, fasting begins in earnest. Lights can be spied in many windows at the time of Su'hoor (predawn meal). Families give one another wake-up calls. The mosque is unusually full at the time of Fajr (dawn). An Ummah has been galvanised into reflecting the true spirit of the Islamic Brotherhood. A day on the street in Rama'daan is different. The Fast Food outlets in the areas where Muslims are a majority go quiet. The sounds of people on the move, earning a living or going about their day to day activities, are somehow muted.

But as the day winds down, the tempo picks up once more. Mosques become gathering places, where Muslims from around the world converge, each bringing with them a slice of home. They lay this out before them, assembling in groups. And then, comes the Ath>aan. It resonates from the loudspeakers poised like sentinels atop lofty minarets; the end of a long day of fasting under a burning African sun. Water and sweet dates from Me-

dina and Tunisia enter parched mouths, and slip into empty stomachs. The Muslims in true brotherhood eat, then stand - straight rows, and bow in obedience to the One Allaah; bow in unison.

But something is amiss. Yes, you're right, the women. Where are they? Where I live, I hear the Ath>aan of no less than three mosques. And not one of these make provisions for the sisters to share in the feeling, to perform the Tarawee'h, where 'Huffaaz - some as young as thirteen - lead the congregation, guide the men through the completion of the 'Qura~n.

There are mosques- where Muslims that follow the Shafi'ee Math>hab (school of thought) dominate - where women can share in the activities of Rama'daan, and perform the Tarawee'h in congregation. And oft-times, I wish I could be there. But alas, they are too far away. So what do we, as women, do? As the hour of sunset draws closer, we bustle about in kitchens, preparing all manner of delicacy. The aroma of baking pies, frying samoosas (pies),

simmering curries and melting ghee hangs in the air, enticing, inviting. Frothy jugs of falooda (sweet drink) sweat in the hot air, the moisture running in rivulets down their sides. Plates, laden with the choicest pickings make their way, borne by children impatient for the fast to end, from home to home.

But here too, something is amiss. Do the plates find their way to the homes of people we do not know? Do they find their way past the thresholds of those less fortunate than ourselves? Many of our African brothers and sisters have seen the beauty of Islaam, but sadly, in my predominantly Indian community, they are marginalised, ignored. I cannot fault my brethren totally though, for many of these brothers and sisters have acquired quite a reputation, drifting from door to door, especially during the month of Rama'daan, begging in the name of Allaah. And often, they turn out to be charlatans.

But this year I have promised myself that it will be different. I have made an intention to change the things that are within

my power. So that means that while the mosques are excluded, those less fortunate are not. I've made it a challenge to myself, a challenge to extend a hand of friendship to as many fellow Muslims as I possibly can.

That is my goal this year, one to add to the target of reading as much 'Qura~n as possible, or performing the Tahajjud (predawn prayer) prayer daily. The intention is to, through my actions, display the concept of the Brotherhood (or Sisterhood) of Islaam in as vibrant a way as I possibly can.

Maybe you should attempt the same. Change starts with little stirrings, little ripples on the glassy surface of waters that mask blights. And enough ripples, can create a wave that might someday sweep in a current of positive change. Start making a stir...

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RAMA'DAAN: A MONTH OF BLESSINGS



By Khalfan Al-Esry

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The month of Rama'daan is here and you have the opportunity to make a difference in your life. This is the opportunity to fine tune your way of life to perfection; the opportunity to align your body, mind and soul to attain higher moral values that will bring you inner peace, tranquility and success. This is the best time to purify your body and your mind. It is the time to revitalise love, consideration and compassion; the time to strengthen your relationship with those who mean the most to you in your life. This is the time to seek new meanings in life and to get a deeper insight of life by accessing your inner and deeper self. The ultimate goal of Rama'daan is to get peace of mind as you align your values and goals, as you balance between materialistic and spiritual life, and between this life and that of the hereafter. It is the time to engage your senses and use your faculties given to you by the Almighty Allaah to the maximum.

To do so, you must go beyond the obvious by spending quality time in critical thinking, meditation and reflection. When you capitalise on this opportunity, you will reach higher levels that will overwhelm you. The good news is that you have what it takes to get there.

As a start, you must appreciate that fasting the month of Rama'daan is one of the five pillars of Islaam. These are the foundation upon which the entire structure of Islaam is built on. These consist of the declaration of faith, establishing five daily

prayers, fasting the month of Rama'daan, paying the annual charity in the form of Zakaah, and performing the pilgrimage to Makkah, known as 'Hajj. Rama'daan is an annual event and lasts for one month.

A careful analysis would suggest that acts and rituals carried out by Muslims in the month of Rama'daan directly benefit individuals who do them with sincerity and devotion with the aim to go beyond the obvious in their acts and intentions. In so doing, let us focus together on how the body, the mind and the soul can tremendously benefit in the month of Rama'daan.

Starting with the body: It has been said that "You are what you eat". Most people have developed bad habits in choosing unhealthy diet. This is clear from the type of food or the quantity they consume. Rama'daan becomes an opportunity to free oneself from these bad habits as well as from addictions. Many people use this period to stop smoking, to stop eating unhealthy and junk food or simply to give up bad behaviours. This approach then gives the stomach and the digestive system a break. It also gives the body a chance to cleanse itself from impurities, excess fat and to get rid of weaker cells.

Fasting weakens the body to a certain extent. At the time of breaking the fast, one has to eat only little to regain strength and energy. This is a repeated phenomenon every day during Rama'daan. In this, the message is very simple. Food is a gift from Almighty Allaah. Digesting food and turning food into energy is also a miracle from Allaah who created you in perfection. If you were to be denied of food either through

illness or scarcity of food, you would become weak. Therefore, make sure you look after your body by feeding it quality food. Make sure you do not consume food in excess. Do not overload your digestive system.

Another benefit for the body is experienced by those who properly fast. They have a chance to understand the meaning of hunger and the pain of starvation. As a result, they appreciate that food may not be taken for granted and that the majority of people around the world have very little of. As a result, remember the desolate and those in need by donating to them and to the orphans.

As of engaging the mind, we are told that thoughts are the seeds of every action. "You are what you think about most of the time." The world today is suffering from a lot of negative thoughts, such as anger, self criticism and worries. These can lead to stress, depression and even a mental break down of a person who spends too much time on negative thoughts.

A lot of hospital studies show that more than 70 percent of all outpatient complaints have no physical basis. It all has to do with negative thoughts. Doctors say that negative thoughts reduce phosphorus which the brain uses as food. This result is putting more stress on thyroid and adrenal glands. Consequently, it affects the immune system, allergic reactions, metabolism and hormone production.

Muslims are therefore encouraged to purify their thoughts, words and action, more so whilst fasting. They are encouraged to think positively of themselves, of others and of their relationship with Allaah. They are encouraged to observe

their habits of mind so that they develop positive ones. Positive thoughts such as persistence, strengthening will power, controlling desires and impulsiveness, analytical thinking, developing open mindedness, listening attentively with understanding and empathy, striving for perfection, focus with accuracy, reasoning, questioning with advocacy and inquiry, searching for solutions, building hope and much more. In so doing, they focus on the positive, remain positive and give no room for negative thoughts to enter the mind.

One of the companions of the Prophet named Abu Huraira narrated: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever does not give up forged speech and evil actions, Allaah is not in need of him leaving his food and drink (i.e. Allaah will not accept his fasting.)" (Narrated in the book of Abu'kaari.) When you apply this approach, and for one full month, you develop qualities of endurance and self-restraint to control anger as well as a fiery or malicious tongue.

To learn how to achieve what is mentioned above, you are encouraged to read the Holy 'Qura~n; the book of life that was sent down in the month of Rama'daan to be guidance for Mankind. Through reading the Holy 'Qur~an and through reasoning, you begin to understand your purpose in life and how to establish a relationship with Allaah, with yourself and with others. Think of the Holy 'Qur~an as the constitution for mankind, a road map to success and blue print to eternal happiness. Do not limit the Holy 'Qur~an to recitation and worship alone. Go beyond that and make it part of your day to day reading. The

first verse sent down as an inspiration was the word "Read". Read the Holy 'Qur~an as an encyclopaedia of life and you will get many answers to the questions you have about life. Muslims and Non-Muslims who considerately read the Holy 'Qur~an with an open mind continue to testify to this fact.

Let us now focus on the spiritual development. The essence of fasting Rama'daan and the objective of every act of worship is summed up in the 'Qur~an in one word: Ta'qwa. "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may attain Ta'qwa." (Soorat Alba'qarah, 183)

Ta'qwa is a recurring theme in the 'Qur~an and is described as a high value to have. It is being conscious of Allaah's existence and presence in our lives. It is the proper attitude of the human towards the Almighty Allaah that denotes love, devotion, and fear. Love to the source of good and beauty that make life worth living; devotion to Allaah's boundless wisdom and majesty; and fear of misunderstanding His message or failing in maintaining the appropriate relationship.

Fasting Rama'daan, like other religious practices in Islaam, is an occasion for pursuing moral excellence that can also be translated into excellence in social organisation and interaction. Nothing does empower a community more than the development of the moral and ethical characters of its members. The theme is that moral life based on Ta'qwa leads to societal strength and prosperity. "Whoever has Ta'qwa of Allaah, He prepares a way out for them, and He provides them from sources they never could imagine."

(Soorat A't-'alaa'q, 65:2-3)

Fasting is not simply a time during which people deprive themselves from physical pleasures, but is an occasion to exercise moral restraint and experience spiritual growth. Rama'daan is a time of remembrance of Allaah and renewal of commitment to the high and noble values He revealed to mankind. And nothing would give us the sense of spiritual fulfilment more than a state of Ta'qwa of Allaah - a consciousness, that Rama'daan helps us to realise. It is the time to get closer and closer to Allaah through prayers, recitation of the 'Qur~an and supplication. In summary, Rama'daan comes with an opportunity to reorient oneself to the Creator and the natural path of goodness, purity and faithfulness. In so doing, one must not use fasting as an excuse to laze around or neglect basic duties at school and at work. Living by the above principles requires courage and determination. So why not make this Rama'daan very special!

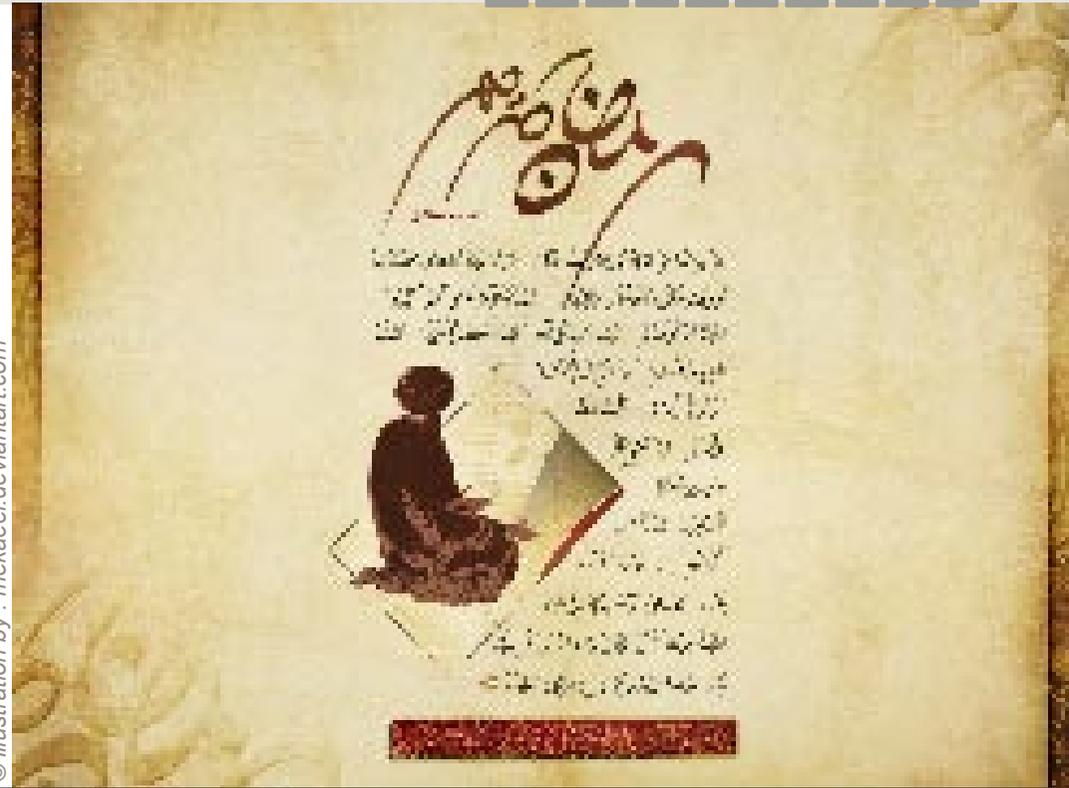
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Rama'daan:

What Is It All About?

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The blessed month of Rama'daan: is the month of mercy, forgiveness, piety, love and brotherhood. In this month, the 'Qura~n, the final testament to all humanity was first revealed to Prophet Mu'hammad (PBUH). "The month of Rama'daan in which was revealed the 'Qura~n, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion (between right and wrong)". [Chapter of Alba'qarah,185]

God has singled out the month of Rama'daan with special virtues that are not present in any other month. It is the best of the months in the lunar calendar. With regard to what Muslims do in Rama'daan, we seek to draw closer to God and strive hard in worship. Various kinds of worship have been prescribed for Muslims, these include the following:

1- Fasting.

This means refraining from food, drink, and sexual intercourse from dawn until sunset. Muslims are not the only nation on whom God has enjoined fasting, rather previous nations were also prescribed fasting. "O you who believe fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you so that you can learn Ta'qwa" [Chapter of Alba'qarah,183] The Arabic word

'Ta'qwa' is translated in many ways including God consciousness, God fearing, piety, and self restraining. Thus we are asked to fast daily for one month from dawn to dusk and avoid food, water, sex and vulgar talk during that period. But why do Muslims fast? What is the purpose of fasting? We can summarize the reasons in the following points:
 a. It is a prescription from the Lord

- a. and Creator Whom they love
- b. To allow them to be pious
- c. Forgiveness of 'minor' previous sins
- d. Acquiring patience and strong will
- e. Being more charitable since they are experiencing the feelings of the poor
- f. Sensing the unity of the Muslims
- g. Learning discipline

2- Prayers at night.

Praying at night has a great effect in purifying and reforming the heart and soul, and is also a means of asking for and receiving forgiveness.

3 – Reading the ‘Qura~n.

Rama'daan is the month of the 'Qura~n, hence you will find the Muslims reading the entire 'Qura~n during Rama'daan, and some of them might read the entire it more than once. The Muslim knows that reading a single letter of the 'Qura~n brings a tenfold reward, and that reading a single page brings a thousand rewards.

“(This is) a Book (the 'Qura~n), which We have sent down to you, full of blessings that they may ponder over its verses, and that people of understanding may reflect” [Chapter of 'Saad, 29].

4- Charity and feeding the poor

Prophet Mu'hammad (PBUH) was the most generous of people, and he

was most generous in Rama'daan. Prophet Mu'hammad encouraged Muslims to feed the poor and to give fasting people food to break their fast. He told us that the reward of the one who gives food to a fasting person to break his fast is equivalent to the reward of the fasting person, without that detracting from the reward of the fasting person in the slightest.

5 – I'tikaaf (“Retreat” for worship)

This means staying in the mosque in order to devote oneself to worship. It is optional, but highly encouraged during the last ten days of Rama'daan.

7 – Zakaat Al-Fi'tr :

God has enjoined a special charity to be given at the end of Rama'daan. This is called Zakaat Al-Fi'tr, by means of which the fasting person offers expiation for

any idle or obscene speech he may have uttered during his fast; it is also a means of feeding and helping the poor. It is obligatory upon every Muslim, young and old, male and female. It is one of the ways of making people feel the unity, cohesion and mutual compassion of the Muslim community.

8 – ‘Eed prayer:

God has also enjoined that those who have fasted should offer the 'Eed prayer, as a conclusion to these good deeds that they have done during Rama'daan, and as a way of bringing them together to express their joy and gratitude towards the Lord and Creator of the heavens and earth.

May Allaah (Almighty-God, in Arabic) accept our deeds and forgive our shortcomings, Amen.

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Glaring Truth

By Mohamad Abd Elbadeea

— [Mu'hammad Abd Albadee']

Most people rely on stereotypes in formulating their thoughts and ideas, and tend to believe what they know only. Any new information that contradicts their common beliefs, even if true, is often shunned away as it is easier for the mind and ego not to disturb itself with contradictory information.

What if the mind and ego start to question the validity of their beliefs discovering that they could be mistaken and that they would look foolish if they continue to think the same way they used to? That mind and that ego will, therefore, be convinced easier with the truth.

Imagine the following scenario: Evil antibodies killing innocent bacteria inside the blood stream of a human body, and a reporter commenting on those evil killing perpetrated by one group on another, without mentioning that these are antibodies and those are bacteria. The viewer is convinced that the killers (not knowing they are antibodies) are evil and the victims (not knowing they are bacteria) are good, thanks to the reporter, without knowing the true nature of each and why is this going on.

The above scenario is an example of how an event could be reported in such a way that would give an impression that is completely opposite to the truth.

It is an example of what is going on everyday in our world due to the effect of the biased media coverage, which conveys a distorted and incomplete image of the truth; the truth about the events happening all around the world, the truth about

why there is a certain conflict, the truth about why certain people are behaving in a certain way, the truth about who is the true aggressor and who is innocent and the truth about who is defending himself and who is evil.

How about if the above reporting of the scenario is amended, and proper zooming is employed to reveal the nature of these objects and what is really going on and who is who and why; a report which says that actually the antibodies are defending the human body against the harmful and aggressive bacteria that are attacking it.

The events that have been going on for more than half a century in the Middle East and especially in Palestine, the rising misunderstanding between different peoples of the world with a resultant widening of gaps, and the most tragic events in Lebanon and how the aggressor was displayed as the victim and the defender displayed as a terrorist, have all contributed to establishing the Glaring Truth group.

The Glaring Truth group is an ongoing effort that aims at revealing the truth to the whole world regarding the political, historical, social, geographical and humanitarian aspects of the Middle East. We aim

at dramatically convincing the stereotyped mind and ego that it could be mistaken by trying to present to the audience worldwide with the full true picture.

Glaring Truth is an initiative started by a group of people from different backgrounds, religions and cultures with one common goal in mind – to allow the light of truth to reach out to you. It is not politically-affiliated in any way and does not, in any way, promote or affiliate itself with any particular organization. It aims to reveal the truth of current and past events amidst the biased, clichéd and one-sided image that media often reflects to the public. It is trying to reach out beyond the lies, ignorance, arrogance and personal motives of individuals and groups that have succeeded in building barriers and racial prejudice. This has been responsible for the suffering of the human race worldwide and has allowed people to see their differences in an unfavorable light with the result being a never-ending conflict to annihilate the other. The Glaring Truth demonstrates facts and builds bridges of understanding that supersede racial, religious and cultural differences.

. During our follow up of events, we came to the conclusion that what really shapes our present is not

the war of armies, but the war of words. The Public Relations war, in an attempt to gain support for the aggressor's side, is hijacking the world's ability to think and choose. Extensive lies and obscured truths are the tools of choice. Accordingly, we decided to organize ourselves and initiate a forum to discuss how we can very professionally sustain a front that defends the truth and make sure it reaches the media and the public through the "Glaring Truth" group. Our efforts are based on humanitarian issues regardless of religion or race. In this group, you will find people who are trying to do something, and who are not just talking.

Within two weeks of our start, we managed to put a racist website under investigation for the possibility of shutting it down by the order of law. Visit the Glaring Truth group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/glaringtruth/>.

In order to join the team and share in this noble effort of bringing peace to the world through conveying the truth and bridging gaps, please send an email introducing yourself to: glaringtruth-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

RAMA'DAAN IN KUWAIT'S GRAND MOSQUE: A FESTIVAL

Written By

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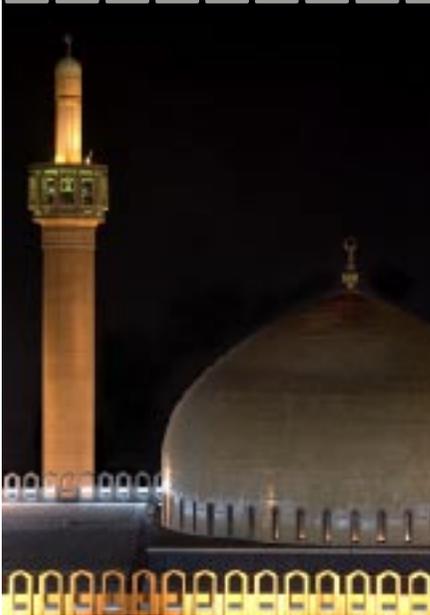
Photographs By

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Performing the Rama'daan prayers in the Grand Mosque, specially on the last ten nights of the holy month, is one of my wishes which I am hoping would come true this year. I'd been to the Grand Mosque before with a group of friends, however being there in Rama'daan is different. Walking inside the prayer hall I was struck by the beauty of the design, its vastness and its grandeur and overall elegance. Twenty years have passed since its construction in 1986 by the late Ruler of Kuwait Shaikh Jabir al-Ahmad. It took seven years and 14 million Kuwaiti Dinars, as well as a huge numbers of builders, carpenters, marble lays, and engineers to construct it, thus becoming an architectural model for many mosques around the world. Continuing towards the main gate, one could hear the humming of worshippers reciting the Holy 'Qura~n. Inside the mosque it was more stunning than the outside. I spent more then one hour praying inside the prayer hall of the mosque, entertaining the gorgeous



sensation of being between the hands of the Almighty God and feeling the ease of satisfaction one would feel in such a place.

Rama'daan in the Grand mosque in Kuwait creates its own magical environment, a festive look and overflow of worshippers, specially on the last ten nights where it becomes more beautiful with the scene of about a quarter a million worshippers coming to perform the prayers (Taraweeh) together in one place. On these nights everything wakes up into activity here, and would stay alive till sunrise.

The mosque on these nights is filled inside out, the scene outside the mosque becomes more stunning as well as the inside, were endless rows



of people perform the prayer together, showing and sensing the unity and brotherhood which Islaam asks for.

Satellite channels would broadcast live the festival on these nights, where a quarter of a million worshippers are expected to attend at this time of the year every Rama'daan. The Ministry of Islamic affairs does its best every year to make sure the worshippers have all the facilities they need for a safe, comfortable, and spiritual festival as such. Likewise, the Ministry of Health works in its part for assuring its utmost readiness to face any emergencies. Youths volunteer and work in organized groups and participate actively in the event.

Usually the best reciters are present to lead the prayers here, such as Mshaari

Raashid Al-Afasy, Yasir il-Failakawy, Fahad Al-Kandary and Salah Alhaashim. Those reciters are famous for their beautiful voices and are sought after by the faithful worshippers throughout the month.

The prayer is commenced in a breathtaking display throughout the night in which the darkness of the sky is broken through by the light of the silver crescent, which symbolizes the faith for over one billion Muslim around the world. The reciter leads the worshippers; following the example of the Prophet (PBUH), while trying the best to let those who pray behind feel the meaning of the verses and live them with all their consciousness.

The scene portrays a beautiful and



powerful image of human unity. About a quarter million Muslim standing here, in one place, the poor and the rich, the short and the tall, the white and the dark; together, asking for guidance, forgiveness, mercy and the best of this world and the hereafter.

This image invokes the image of the Day of Judgment where every soul is asked for his deeds. Some weep, in following the prayer, while others sweat standing their keenly and listening to the verses. The reciters with their most beautiful voices recite the most beautiful words said ever, at a night which could possibly be the Night of Decree, which is believed to be one of the last ten days of Rama'daan. A prayer on this night equals seventy thousand years of worship.

RAMA'DAAN: A STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

By Hicham Maged [Hishaam Maajid]

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Rama'daan is an extra-ordinary month for Muslims; not only because they fast during the day and perform extra-additional worship to Allaah Almighty but also because it was the month when the Holy 'Qur~an was sent down in Laylat al-Qadr (the Night of Decree).

Fasting in Islaam

In Islaam, fasting is an action of forbidding normal human habits of eating, drinking, swallowing anything, and having sexual intercourse between husband and his wife for the duration of the day; which starts from dawn and ends with sunset.

Fasting in Islaam has two types:

* **Obligatory:** This type of fasting occurs only during Rama'daan where all Muslims should practise it during the entire month. If some of them couldn't fast some days because of being ill, for example, they should re-fast those days in another month.

* **Voluntary:** This type of fasting is distributed throughout the whole year

(except Rama'daan and the two days of 'Eed) where Muslims are called to fast certain days, each according to what he/she can bear. If they couldn't practise it, there's no need to re-fast them.

What I'm interested in talking about is fasting during Rama'daan; as I consider it as the cornerstone of the Muslim's life in general.

Aims and Goals

Some people might think that the purpose of fasting - either in Rama'daan or other voluntary days - is just to perform additional worship to Allaah Almighty in order to increase the person's good deeds only.

Well, this is absolutely right; however it's just a minor part of the truth. Unfortunately, the major one is always ignored despite that it's the core of the philosophy of fasting in Islaam.

Allaah Almighty mentioned the following in the Holy 'Qur~an: "O ye who

believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off evil);" (Chapter of Alba'qarah, 183]. From what Allaah Almighty told us, it's clear that fasting came for the purpose of reaching the state of piety.

Piety - simply - can be defined as the state of mind Muslims called upon to reach in order to perform a definite mission. In order to reach such state of mind, body plus soul should work in harmony together.

As for the body; it's called upon to stop the normal habits of eating, drinking, and having sexual intercourse, so it becomes lighter and ready to perform additional worship during Rama'daan, such as reading the Holy 'Qura~n plus praying Taraweeh (congregational night prayer).

As for the soul, it's called upon to purify itself via this extra worship to Allaah Almighty, not only to perform them

because they are obligatory.

The state of Piety, when reached, allows Muslims - both Men and Women - to perform their role, which is Urbanising Earth for the welfare of humanity, in a better way.

That's why I see fasting as a basic tool from Allaah Almighty to help Muslims perform their role, not the goal itself.

Etiquettes of Islaam

In Rama'daan, the real Islaamic manners and etiquettes, which Muslims are instructed to follow in their life, are revealed.

Such etiquettes represent the core of Islaam, which guided their ancestors to establish the Islaamic Civilisation between the 7th-15th centuries; a civilisation that offered light to humanity in many fields.



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In the following few words I shall highlight the most important etiquettes, which we are instructed to follow all throughout the year; not only during Rama'daan.

Etiquette 1: Pursuance of Knowledge

Knowledge is the framework of the Islaamic faith; as the 1st verse which the archangel Gabriel taught to prophet Mu'hammad (PBUH) states: *"Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth."* [Chapter of Al'ala'q, 1]

Knowledge is the way to know Allaah Almighty better; which means to think about life, search and work for creating new techniques to make life better, and this was what motivated Muslim scientists to rise in every field; astronomy, medicine, engineering, chemistry, mathematics, architecture, philosophy.

Etiquette 2: Equality

Human Rights are guaranteed in Islaam. Islaam considers all Humans - being Men or Women - to be equal in everything no matter what the colour of their skin is.

For sure there are rich and poor like any other community, however there is nothing called Masters and Slaves; rather rich people are called upon to help the poor, and both are citizens of a community and are called upon to cooperate and work together for the sake of their community. Finally, everyone according to his deeds will be judged by Allaah Almighty.

In parallel, even the human rights for other non-human creatures are guaranteed by default in Islaam. One of the famous companion who was the most prolific narrator of Hadith was called "Abu Hurayraa" (father of the kitten); because he used to take his cat everywhere with him.

Etiquette 3: Non-Muslims

Non-Muslims are part of the Islaamic community since Jewish were living in Medina side by side until the present in different Islaamic countries.

A fundamental part of Islaamic teaching states that Muslims have to believe in the past messengers from Allaah Almighty like Moses and Jesus. In parallel, Islam calls us to respect the religion of each member of the community, and not to force anyone to enter Islaam; rather every one has the choice wither to enter Islam or not.

Prophet Mu'hammad (PBUH) and the companions never urged any one to enter Islaam, rather they had entered - and still - according to their own conveniences.

Etiquette 4: War and Jihaad

People think that Islaam comes to declare war against Non-Muslims, and this is totally wrong. Islaam comes to convey to the people the last message from Allaah Almighty, so obviously it will not urge them to fight against each others.

Islaam forbids any kind of killing to any

soul; either Muslim or none, and even for other creatures too.

The war in Islaam is only to defend ourselves against the enemies who were pagans. In parallel, within the war itself, there are several etiquettes Muslims must follow which forbid any kind of killing for women, children, weak, disabled people and elders. Therefore, terms like "torture" and "genocide" are totally forbidden under any circumstances within war in Islaam.

Etiquette 5: Women Rights

Women are an integral part of any Islaamic community, and Islaam guarantees their rights same as it did for Men.

The 'Qur~an always talks to both Men and Women and did not differentiate between them in any thing, rather it urges them to work in order to make the community better, within the state of modesty which is the characteristic feature of an Islaamic community, and this was very clear during the life of Prophet Mu'hammad (PBUH) and the companions after him.

Special days that quickly pass

Well, in the light of what I've mentioned above, you can figure it out why I love Rama'daan. The spiritual values of this month make it something really like flying without wings. That's why I consider it as the month of recharging our souls.

In parallel, ascending requires more effort from us than descending. Well, in Rama'daan the soul ascends to

become closer and closer to Allaah Almighty, thus supplying us with the power we need to face life for additional 11 months until it comes again.

Another interesting note: Rama'daan is the 9th month of the Hijri Calendar (Islamic Lunar Calendar) same as a baby that comes to life after 9 months of pregnancy

Therefore, I see that our souls are re-born every Rama'daan in order to return back to its normal state of purity as Allaah Almighty created them. For sure it is not 100% pure as we are humans not angels; however this regeneration gives us the power to survive for the rest of the year.

I think that's why Allaah Almighty made Ramad'aan one of the five pillars of Islaam.

Quotes:

Shall I not inform you of a better act than fasting, alms, and prayers? Making peace between one another: enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by the roots"

-- Prophet Mu'hammad (PBUH)

The Rule of Thirds

CROPPING

By
Ahmad Konash

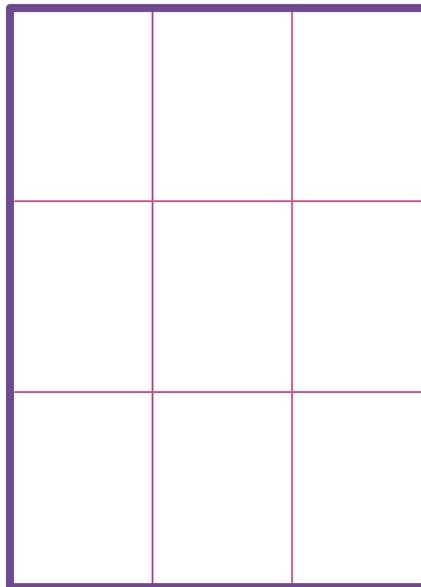
konash@i-mag.org

■ Rule:

“The rule of thirds is a compositional rule of thumb in photography.

The rule states that an image can be divided into nine equal parts by two equally-spaced horizontal lines and two equally-spaced vertical lines. The four points formed by the intersections of these lines can be used to align features in the photograph. [...] Aligning a photograph with these points creates more tension, energy and interest in the photo than simply centering the feature would.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_thirds



[■ Idea

Composition !

The rule of thirds is widely known by artists, Graphic Designers, and photographers. It is a tool to be used in laying out or composing their pieces in a certain way that would be aesthetically pleasing.



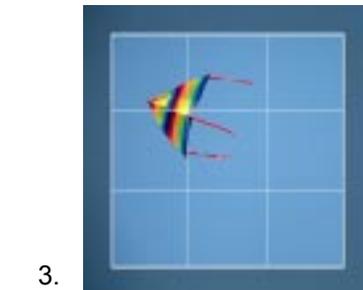
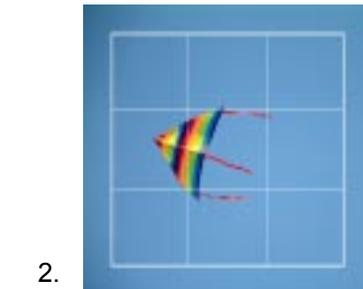
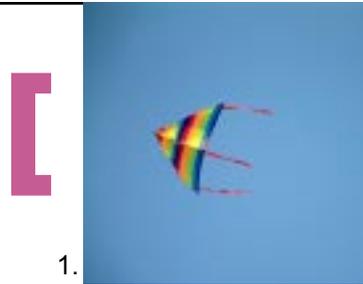
Steps

We will be having an example here how to *crop* a photograph so that it applies the rule, and then we'll see how it looks before cropping, and after.

1. Find an image in your photo library.
2. Make a grid of thirds.
3. Align your photo to the grid.
4. Once you like it, crop it.
5. Compare.
The result *should* be more pleasing to your eye :)
- 6- Now, once you know this rule, you might not need to crop your image anymore, you can do it right while shooting.

Note: "Rules are made to be broken" as long as you are aware about that, rules can be broken!

If you liked this issue's tip, please share your experiments with us.
Send your works to:
konash@i-mag.org



Before & After

© Photographs by Ahmad Konash.





© Photo from <http://hollywhapping.blogspot.com>

MUSLIM Anger Grows at Pope Speech

By Edwin Anthony

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Whoa there infidels! Whoa!

A statement from the Vatican has failed to quell criticism of Pope Benedict XVI from Muslim leaders, after he made a speech about the concept of holy war. Speaking in Germany, the Pope quoted a 14th Century Christian emperor who said Muhammad had brought the world only “evil and inhuman” things.

.. Stressing that they were not his own words, he quoted Emperor Manuel II Paleologos of the Byzantine Empire, the Orthodox Christian empire which had its capital in what is now the Turkish city of Istanbul.

The emperor’s words were: “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.”

Benedict said “I quote” twice to stress the words were not his and added that violence was “incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul”. [Quote for B.B.C.’s Webiste.](#)

Whilst the Pope has attempted to defend himself against critics by reiterating that he was ‘quoting’ an emperor, that still does not absolve him from the implication behind his choosing this particular quote amongst a multitude of other statements made by a multitude of other emperors, saints and popes. In this, the Pope, perhaps unwittingly, takes upon himself the role of the spiritual aide and validator of the perspectives of its temporal half – the western powers.

The Divinification of the West and Irrationalism as the Current Cause of Terrorism

To state that 'violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul' is not in itself a problem, and is, indeed, laudable enough. The problem arises, however, due to the juncture of history wherein the Pope makes the statement and whom it is in reference to - that is, in the face of the consequences and aftermath of western action and inaction in, amongst others, the Middle East, and not prior to or in the course of it, and in reference to Muslim militants and not western ones. In other words, the Pope has failed to forward such a statement in the face of the millions who have died due to western/national/capitalist enterprises.

Via this 'oversight', on the one hand, he tacitly validates the first, and thus 'divine', right of the west to a monopoly of violence and offensive and self-aggrandizing action, whilst simplistically reducing the subsequent (some would say 'retaliatory') actions of militants of non-western and UN-unrecognised origin to that instigated by a cause none other than the worst and irrational of human propensities. By this, the allegedly 'Holy' Father detracts the attentions of the masses from the fact that the worst and irrational of human propensities and actions are themselves, oftentimes, not without an external, and in this context, western cause. In other words, he performs a catholic style transposition and contemporarisation of the concept of 'the devil' onto 'the terrorist'. The devil does what he does because he is the devil and one does not need to look for causes. The same is implied in the case of the 'terrorist' - as it once was in the

case of the 'savage' encountered by the western colonialists. It is in his nature to do what he does and we need not trouble ourselves to look for scientifically verifiable causes. Nothing is addressed other than her/his use of violence. No prior and external cause is alluded to.

This fits well with the western/ised tendency to absolve themselves of antecedent complicity in the actions of the 'terrorists' on a daily basis via, amongst others, the arbitrary, self-serving and erroneous use of the words, 'terror'/'terrorists'/'terrorism', which serves to locate the first and sole cause of the 'terror' they are subjected to within the 'terrorist' rather than the historical causes and context that inevitably produces her/him.

The Pope, in this case, adds the spiritual half to this temporal and western effort at self-absolution. In this, the Pope yet again follows in the historical traditions of Pope Leo III and those after him in anointing, and thus, validating, the self-aggrandizing (capitalist) enterprise of the leaders of the western/ised world. They are accorded 'divinity'. This immediately and logically turns all defensive or retaliatory actions into offensive ones simply because the 'divine' can do no wrong. Therefore any opposition on our part can be construed to be nothing less than 'immature', 'uncivilised', or using the colloquialisms of our times, simply 'terroristic'. By such an 'oversight' the Pope sanitises the actions of the west. If 'Good' - the Catholic Church as one of the beacons of Morality - fails to call Evil to task, Evil ceases to be Evil and

becomes either a Good or a necessary Evil. This is how the global mass is directed to interpret the crises of our times. All western actions are either 'good' or 'necessary evils'. By promoting such notions, the Holy 'Catholic' Church becomes little more than a consort of the global bourgeois and nationalistic system.

Mu'hammad and Islaam as the First Cause of Terrorism

An additional reduction and redirection of our appreciation of the extraneous factors that have contributed to the development and evolution of the so called 'terrorist', along with its recontextualisation within irrationalism, is the Pope's attempt to help us 'make sense' of the current crises ('terrorism') by directing our attention to its first cause - the actions and message of Mu'hammad. Mu'hammad is forwarded as the prototypical 'terrorist' in 'spreading the faith by the sword'. By linking this with the current idea of the Jihaad, the Pope renders the link between the Jihaad waged by transnational militants and the self-defensive/self-preservational instinct activated by western actions, tenuous. In other words, he recontextualises it by implying that Jihaadists have no other reason to do what they do other than the reason that had allegedly motivated Mu'hammad's actions - spreading the faith and expanding their dominion. Thus, again, it is implied, the policies, actions and inactions of the west with regards to the Middle East have nothing to do with the actions of the transnation-

al militants. In other words, if one wants to know why 'terrorists' do what they do, look at the actions and intentions of their prophet, Mu'hammad. The west is thus, implicitly and indirectly, granted Papal Absolution.

Whilst it is true that the actions of Mu'hammad does not invalidate the use of violence - as opposed to, say, Christ's refusal to allow Peter to defend him by the sword in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Romans had come to arrest him - the Pope ignores, or is unaware, that it is not the glorification of violence that spurs the transnational militant but real, past and present actions of the west that has led to much death and destruction amongst the yet-to-be-recognised transnational Nation of Muslims. The perhaps 'Holy', but most certainly 'Perspectivally-challenged' Father, has failed to realise that the main difference between the Jihaadist and the Nationalist is that the former cries out the name of God, whilst the latter, the name of her/his country. But they both do it, as far as they are concerned, for their respective peoples. A war conducted under the banner of the nation-state is as 'holy' to its soldiers as one conducted in the name of Allaah. To single out the Jihaadists in his speech on the evils of violence and holy wars is to exhibit an abject ignorance of this fact and being bereft of that modicum of objectivity and catholic-style universality required to recognise it.



INTELLIGENT-DESIGN DEBATE

REVEALS LIMITS OF RELIGION AND SCIENCE

By Robert Jensen

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Despite the clashes between claims based in faith v. reason, it seems that most people -- on both sides of the debate about religion and science in the United States -- share a belief in a kind of magic. Sadly, this need for magical thinking undermines the ability of religion and science to deal with the complexity of the material world and the mystery of creation.

The difference between a belief in magic and an appreciation of mystery has never been clearer than in the debate

over "intelligent design" and the alleged challenge it presents to evolutionary biology. In claims that religious people make about a designer, as well as many of the typical refutations of that position, we see our species' hubris on display.

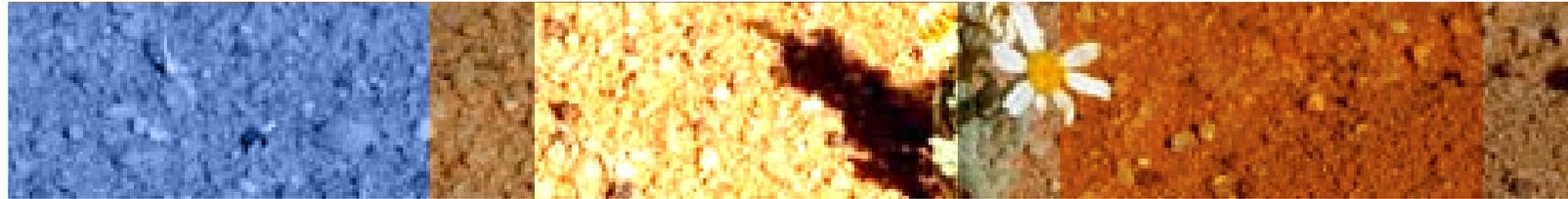
Our predicament is simple: We humans know -- and are capable of knowing -- far less than we would like to know about how the world came to be and what kind of beings we are. For all our cleverness and inventiveness, what we don't know still dwarfs what we do know.

In the words of Wes Jackson, a biologist and sustainable-agriculture researcher, we are fundamentally ignorant. That doesn't mean we know nothing, but simply that we don't know enough to understand as much as we would like, as deeply as we desire.

What to do in the face of those limits? One possibility is to acknowledge them and understand life as an endless engagement with the mystery that we can, at best, only partially comprehend. Another approach is to craft magical

"solutions" that purport to give definitive answers. Unfortunately, too many take this latter path.

This is obvious in the arguments of supporters of intelligent design, an approach that holds that "certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause rather than an undirected process such as natural selection." <http://www.intelligentdesignnetwork.org/> Unlike traditional creationism, this approach doesn't identify God as the



designer, though it's nearly impossible to find an intelligent-design proponent who doesn't believe in such a God. But the shift from God-as-creator to unidentified-designer is strategic not principled; by declining to inject religion directly into the debate, intelligent-design campaigners can make arguments that appear to be rooted in a call for objectivity -- the "teach both sides" rhetoric. Instead of arguing for the superiority of intelligent design, its backers simply argue it should be taught as a competing scientific theory alongside evolution.

The problem, of course, is that intelligent design is not open to being tested experimentally and has no basis in science. It is speculative philosophy that could appropriately be taught in a course that deals with various cultures' origin myths. Such treatment is not disrespectful of people's religious beliefs, but simply intellectually honest.

Polls in the United States suggest that most people disagree. In one survey a couple of years ago, 65 percent of people favoured teaching creationism (not just intelligent design, but good, old-fashioned Christian creationism) together with evolution in science classrooms, and 37 percent thought creationism should be taught instead of evolution.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/11/22/opinion/polls/main657083.shtml>
This reflects a need to articulate clear answers to questions that can't be definitively answered given the limits of human intelligence. Those folks have

cast their lot with magic, typically out of fear of mystery.

Secular people who believe science is a more compelling way to resolve this question tend to find this perplexing and/or maddening. As one person put it in casual conversation with me, "Why can't they (creationists) just accept that evolution is the answer?"

While I also weigh in on the evolutionary theory side of this debate, I am uncomfortable with the declaration that there is any "the answer" concerning the origin and development of life. Is not a belief in science's ability to provide definitive answers also a kind of magical thinking, a willingness to believe beyond our capacity to know? Could there be forces beyond evolution-through-natural-selection also at work that we don't yet understand? Can we be sceptical of mystical assertions and yet open to alternative avenues of inquiry?

Both religion and science, when taken down these limited magical roads, impoverish our imaginations. But the problem isn't religion or science per se; the best traditions in both realms don't talk in such absolutes.

Science is based not on claims of absolute truth, but on evidence marshalled to support a theory. It works on the principle of falsifiability: Ideas must be capable of being proven false to be scientifically valid. Rather than saying something is TRUE, we can only say that to date it has not been proven false. And, of course, the history of science

is a history of change, as claims once widely accepted give way to more robust ideas.

Scientists know this, as do many lay people. But in a culture that glorifies the products of the scientific method -- especially our dazzling high-technology machines -- many believe that science offers definitive answers. In that sense, the culture corrupts science by demanding magical answers.

Much religion, on the other hand, is based on claims of truth. But the best interpreters of religious traditions steer the discussion of faith away from certainty and toward ongoing engagement with the questions.

Jim Rigby -- pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Austin, TX, and a progressive theologian -- puts it this way: "Religion and science conflict only when one or both forget their proper bounds. When religion makes competing claims with science it is like a retina moving to the front of the eye; it cannot help but stand in its own light. The proper concern of religion is not declarations of truth, but the search for meaning." At their best, religion and science recognize mystery and reject magic. Both accept the limited scope of their inquiry and encourage other forms of understanding.

On the origins of life, evolutionary theory appears to be a compelling framework. It is folly to disregard it out of a need to believe in religious magic. But it also is folly to believe evolutionary theory is the last word on the subject and all that

remains is to work out the details. A more sensible path is to acknowledge that we live in a material world and also are part of creation.

We can look at a material world and be grateful for how some scientists have helped us understand, in limited ways, its workings. And we can be disappointed in the way some science has contributed to the degradation of the world's ecosystems, in large part through arrogance and an underdeveloped sense of our intellectual limits. We can look at creation and be grateful for the ways that some religious people have helped us understand, in limited ways, its meaning. And we can be disappointed in the way some religion has encouraged people to narrow the scope of inquiry into the meaning of human existence, in large part because of that same arrogance and problems with comprehending limits.

As we struggle with the timeless questions about the meaning of creation, we face the urgent problem of creating sustainable systems in the material world. This is the task of our moment in history, and to succeed we will need the best of both these traditions.

**Robert Jensen is a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin, a founding member of the Nowar Collective, and a member of the board of the Third Coast Activist Resource Centre. He is the author of "Citizens of the Empire: The Struggle to Claim Our Humanity." His website: <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/home.htm>*

Questioning Enlightenment

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS HAS TO BE PRECEDED BY FAMILIAL UNCONSCIOUSNESS



By **Abdelwahab Elmessiri** [‘Abd Alwahhaab Almiseery]



While the old Islaamic discourse may have reflected a naive infatuation with Western civilisation, the bearers of a new way of thinking discovered a tainted modernity, embroiled in crises and questions of its own.

Whereas partial secularism recognises the validity and importance of values on the moral level, and the idea of totality on the epistemological level, comprehensive secularism denies them, as it denies the very idea of transcendence. Many of the negative aspects of Western mo-

ernity, which were to become more or less recurrent patterns or central phenomena, were isolated events that could be overlooked easily. Furthermore, the Western critique of modernity and the Enlightenment had not yet crystallised, in spite of the fact that voices of protest were growing stronger.

Western Romantic literature, for instance, is in essence a protest against the negative aspects of Western modernity. The writings of some conservative Western thinkers, such as Edmund Burke, include

references to many of the topics developed later by the Western critical discourse on modernity. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of modern Western civilisation, whether at the level of theory or of practice, were not yet obvious to observers or students of this civilisation.

For the bearers of the new Islaamic discourse, the situation is quite different. The '50s were the intellectual formative years of the majority; their first encounter with modern Western civilisation took place in the '60s, at a time when Western modernity had already entered the stage of crisis, and when many Western thinkers had begun to realise the dimensions of this crisis and the impasse Western modernity had reached.

The bearers of the new Islaamic discourse realised, from the very beginning, the darker aspects of Western modernity. It had embroiled the entire world in two Western wars, called "world wars" because the whole world was dragged into the arena of conflict. In time of "peace", the world was caught up in a frenzied arms race. The centralised nation-state, growing stronger and more authoritarian, expanded, reached the most private aspects of man's life, and, through its sophisticated security and educational ap-

paratus, tried to "guide" its citizens. The media, another by-product of Western modernity, invaded the private lives of citizens, accelerating the process of standardisation and escalating the consumerist fever. In the meantime, the pleasure sector became so powerful as to control

THE CRISIS OF MEANING, THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRISIS, ANOMIE, ALIENATION AND REIFICATION BECAME MORE PRONOUNCED. THE LIBERAL CAPITALIST PROJECT CEASED TO BE A SMASHING SUCCESS STORY; THE SOCIALIST EXPERIMENT COLLAPSED AND LOST ANY VESTIGE OF CREDIBILITY. ANTI-HUMANIST INTELLECTUAL TRENDS SUCH AS FASCISM, NAZISM, ZIONISM AND STRUCTURALISM EMERGED, REACHING A CLIMAX IN POST-MODERNIST THOUGHT.

people's dreams, selling them erotic utopias if not pornography. The family as a social institution could not sustain the pressure; divorce rates sky-rocketed, reaching levels rarely witnessed before.

The crisis of meaning, the epistemological crisis, anomie, alienation and reification became more pronounced. The liberal capitalist project ceased to be a smashing success story; the socialist experiment collapsed and lost any vestige of credibility. Anti-humanist intellec-

tual trends such as fascism, Nazism, Zionism and structuralism emerged, reaching a climax in post-modernist thought. By the mid-'60s, the Western critique of modernity had crystallised, and the works of the Frankfurt

School thinkers had become widely available and popular. Many studies critical of the age of the Enlightenment were published. Writing about the standardisation that resulted from Western modernity and its one-dimensional man, Herbert Marcuse sought to demonstrate the existence of a structural defect at the very heart of modern Western civilisation in its totality, a defect that goes beyond the traditional division of this civilisation into a socialist and a capitalist camp. Many revisionist historians, rewriting the history of modern Western civilisation, tried to underscore the enormity of the crimes committed against the peoples of Asia and Africa and of the colonial pillage of their lands. Many studies, radically critical of development theories, appeared during the same period. The New Left movement made a significant contribution in this regard.

Thus, whether on the level of practice or that of theory, it was not difficult for the bearers of the new Islaamic discourse, those who studied Western modernity in the middle of the twentieth century, to recognise many of its shortcomings and to see it in its totality. It was no longer possible for them to experience a naive infatuation of the type experienced by the intellectuals of the first

generation. The Western modernity they knew, experienced and studied was, in many aspects, different from the Western modernity known, experienced and studied by the pioneers' generation.

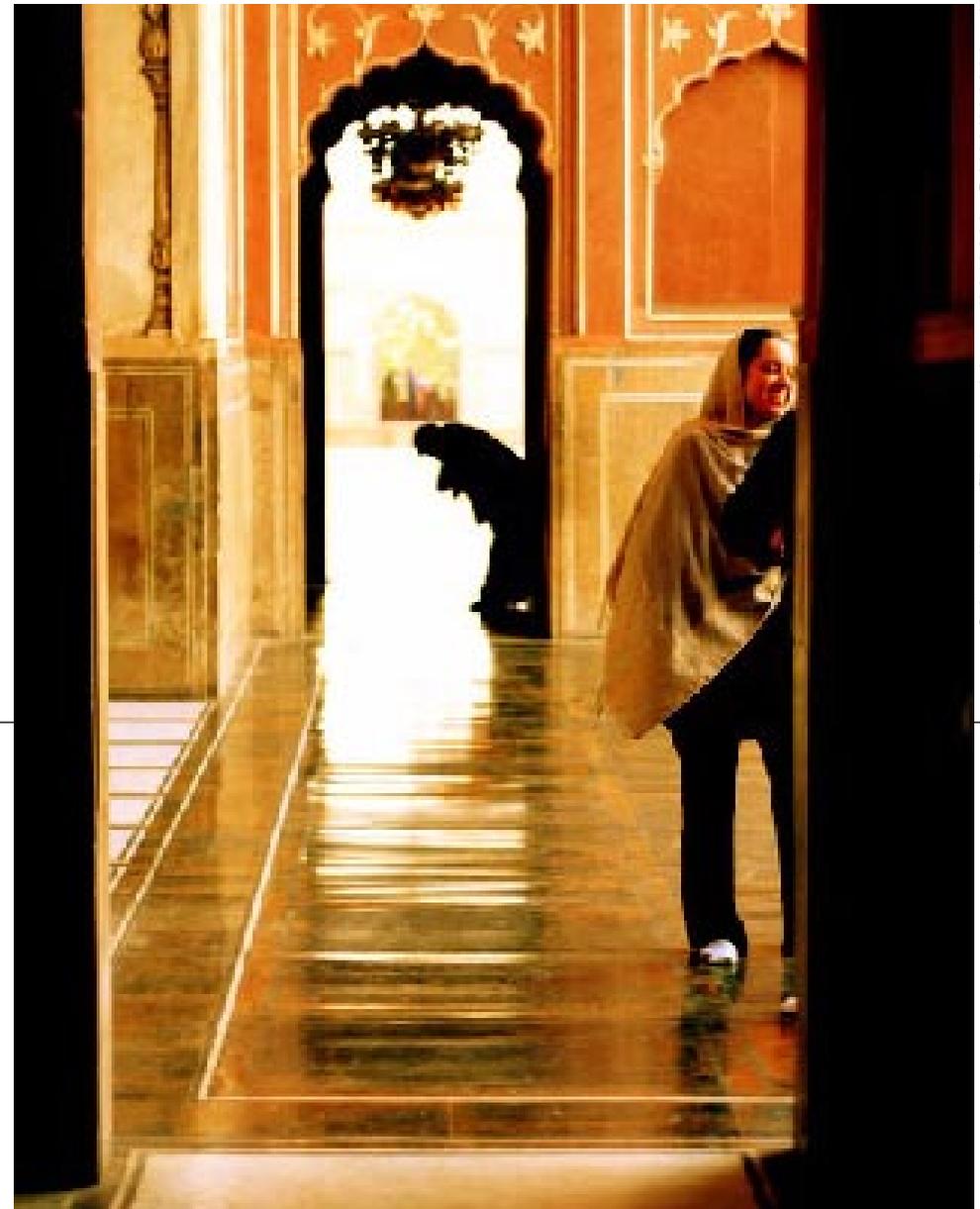
Neither the new nor the old generation of Muslim intellectuals constructed their respective intellectual systems on the exclusive basis of the Islaamic world-view, however. Their interaction with Western modernity was a very important formative factor. After all, this was a civilisation that had acquired centrality by virtue of its economic and military accomplishments, put forward its own view of the world as if it were the view of all human beings at all times and in all places, conceived of its knowledge as a precise science applicable to all communities, and set the challenge to which everyone else had to respond.

Responses varied with the type of challenge and its intensity. The early reformists found many positive aspects in Western modernity. One may even go as far as suggesting that they were entranced by it. This is evident from Sheikh Mu'hammad 'Abduh's oft-quoted remark that "whereas in the West he found Muslims without Islaam, in the East he found Islaam without Muslims".

He meant that in the West, he found people who manifested in their conduct the ideals of Islaam, although they were not Muslims, whereas in the Muslim world, he found people who believed in Islaam, but belied their belief through their conduct. Consequently, the fundamental issue for many of the bearers of the old Islaamic discourse was how to reconcile Islaam with Western modernity, and even how to bring Islaam up to date and up to par. This was the core of Mu'hammad 'Abduh's project, a project which continued to dominate until the mid-1960s of this century.

Abdelwahab Elmessiri is an Arab thinker and writer. He has a Ph.D. in English and comparative literature from Rutgers University, U.S.A. He published scores of books and articles. Amongst which is "The Encyclopaedia of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism" which has eight volumes and is a result of 25 years research and critical inquiry with a team of 30 researchers.

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RAMA'DAAN A MONTH OF UNITY FOR MUSLIMS

By **Harun Yahya*** [Haroon Ya'hya]
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The 'Qura~n, to which falsehood can never draw near, which leads people out of the darkness and into the light and onto the path of our All-Wise, All-Knowing and Praise-worthy Lord, which is a guide, a source of glad tidings and a mercy for all Muslims, and a reminder and a comfort for those who fear Allah, was revealed in the month of Ramadan. This holy month in which Allah revealed His verses to our Prophet (PBUH) 1,400 years ago is described in these words in the 'Qura~n:

The month of Rama'daan is the one in which the 'Qura~n was sent down as guidance for humanity, with clear signs containing guidance and criterionn [for discrimination between what is right and wrong]. Any of you who are resident for the month should fast it. But any of you who are ill or on a journey should fast a number of other days. Allah desires ease for you; He does not desire difficulty for you. You should complete the

number of days and proclaim Allah's greatness for the guidance He has given you so that hopefully you will be thankful. (Chapter of Alba'qarah, 185)

The month of Rama'daan, which is also revealed to be "better than a thousand months," (Chapter of Al'qadr, 3) is also a fruitful one containing the Night of Decree. This month has a particular importance, purity and beauty for Muslims. As described by Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in the words "In the holy month of Rama'daan, the Islaamic world comes to consitute a single masjid [mosque], and this is such a masjid that in every corner of it millions of 'haafi'ih [those who have memorized the 'Qura~n] read the 'Qura~n, the word of Allaah, and cause others to hear it," throughout this month the Muslims of the world fulfil their obligations to fast, maintain the bounds set by Allaah in the verses, realize their helplessness and give thanks to Allaah for His blessings, pray

with all sincerity and endeavor to tame their earthly desires.

As emphasized by Bediuzzaman, one of the most important attributes of the month of Rama'daan is that it unites all the Muslims of the world. By means of this precious month the extent of all Muslims' need for unity and union, and the powerful force for world peace they can constitute if that unity is established, once again become apparent. The fact that the forces opposed to Islaam are expending such great energy, and the suffering being inflicted on believers in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, must encourage all Muslims to reflect on the importance of "acting in unison, leaving their differences aside and working to disseminate Islamic moral values."

The Islaamic world covers a huge geographic area populated by 1.2 billion Muslims. Unfortunately, it is characterized by tension, conflict, and disorder, all of which continue to threaten global peace and prosperity. All attempts to solve the region's problems have so far failed. But a review of its history shows that a strong central authority, ruling according to the 'Qura~nic morality and tolerance,

as well as respecting all people's rights and belief systems, had enabled this vast region to live in peace. The Ottoman Empire was the most recent example of this. And now, it is time to bring about a new Islaamic Union, for the current system, based upon nationalism, materialistic philosophies, and atheism can only worsen the current situation. Such an Islaamic Union would enable the Muslim world to live in peace, both internally and externally, and allow the entire world to benefit from its vast natural resources.

One of the first things we notice when analyzing the state of the Islaamic world is its many internal divisions due to deep-rooted distrust and disputes. Recent history has seen the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, and East Pakistan's (Bangladesh) war of independence from West Pakistan. The civil wars and internal conflicts in Afghanistan, Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and Algeria due to political and ethnic differences made it obvious that something is wrong with the Islaamic world. In addition, very divergent religious views and models are being practiced in the Islaamic world, because there is no central authority to determine what is and what is not compatible with Islaam,

establish consensus, and provide guidance to the general public. Catholics have the Vatican and Orthodox Christians have the Patriarchate, but there is no religious unity or central authority for Muslims.

However, solidarity is central to Islaam's character. After the death of our Prophet Mu'hammed (PBUH), the Islamic world was for a long time led by the institution of 'kilaafah, which provided religious guidance to the Muslims.

In our day, too, a progressive central authority could be formed. Establishing an Islaamic Union and a central Islaamic authority, based on democratic principles and the rule of law, would be major steps forward in resolving the Islaamic world's current problems. Several aspects of this proposed Islaamic Union are explained hereafter, such as its ability to:

- 1- Reach the entire Islaamic world. Therefore, it must be founded upon Islaam's core principles and not become the organ of a particular denomination or sect.
- 2- Support human rights, democracy, and free enterprise, and seek to achieve its mission of economic, cultural, and scientific development in the Islaamic world.
- 3- Establish friendly and harmonious relations with other countries or civilizations, and cooperate with the global community and the UN on such issues as controlling weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, international crime, and the environment.
- 4- Deal with the minority rights of Christians and Jews, as well as foreigners who migrate to Islaamic countries, consider their safety a priority, and value interfaith dialogue and cooperation.
- 5- Seek fair and peaceful solutions whereby both sides make compromises to end conflicts between the non-Muslims and Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, the southern Philippines, and other regions. It must defend the rights of Muslims as well as prevent radical Islaamic movements from driving the situation to into a dead-end.

Such a rational, considered, and just leadership will benefit the 1.2 billion Muslims who are struggling with so many problems, as well as all humanity at large. An Islaamic Union founded upon 'Qura~n principles will enable humanity to find peace and justice, and the good character prescribed by the 'Qura~n will deliver happiness. Since the era of the Prophet Mu'hammed (PBUH), Muslims led the way in science, reason, thought, art, culture, and civilization, and produced many benefits for humanity.

When Europe was in its dark ages, Muslims taught the world science, reasoning, medicine, art, hygiene, and countless other subjects. In order to restart the rise of Islaam, powered by the 'Qura~n's light and wisdom, present-day Muslims have to acquire guidance based on the Qura~n's morality and the Prophet's Sunnah (His example, or way of life).

How can this project be realized? We will investigate this issue as we proceed. Also, it must be remarked here that out of all Islaamic nations, Turkey in particular has an important role to play, as it is the heir of the Ottoman Empire, the founder of such an Islaamic Union which it ruled successfully for over 5 centuries. Turkey has the social infrastructure and state tradition necessary to fulfill the requirements of this important responsibility. Furthermore, of all Muslim states, it has the best-developed relations with the West and is therefore ideally placed to mediate the differences between the West and the Islaamic world. Turkey also has a tradition of tolerance and harmony, and represents the Ahl as-Sunnah belief as the majority of Muslims believe, rather than a certain sect. All of this makes Turkey the most qualified candidate for leading the envisaged Islaamic Union.

Finally, the solutions proposed here need to be implemented immediately, because the risk of a clash of civilizations between the Western and Islaamic worlds is increasing by the day. Setting up the Islaamic Union will

cause this danger to disappear.

History proves that the coexistence of different civilizations is not necessarily a source of tension and conflict. A multicultural state does not experience difficulties because of existing internal differences, but because of its inability to manage those differences. Different cultures that exist side by side choose either conflict or peace and cooperation, depending upon their existing levels of tolerance and whether they can or cannot control those factors leading to intolerance. At present, some Westerners and Muslims prefer hostility and conflict over tolerance and harmony. Thus, misunderstandings and prejudices against Islam and the Muslims continue to present certain difficulties. On the other hand, Westerners feel unnecessarily threatened because of various misunderstandings. Therefore, a solution to these problems is needed urgently to avoid even worse conflicts and misunderstandings.

An Islaamic Union: The Only Way for Order and Stability

The developments especially in the recent years clearly show that the Islaamic world is ripe for great and fundamental change. The 'Qura~n and the 'Hadiieeh literature suggest that the approaching period will be a bright one for the world's Muslims, God willing. Setting up the Islaamic Union will speed up the process and begin a new era of plenty and prosperity for humanity in general. The current situation may seem to be very negative at first look, whereas in reality each negative development signals the approach of a blessed period. War, destitution, famine, oppression, and tyranny against Muslims across the world are signs of the End Times foretold by our Prophet (PBUH). That all of these events are taking place is also a clear sign that the global rule of Islaamic morality is approaching, as prophesized by our Prophet (PBUH) (God knows best). Therefore, the current situation must not cause Muslims to feel despair and hopelessness;

on the contrary, it should motivate them and increase their zeal and excitement. In addition, they must act with the awareness that despairing of solace from God is not an option, for

Do not despair of solace from God. No one despairs of solace from God except for people who disbelieve. (Chapter of Yoosuf, 87) The great scholar Bediuzzaman Said Nursi explained, in his famous the Damascus Sermon (Hutbe-i Samiye), the conditions in which Muslims live, warned of the dangers of falling into despair, and spoke of the bright future awaiting them, as follows:

Despair is the most detrimental sickness. It has permeated into the heart of the Islaamic world... Such a despair that it has stifled our sublime morality, swerving our attention from the interests of the general to our personal interests. It is the very same despair that has broken our spiritual might... Despair is the most dreadful sickness of our people... It is the pretext of the coward, the inferior and the helpless... It is only Islaam which will truly and spiritually pervade the continents of the future and lead humanity to bliss both in this world and the next.

**The author, under the pen-name Harun Yahya, has written more than 200 books which are published in 37 languages all over the world. Harun Yahya's books appeal to all people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, regardless of their age, race and nationality, as they centre around one goal: to open the readers' mind by presenting the signs of God's eternal existence to them.*

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charity@probureau.net

Pro Bureau is a consultant engineering office, with a growing reputation for its approachable, effective and thoughtful service. This is characterized by our intention to create clear, simple and elegant architecture with integrity.

Background

Pro Bureau was established in December 1997 to provide a complete engineering design package as per the international codes and standards. We work from our purpose-designed studio in Al-Khobar , Saudi

Arabia, , with a collaborative approach to projects. Our experience is typified by our interest in the design and supervision process: technical issues, materials, context, environment, colour and placement in three dimensions. These beliefs are a source of inspiration to refine ideas in our creative loop.

Working for Allaah

We believe that every body has a great task to do in his life by working for the sake of his Creator through the talents and backgrounds gifted by Him.

We, at Pro Bureau, will put our talent in the cause of Allaah by providing our professional services free of charge for any charitable project. If any one wants to construct a charity project, the starting point is the design package. To contribute and assist in this charitable undertaking we will provide the complete design for free.

For the design process to commence, we would be needing information about the lot area, dimensions, laws and regulations in this area governing the set backs or maximum height, etc, and a copy of the land deed.

Our plan

We are planning to collect all charity projects designed by us or by other firms who are willing to offer their designs free of charge for charitable projects, and offer them for free download. Example projects include:

1. Mosques
2. 'Qura~n schools
3. Schools
4. Hospitals
5. Clinics

6. Various projects serving people with disabilities
7. Housing or shelters for the poor
8. Orphanages
9. Others.

We are also looking for having a professional team from different countries to help in the project construction phase.

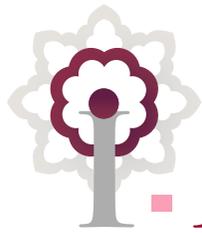
Therefore, if you find yourself ready professionally and willing to volunteer, please contact us to put your name and country in our professional volunteers list.

It is an open invitation to all who like to share their experience and donate their skills and efforts for a charitable cause to submit their names and CVs. The list of needed volunteers for such projects include, but is not limited to, engineers, contractors, material suppliers, or even support professionals like drivers, accountants, etc.

Please contact us at either of those addresses:

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charity@probureau.net

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