

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الحمد لله الذي هدانا لهذا
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Islam, Muslims, and America

ARSHAD KHAN

مسجد مكة

Islam, Muslims, and America

Islam, Muslims, and America:

UNDERSTANDING THE BASIS OF THEIR CONFLICT

Arshad Khan

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PREFACE

September 11, 2001, changed America. The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center brought home to Americans something they had heard about but never really experienced. It dramatically increased their personal and collective security concerns. Stunned and terrified by the event, Americans were eager to declare war on terrorism and initiate an attack on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. In the aftermath, Washington introduced new laws for combating terrorism; individual rights and personal freedom were cut back, government intrusion into private lives increased, and the economy slowed.

Following 9/11, America started adopting laws and policies that, in the past, have only been associated with undemocratic and autocratic foreign countries. While short-term restrictions and the loss of some freedoms are understandable due to the need to fight terrorism, their long-term application is not a viable solution. No freedom-loving people will ever desire such restrictions to become a part of their daily lives.

Islam, Muslims, and America identifies viable approaches to resolving the conflict between America and Muslims; these solutions lie with various governments, religious organizations, and individual Muslims and Americans. Collectively, they need to remove the root causes of the issues that drive Muslims and Americans apart, and that give Muslims and Americans such a negative view of each other. Unfortunately, after a brief period of self-evaluation, Americans have shown a disinclination to identify and address the root causes of the problems.

The American attitude has increased (in the case of Muslims) or created (in the case of Europeans) the widespread perception that they are arrogant. Muslims, who were highly supportive of and sympathetic to President Bush after 9/11, have been disappointed and upset by his subsequent actions, such as praising Sharon (when the Israeli army was invading the West Bank), and the war against Iraq — initiated on dubious grounds, based on what most Muslims believe is a hidden agenda, and in contravention of world opinion that was important only so long as it suited America.

Islam, Muslims, and America is not an exhaustive academic work intended only to be used as a research tool by scholars; its goals are to identify and discuss the reasons for Muslim-West alienation and to understand it in the context of Islamic teachings. Such an approach will enable readers to observe the apparent disconnect between true Islamic principles and their application, especially in the modern world. It will explain how extremist Muslims have deviated from Islam's true purpose and principles through their actions.

Islam, Muslims, and America will also clarify how a series of events, spread over centuries, has created the current negative perception of the West and America among Muslims. It is the cumulative effect of these events that has shaped Muslim thinking, beliefs, and attitude. (By the same token, these events have fed the West's negative view of Muslims, over the centuries; that is an inevitable part of this book, although it is not a main focus.) Some people may disagree with the interpretation and analysis of individual events presented here. However, it should be realized that even if some individual events are ignored, the overall picture remains unchanged. Therefore, rather than fixing attention on any particular event, I hope readers will view the current situation, in the context of historical events, from the "ten-thousand-foot level."

Please keep the following in mind as you read this book:

- It is not possible in a book of this length to provide in-depth knowledge of Islam — a way of life that encompasses the personal, social, economic, political, legal, and religious facets of existence.
- Due to the large number of topics covered in this book, it is not possible to discuss each event, crisis, and topic in depth. Each section is deliberately concise.
- I recognize that there can be disagreement regarding some items. For example, I have stated in this book that 10,000 people were murdered by Hafez al-Assad's military in Hama. However, the reported number of victims ranges from that figure to 38,000. Similarly, the reported number of Kashmiri civilians killed by the Indian forces ranges from 33,000 to 80,000, while the

number of Palestinian civilians reported killed at the Sabra and Shatila camps ranges from 800 to 2,000. Such variations can never be reconciled because there is no way for the numbers to be authenticated. What is important is to realize that the killings took place and that the magnitude of the massacres or killings does not decrease the severity of the crime nor its impact on the survivors.

I fully expect to be taken to task by the prejudiced and the extremists on both sides. However, in order to be impartial it was essential that the mistakes, injustices, and false perceptions of both sides be pointed out. Unless such mistakes are acknowledged, there can be no progress toward better understanding between America and Muslims. The time has come when finger pointing and mutual recriminations over past injustices should be abandoned and a new beginning attempted.

Introduction

Islam, Muslims, and America is divided into two parts:

- Part I: Understanding the Conflict — Background and Analysis
- Part II: Understanding Islamic Principles and Practice

Part I covers history and current events. It examines the rise and fall of the Islamic civilization, empires, and dynasties, and discusses various events which, since Islam was introduced 14 centuries ago, have shaped Muslim views and attitudes towards the West and America. It also identifies the factors that have led to the present depression (both economic and psychological) affecting Muslims worldwide

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the present conflict. It identifies historical as well as current events that have contributed to the current antagonistic situation between America and many Muslims. Besides discussing specific Muslim complaints against the West and America, it identifies the root causes of the problems that have soured their relations. Numerous historical and recent mistakes, as well as incorrect perceptions and biases maintained by both sides, are pointed out. Finally, with the objective of building bridges for a better and more peaceful future, specific recommendations are made that require action by both sides.

Part II focuses on the religion and its teachings, providing an overview of the fundamental principles, beliefs, and practical aspects of Islam. It offers information at a level that can be easily understood and absorbed by those who are unfamiliar with the religion. It encompasses diverse topics such as morals, good and bad deeds, personal characteristics, rights and obligations, women's

rights, Islamic law, sectarian differences, relations with other religions, day-to-day issues, as well as contemporary moral issues such as cloning, surrogate motherhood, and stem cell research.

Terminology

- ayatollah: Shia religious leader; literal meaning is “sign of God.”
- caliph: Leader of an Islamic polity, regarded as Prophet Muhammad^P's successor. The superscript “p” is a short form for “peace and blessings be upon him,” which Muslims recite each time the name of Prophet Muhammad^P is invoked.
 - Islam: Religion started by Adam, the first man, and formalized by Muhammad^P, the last prophet.
 - jihad: The most common form is an inner, personal struggle to be righteous. In extreme cases, it can involve laying down one’s life for a righteous cause, such as the defense of Islam.
 - Kaaba: Cube-shaped structure in Mecca towards which Muslims face when performing their ritual prayers. Built as place of worship by Prophet Adam and rebuilt by Prophet Abraham.
 - madrasa: Islamic religious seminary.
 - Muhammad^P: The prophet who formalized the religion of Islam.
 - mujahideen: Muslim fighters who take up arms in defense of Islam, Muslims or a righteous cause.
 - mullah: Local religious leader.
 - Muslim: Person who follows the religion of Islam (one who submits to the will of God).
 - Palestinians: Arabs who live in Palestine.
 - Sharia: Islamic law.
 - Shia: Minority sect of Islam primarily concentrated in Iran, Iraq, and the Indian subcontinent.
 - sultan: Ruler of a Muslim country, especially of the former Turkish Ottoman Empire.

- Sunnah: Actions, sayings, and approvals of Prophet Muhammad^P; also referred to as the Hadith.

Note 1: Koranic references are denoted in the format (25:32). The first number (25) refers to the chapter, while the second number (32) refers to the verse.

Note 2: Since the primary readers of this book will be American non-Muslims, the scripture that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad^P has been spelled “Koran,” in consideration of how it is commonly spelled in America, even though “Quran” is a closer reflection of the way in which it is pronounced in Arabic — the language in which it was revealed.

PART I

UNDERSTANDING THE CONFLICT:
BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

CHAPTER I: THE EVOLUTION AND RISE OF ISLAM

THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAM

Historical roots

According to Islam, Adam and Eve were the first human beings created by God. When He sent them to live on Earth, He instructed them to obey His commandments, follow His guidance, and worship Him. They were told to “submit to the will of God,” which is what the word *Islam* means. In accordance with His instructions, Adam and Eve led a life on Earth in conformity with God’s will. Their submission to God marks the beginning of Islam, according to its adherents. Nowadays, when reference is made to Islam, it means the religion taught by Prophet Muhammad^P of Arabia.

Periodic reinforcement and revival

After Adam, God periodically sent prophets to various nations and countries. They were instrumental in leading their people to the “right” path — monotheism and obedience to God. However, after the death of a prophet, it was typical for nations to drift back to an old way of life based on polytheism and other beliefs and activities that conflicted with God’s commands. To reinforce the message and revive the religion, God periodically sent prophets, for thousands of years.

Every prophet sent after Adam delivered the same message and guidance. According to Muslims, all prophets including Noah, Abraham, David, Moses,

and Jesus submitted to the will of God and, hence, followed Islam. Although prophets brought specific messages tailored to the unique issues and times of their own people, they never deviated from the primary message of Islam — submission to God.

Religion is formalized

In the year AD 610, Muhammad^P became a prophet in Arabia at the age of 40. Initially, he encountered stiff resistance and persecution. By the time he died in 632, he had formalized the religion of Islam and established an Islamic society and state. According to Islam, Muhammad^P is the last prophet and no more prophets will follow him. Therefore, the form of Islam that he preached and formalized, as per Islamic teachings, will remain unchanged until the end of time.

THE RISE AND SPREAD OF ISLAM

Where and how the religion spread

Islam spread rapidly after it was introduced in Arabia. In less than a century, an Islamic empire had spread across the Middle East and North Africa. Its reach extended from Spain in the west to Central Asia and China in the east. Muslim forces reached France, getting within 170 miles of Paris, but were defeated in 732 at the Battle of Tours. In 1529, Islamic forces laid siege to Vienna but failed to capture it.

During the early days of Islam, the driving force for expansion was the desire to spread the religion. Force was used when resistance was encountered, though the vanquished were not compelled to accept Islam. When Umar, the Islamic head of state, entered Jerusalem in 638, he made the Covenant of Umar, which guaranteed Christians freedom of religion, use of their places of worship, and the right to visit their holy places. For the Jews, he promised religious freedom and cancelled the Roman decree that had barred them from entering Jerusalem.

The initial expansion of the Islamic empire was due to its military strength. However, its expansion also required the conquering forces to become involved in the day-to-day administration of the regions under their control. The governments run by early Muslim rulers, efficient and relatively free from

corruption, combined with the message of a powerful faith to enable the establishment of a civilization that lasted for centuries.

622-632: Period under Muhammad^P

In 610, Muhammad^P started to preach Islam in Mecca, where he was bitterly opposed and persecuted. In 622, when persecution reached its height and a plot to murder him was hatched, he migrated to Medina. In Medina, where Muhammad^P was welcome, he was able to preach without restriction and establish the first Islamic society. During the 10 years that Muhammad^P spent in Medina, he was able to consolidate his power, take control of Mecca, and spread Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula, with the exception of a few pockets.

632-661: Period under the four caliphs

After Muhammad^P's death, the Islamic state had four leaders from 632 to 661. They carried the title "caliph," which means "successor." The four caliphs were:

1. Abu Bakr, from 632 to 634
2. Umar ibn al-Khattab, from 634 to 644
3. Uthman ibn Affan, from 644 to 656
4. Ali ibn Abu Talib, from 656 to 661

Abu Bakr, a very close companion of Muhammad^P, ruled for only two years. A simple and religious man, he was a highly capable and strong leader. Under his leadership, the Islamic empire began to expand outside the Arabian Peninsula. When his forces headed into Syria and Iraq, they faced powerful empires, including the Byzantine Empire.

Abu Bakr appointed Umar as the second caliph. During his rule, Syria, Jerusalem, Iran (Persia), Iraq, and Egypt came under the Islamic empire. After Umar's murder in 644, Uthman and Ali contested the caliphate. Uthman won, but he turned out to be a weak ruler who could not resist the influence of his relatives. A discontented group killed him in 656. During his rule, Islam reached Tunisia and extended further to the east.

Ali became the fourth caliph; during his rule serious internal issues arose. The relatives of Uthman, the third caliph, were upset with Ali because he could not bring to justice those who had killed Uthman. Ali's caliphate ended in 661 when he too was murdered.

661-750: Period under the Umayyad Dynasty

After Ali's assassination, the caliphate was taken over by his rival, Muawiyah, the governor of Syria, who established the Umayyad Dynasty. The Umayyads believed in succession based on inheritance, which was in conflict with the established Islamic practice of electing caliphs. In 661, the Umayyads moved the caliphate from Medina to Damascus. The shift in power to Damascus had far-reaching implications, the most important being that it shifted the caliph's main focus from religious to secular concerns.

The Umayyads continued to expand the reach of Islam. They extended the Islamic empire's influence to the borders of China and Transoxania, an area north of the river Oxus in Central Asia. In 715, Muslims captured the Central Asian cities of Bukhara and Samarkand. They also reached Sind, in India, and North Africa up to the Atlantic.

In 710, a small Islamic force crossed the eight-mile-wide strait that separates Africa from Spain in a daring raid that led to Spain's first contact with Islam. A year later, a Muslim force of 7,000 invaded Gibraltar. Within the next seven years, almost all of the Iberian Peninsula came under Islamic control. Islamic forces penetrated deep into France but were stopped at the Battle of Tours.

In 747, a rebellion against the Umayyads in Khorasan, Iran, led to the defeat of its last caliph, Marwan ibn Muhammad, and the end of the Umayyad Dynasty in 750.

750-1258: Period under the Abbasid Dynasty

The Abbasids came to power when they overthrew the Umayyads in 750. They ruled for more than five centuries and made Baghdad the political center of their empire. They distributed power among different ethnic groups and regions and converted the Arab-dominated Islamic empire into a multinational domain.

Despite the setback in France in 732, when the westward spread of Islam was halted, Islamic influence continued to spread into parts of Asia during the rule of the Abbasids. Islamic forces defeated the Chinese army in Transoxania in 751, which led to the spread of Islam in Central Asia. In the 10th century, Islam spread to Russia. In the 11th century, it spread to the northwestern part of India. The areas of influence under the Abbasids included the Indian subcontinent (now India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), Afghanistan, parts of what became the Soviet Union, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, China, and Africa.

The Crusades, a set of military expeditions launched by European Christians between the 11th and 13th centuries, to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims, weakened the Islamic empire. Also, with the passage of time, decentralization initiated by the Abbasids led to the weakening of their power. Many provinces were minimally controlled and some, such as the Fatimids of Egypt, became independent. The Abbasid Dynasty finally came to an end in 1258 when the Mongols captured Baghdad and executed the last Abbasid caliph.

750-950: Golden Age of Islam

When the Umayyad Dynasty was overthrown in 750, its sole surviving member, Abd al-Rahman ibn Muawiyah, escaped to Spain, where he restarted the Umayyad Dynasty and caliphate in 756. It was the beginning of a great civilization, one of the greatest the world has ever seen. It led to Spain's becoming the center of learning in Europe as well as the cultural center of Islam in the West.

The Golden Age of Islam lasted about two hundred years. During that period, the Islamic empire covered Spain, North Africa, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Palestine, and parts of Turkey. The Golden Age of Islam was characterized by:

- Flourishing of science, chemistry, astronomy, technology, mathematics, literature, philosophy, and the arts
- Development of the astrolabe, an instrument for measuring the altitude of heavenly bodies and determining their positions and movements, and the building of the world's first observatory
- Contributions to medicine, including drugs and expansion of knowledge of anatomy, dissection, and blood circulation
- Introduction of Arabic numerals, which influenced the development of algebra
- Advances in agriculture, including underground canals, networks of wells, waterwheels, and livestock improvement
- Development of the art of making paper
- Establishment of a paper mill in Baghdad, which had a significant influence on education and made possible the widespread distribution of books
- Development of Arabic into the language of international scholarship
- Massive efforts to translate scientific manuscripts into Arabic
- The establishment of numerous libraries

Many advances made during the Golden Age laid the groundwork for developments that led to the Renaissance in Europe. The peak of the Golden Age is considered to have occurred during the rule of al-Mamun, who died in AD 833.

ISLAM'S CONTRIBUTION AND IMPACT

Dignity

For centuries, Islam has helped millions of men and women lead their lives with dignity despite deprivations and difficult living conditions. It has provided them peace of mind even when facing a future that held little or no hope. It also provided an objective for their lives — achieving a far better life in the hereafter. It was an objective they believed could be achieved despite the hopeless circumstances in which they lived.

Islamic civilization

The Islamic civilization was one of the greatest contributions made by the religion of Islam. Its influence and benefits were not limited to Muslims; its impact was felt throughout the known world. The Islamic civilization brought into its fold people of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. They contributed to the advancement of knowledge and developments in various fields such as science, mathematics, and medicine. In particular, scientific development in the Islamic world, from the 8th to the 11th century, became the basis of knowledge in the world.

Global influence

The influence of Islam and the Islamic civilization was felt in vast areas that covered Asia, Europe, and Africa. The spread of Islam accelerated a few years after Muhammad's death. It included people of every ethnic group it contacted, including Arabs, Persians, Turks, Egyptians, Europeans, Russians, Chinese, Mongols, and Indonesians. Every area that converted to Islam during that period contributed to the Islamic civilization. A primary reason that the Islamic civilization was able to develop and flower was its message of brotherhood and its ability to absorb and incorporate from:

- Earlier civilizations
- Countries where it spread
- Various ethnic and racial groups
- Various languages

Nurturer of knowledge during the Dark Ages

The Dark Ages in Europe started in the late 5th century and lasted for approximately 600 years. The Islamic civilization was in full bloom during that period. It became the engine driving the expansion of knowledge and established high standards in mathematics, science, astronomy, medicine, and other fields. While Europe remained stagnant, Islamic scholars, scientists, and mathematicians made major advances. European scholars who flocked to the libraries and universities of the Islamic world then transferred the knowledge they gained back to Europe. The roots of the subsequent Renaissance, which occurred between the 14th and 16th centuries in Europe, are attributed to contact with the Islamic civilization that kept scholarship alive through the Dark Ages.

Areas of excellence and contribution

Contributions that can be attributed to the Islamic civilization extend to many areas, including:

- Astronomy: Accomplishments included the development of a precise solar calendar (Jilali); discovery of new stars; development of observatories, the quadrant, and the astrolabe (which led to advances in ocean navigation).
- Geography and history: World maps were developed, maritime explorations were made possible with skilled Islamic navigators, and comprehensive world histories and geographies were written.
- Medicine: Hospitals (including mobile units) were organized; areas of development included anatomy and physiology, hygiene, surgery and surgical instruments, and pharmacology.
- Mathematics: Numbers were organized into the decimal system; algebra and trigonometry were invented.
- Physics: The theory of parallels was demonstrated.

The Islamic civilization produced a number of world-renowned scholars, scientists, and physicians. Some of the most prominent were:

- Umar Khayyam (astronomer)
- ibn Batuta (world traveler, also known as Muslim Marco Polo)
- ibn Khaldun (historian and geography writer)
- al-Khawarizmi, al-Biruni, Banu Musa, and al-Hasan (mathematicians)
- ibn Sina and al-Razi (physicians)
- Khalaf Abul-Qasim al-Zahrawi (surgeon)
- ibn al-Haytham (physicist)

Another major Muslim achievement was the writing of books and papers. Razi wrote approximately 200 books, while Thabit ibn Qurra had more than

seventy original works to his credit. Ibn Sina's medical book, *al-Qanun*, was used as a standard textbook for 700 years in many Asian countries as well as in Europe. Muslim scholars also translated thousands of books into Arabic, which they used to enrich their libraries and draw readers from all over Europe.

CHAPTER 2: THE DECLINE OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION AND PRESENT STATUS

DECLINE OF MUSLIM DYNASTIES AND EMPIRES

How the decline occurred

The Islamic civilization reached its peak during the Golden Age of Islam from 750 to 950, then began a slow decline that continued for many centuries. A variety of factors led to the decline and ultimate end of the Islamic empire.

The End of the Abbasid Dynasty

During the rule of Harun al-Rashid, which lasted from 786 to 809, parts of North Africa broke away from Abbasid control. Under al-Mamun, the Islamic civilization thrived (the cultural achievements of the period are listed elsewhere) and he was recognized as a great ruler, but even so the territorial losses continued; the decline worsened following his death in 833. In the next four centuries, a number of provinces broke away. During the 11th and 12th centuries, the Crusades weakened the Islamic empire. The Crusades ended in 1187 after Salahuddin Ayyubi, of Egypt, defeated the Crusaders and conquered Jerusalem — but not before considerable damage had been done.

The Abbasid rule came to an end in 1258 when the Mongols sacked Baghdad. This led to the division of the Islamic empire into three parts dominated by the Mongols, Arabs, and Turks (Seljuk and Mamluk):

- Central Asia (under Mongols)
- North Africa (under Arabs)
- West (under Turks)

The Fatimid Dynasty

The Fatimid Dynasty, which belonged to the Shia sect of Islam, was founded in the 10th century when the central control of the Abbasids declined. The Fatimids established a caliphate in North Africa and extended their influence to the Red Sea, Yemen, and parts of Syria and Palestine. However, the Fatimids never fulfilled their desire to control the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq — areas considered to be the center of the Islamic world. The Fatimid dynasty lasted until the 12th century.

Seljuk Turks

The Seljuk Turks, originally from an area near the Aral Sea, were tough fighters who began to play a role in the Middle East in the 11th century. They controlled a state, nominally under the Abbasid caliphs, that extended from Central Asia to Asia Minor. The area under their control included all of the Middle East, part of the Arabian Peninsula, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkey. It disintegrated following internal conflicts and power struggles that started in 1092. The Seljuks' rule lasted until the 13th century.

The Mongols

The Mongols, led by Genghis Khan, became a very powerful force in the 13th century. They overran China, Russia, Central Asia, Central Europe, the Caucasus, and northern Iran. In 1258, led by Halagu Khan (a grandson of Genghis Khan), the Mongols attacked Baghdad and ended the rule of the Abbasids. With the Mongol takeover of Baghdad, most of the city's 100,000 inhabitants were killed.

The Mongol attack devastated the Islamic heartland and the weakened civilization went into a decline. In a short time, the Mongols shattered a legacy of five hundred years. They destroyed irrigation systems, libraries, and cultural achievements of the Golden Age. The Mongols culminated their destruction by killing scientists and scholars. Their onslaught ended in 1260 when they moved against Egypt and were defeated by the Mamluks.

After coming into contact with Islam, Mongols began to embrace the religion. They recognized Islam as the official religion at the start of the 14th century. Tamerlane, a descendent of Genghis Khan, led the Mongols' second major attack in the 14th century. His forces swept across Central Asia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and India. His vast empire extended from Kiev in Russia to western China. However, Tamerlane failed to install stable governments in captured territories and his empire disintegrated following his death.

The fall of Spain in 1492

The first resistance to Muslim rule in Spain came in the 11th century, as they weakened due to internal dissension; this was put down with the help of North African Berbers. Despite the growth of external threats, lack of unity continued to plague Muslims. By contrast, Christian kingdoms continued to form alliances and started to present a real threat. The result was that Muslims began to be pushed steadily back to the south. By the 13th century, they had been forced to retreat to a few scattered kingdoms in southern Spain.

In 1469, Ferdinand and Isabella (known as the Catholic kings), married and joined forces. Helped by the Muslims' split in ranks, they captured Granada, the last Muslim kingdom, in 1492. Muslims lived in Spain until the Inquisition, when they lost considerable rights; and, with life becoming very difficult, they began to emigrate. The remaining Muslims were forced out of Spain at the beginning of the 17th century.

End of the Safavid Empire

The Safavid Empire was founded in Persia (Iran) in 1501 and lasted until 1722. It was a Shiite empire, and relations with its Sunni neighbors were very difficult due to sectarian differences. It was the second Islamic empire to form after the Ottoman Empire. Invading Afghans ended the Safavid Empire in 1722.

End of the Mughal Empire

A number of Muslim dynasties ruled over India following its first invasion from the northwest by Mahmud Ghazni in the year 1000. They included the Slave, Khilji, Tughlaq, Sayyid, and Lodhi dynasties.

In 1526, Babar, a descendant of Genghis Khan, defeated Ibrahim Lodhi, India's ruler. Following his victory at Panipat, he founded the Mughal Empire, which ruled the Indian subcontinent for more than three hundred years. While

the first six Mughal kings were powerful, subsequent rulers were weak and ineffectual. Their power continued to diminish as the British colonized India. In 1857, following a revolt against the British, the last Mughal ruler was deposed and exiled to Burma.

End of the Ottoman Empire

The Turk-dominated Ottoman Empire, founded by Osman, came to power in 1299. In the 14th century it captured most of Asia Minor from the Byzantine Empire. In 1453, it took Constantinople and made it the capital, renaming it Istanbul. The Ottomans continued to expand to:

- Southeast Europe: Greece, Serbia, Bosnia, and Hungary
- East and South: Iraq, Arabia, and Egypt

The Ottomans reached their peak under Suleiman the Magnificent, who died in 1566. They reached Poland, but their second attempt to take Vienna failed in 1683. That was the turning point for the Ottomans. They were driven out of Poland in the 17th century and from the Balkans and Greece in the 19th century. The Ottoman Empire broke up after the end of World War I, in which it was allied with Germany. In 1922, the Turkish Sultanate was abolished followed by the Turkish caliphate in 1924. In 1928, Turkey was declared a secular state.

MODERN WORLD EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Colonial subjugation

In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt, which was a part of the Ottoman Empire. The invasion spearheaded a campaign of European intervention in the Middle East. Subsequent events included:

- 1830: France occupied Algeria
- 1839: Britain occupied Aden
- 1853: Arab sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf recognized Britain as the dominant power in the Gulf
- 1857: British crown took over India
- 1881: France occupied Tunisia
- 1882: Britain occupied Egypt
- 1906: Morocco-Algenciras conference formalized division between France and Spain
- 1911: Italy occupied Libya

During World War I, the British incited Arabs to revolt against the Ottoman Empire by promising aid and independence. The Arabs managed to divert the Turks, who were Germany's allies, and contributed to the Allied victory. However, Britain and France secretly agreed to partition the Arab areas of the Ottoman Empire, with the result that France occupied Syria and Lebanon while Britain took over Palestine, Iraq, and Transjordan.

Colonial expansion by the Europeans, at its peak in the 19th century, led to loss of freedom for large parts of the Islamic world and was a turning point in Muslim history. Countries not directly subjugated either fell under European influence or were under threat of being overcome by it. The most important aspect of colonial subjugation for Muslims was that it undermined traditional Islamic systems of governance, social structure, and education.

Major 20th-century developments

The Balfour Declaration sows seeds of future conflict

In 1896, Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian Jew and the founder of Zionism, wrote a paper that proposed the establishment of a Jewish state in Argentina or Palestine. In 1917, when Arabs constituted 92% of Palestine's population, the British issued the Balfour Declaration that promised support for a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. Jewish leaders considered this to mean that the British supported the establishment of a Jewish country. However, historians disagree over its interpretation. Some do not believe the declaration supported the creation of a Jewish state because it contained no mention of the word *state*.

The Balfour Declaration resulted in an increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine. The influx accelerated considerably after Hitler came to power in Germany and started to persecute Jews. The increase in Jewish immigration caused serious conflicts with the British, who tried to control the immigration, and with the local Arab population. In 1947, the United Nations (UN) decided to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. After Israel declared its independence in 1948, Arab neighbors attacked the newly formed Jewish state and war broke out. The Arabs were defeated and millions of Palestinians became refugees.

There were three subsequent wars between the Arabs and the Israelis: in 1956, 1967, and 1973. The Arabs lost each time. In spite of many attempts to reach a permanent peace since the first war, it has remained elusive and, to this day,

Arabs and Israelis remain enemies in a war with new battlegrounds in the streets and towns of Palestine and Israel.

Islamic states are formed

In the 20th century, European powers started to allow their Asian and African colonies independence; this included many countries that had large or predominant Muslim populations, such as:

- Africa: Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Niger, Chad, Somalia, Niger, Mali, and Senegal
- Asia: Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Brunei
- Middle East: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, the Yemens, TransJordan, Libya, Kuwait, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates

Most of the colonies became free through a peaceful process, although some resorted to armed revolt, including Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Indonesia. The Algerian revolt against France was brutal and bloody. India was partitioned in 1947, with the state of Pakistan carved out as a separate, Muslim entity, in what was a fairly peaceful process. However, the partition led to the cross-migration of Hindus and Muslims between India and Pakistan, as well as widespread Hindu-Muslim riots. Millions were killed during the migration and riots that engulfed the subcontinent.

ISLAM IN TODAY'S WORLD

Widespread underdeveloped Muslim societies

Muslim countries at this time are, by and large, relatively underdeveloped. The reasons include:

- Wrong priorities
- Mass illiteracy and lack of education
- Harmful customs and practices
- Religious and political leaders who reach their positions due to hereditary and social factors rather than knowledge, character, and ability
 - Paying lip service to, but not following, the teachings and principles of Islam that the leaders claim to uphold
 - Personal characteristics that do not meet the high standards set by Islam
 - Paying attention to Islamic acts of worship, such as praying and fasting, but failing to implement its high values in society

• Paying lip service to, but not implementing, the rights enjoined by Islam such as:

- Democracy
- Equality and justice
- Fundamental and human rights
- Women's rights
- Succession rights for property
- Freedom to choose mates

Population

Various sources provide different estimates for the worldwide population of Muslims. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, there are 1.21 billion Muslims, representing 20% of the world population. It is the second largest religion after Christianity, which is claimed by 33% of the population. Islam is estimated to be growing at an annual rate of 2.9% while Christianity is growing at 2.3%. If present trends continue, Islam will become the largest religion before the end of the 21st century.

Areas of concentration

Followers of Islam are found in all parts of the world. About 47% of Muslims live in four southern and southeastern Asian countries: Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The countries with the largest numbers of Muslims are:

- Indonesia: 201 million
- Pakistan: 140 million
- India: 123 million
- Bangladesh: 109 million
- Turkey: 66 million
- Egypt: 65 million
- Nigeria: 63 million

The distribution of Muslims, early in the 21st century, may surprise some people:

- Muslims are a majority in 54 countries
- Even though Islam began in the Middle East, Arabs account for only 22% of Muslims
 - 30% of Muslims live in the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh)

- Even though India has the third largest Muslim population in the world, it forms only 12% of India's huge population
- Muslims are in a majority in two European countries — Bosnia and Albania
- Six million Muslims live in the United States
- Five million Muslims live in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom

Ethnic diversity

Since Islam taught that ethnicity is an irrelevant factor for those coming into its fold, it appealed broadly across continents and ethnic divisions. Consequently, followers of Islam include practically every ethnic group. Large numbers of Muslims can be found among Asians, Europeans, Africans, Persians, Arabs, Chinese, Russians, Malays, Mongols, and other ethnic groups.

Cultural diversity

The geographic range of Muslims has resulted in broad cultural diversity, which is reflected in languages, attire, food, customs, and traditions. Muslims living in each area have distinctive characteristics that, in many cases, seem odd to Muslims living in other areas. This diversity has also resulted in local traditions and customs seeping into the practice of Islam even though, at times, such practices are contradictory and violate Islamic teachings. In general, no local practice is unacceptable to Islam so long as it does not violate Islamic principles.

Political diversity

Muslims do not acknowledge any central Islamic religious or political authority. Mecca and Medina are considered to be religious, not political, centers. Political leadership of Muslims varies from country to country and region to region. Some Muslim countries are monarchies; others are democracies, and still others are military dictatorships. The diverse political frameworks may include rule by Sharia, or Islamic law, as well as presidential or parliamentary styles of government.

The Myth of unity and brotherhood

Islam teaches that Muslims must be united in a single brotherhood, or Ummah, by a common faith. On a personal level, Muslims consider Muslims all

over the world as their brothers and sisters. They sympathize with them during difficult times and crises. However, political unity has been a mirage, despite all the lip service paid to it. Politically, at this time, Muslims are even more disunited than they have been for most of their history.

Common misconception about Arabs and Muslims

Islam started in an Arab country and spread across many diverse countries all over the world. Over time, Arabs became a minority among Muslims. Many non-Muslims mistakenly think all Muslims are Arabs when, in fact, at present the majority of Muslims are non-Arabs. Arabs may be Muslim, Christian, or Jewish. Just 22% of Muslims are Arabs. In other words, 78% of Muslims are *not* Arabs. And in the 22 Arab countries, about 7% of the population is non-Muslim.

ISLAM IN AMERICA

History of Islam in America

The first Muslims to arrive in America were African slaves. Due to their lack of freedom as well as unstable social and family conditions, they were unable to maintain their identity and, over time, Islam was lost by their offspring. Arabs (including Muslims and non-Muslims) started to immigrate at the beginning of the 20th century, followed by European Muslims, although the number of immigrants was insignificant during the first half of the 20th century.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Black Muslim movement attracted many African-Americans. However, many converts turned away from the Black Muslim religion when they realized that it did not represent true Islam and, in fact, preached the opposite of what orthodox Islam stood for. The first important defector was Malcolm X, who broke away from the Black Muslim movement and joined mainstream Islam. Following his lead, over time a large number of African-Americans defected from the Black Muslim movement. A sizeable number of African-Americans also converted directly from Christianity to Islam.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a large number of Muslim immigrants arrived in the US. They were the dependents and relatives of the tens of thousands of Muslim students who came to America from all parts of the world to obtain an education but never went home after completing their studies.

Population

Islam is the fastest growing religion in America. At this time, an estimated six million Muslims live in the United States. Some estimates run as high as eight million. Assuming six million is correct, the American Muslim population is on a par with the American Jewish population. Muslims outnumber Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians.

About one million Muslims are estimated to be African-Americans, though some figures run as high as two million. According to a Zogby International poll commissioned by the American Muslim Council in August 2000, 22.4% of American Muslims were born in the US, and the percentage of American Muslims by origin is:

- 26.2% Middle East Arab
- 24.7% South Asia
- 23.8% African-American
- 11.6% Other
- 10.3% Middle East non-Arab
- 3.4% East Asia

Dynamic community

Muslims in America are found in all walks of life, though they tend to be better educated than the average American non-Muslim. More than 61% of American Muslims are college graduates, compared to 43.7% of all Americans. A very high percentage of Muslims are professionals such as doctors, engineers, and scientists. There are Muslims in all 50 states. They are distributed throughout the regions in the following proportions:¹

- East: 32.2%
- South: 25.3%
- Central/Great Lakes: 24.3%
- West: 18.2%

American Muslims patronize hundreds of part-time Islamic schools, a few colleges, and more than two thousand mosques. Thousands of community centers have been established all over the country to provide cultural and social programs.

1.Source: Zogby International, August 2000

CHAPTER 3: DEFINING EVENTS AND HOW MUSLIMS VIEW THEM

HISTORICAL EVENTS

Introduction

After Muhammad^P formalized Islam as a religion and established the first Islamic society and state, the religion had a meteoric rise that led to the establishment of the Islamic civilization. After a glorious era, it started a descent that continues today. Though there have been periodic attempts at revival, Muslims have had, at best, limited success. The events of the last 14 centuries, since Muhammad^P introduced Islam, have shaped the way Muslims think and how they react to what is happening around them and in the rest of the world.

The following sections describe how Muslims perceive some of the major events that have influenced their thinking and behavior.

The Decline of Islamic civilization after its Golden Age

The Islamic civilization was at its zenith during the Golden Age, from 750 to 950, which is the benchmark against which Muslims compare their current condition. Since that time, except for brief periods, Muslims' political and economic condition overall have deteriorated in tandem with the decline of the Islamic civilization. Despite the tremendous deterioration that has already taken place, their decline continues, except in isolated pockets. Most Muslims

perceive their current condition as being the worst ever in the nearly fourteen-hundred year history of Islam.

The Crusades

Christians launched a number of Crusades against the Muslims. Pope Urban II initiated the first Crusade in 1095 with the objective of regaining Jerusalem from the Muslims. He succeeded, in 1099. When the Crusaders captured Jerusalem after a five-week siege, they massacred the city's Jews and Muslims.

In 1144, Muslim captured Edessa, one of four Crusader states along the Palestinian and Syrian coast. That triggered the second Crusade, which took place in 1147. The Crusades effectively ended in 1187, when Salahuddin Ayyubi defeated the Crusaders and recaptured Jerusalem.

Additional attempts were made, and a third Crusade was initiated a year after Salahuddin's victory; but they failed to realize their objectives. In the following century, Europeans launched a number of expeditions against the Muslims. Muslims perceive the Crusades as the start of the Western civilization's systematic effort against Islam that, under various guises, still goes on.

The failed Turkish siege of Vienna

The Ottoman Empire's first attempt to conquer Vienna during its expansionist drive (which ultimately failed) took place in 1529. They tried again in 1683; the second siege also failed. One of the primary reasons for the Turks' defeat was the advanced firepower the Europeans used against them. In the three centuries since then, Muslims have been on the defensive, especially since the establishment of European colonial empires in Africa and Asia.

The end of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire came to an end in 1922, when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, an army officer, took control of Turkey. He declared it a republic and deposed the sultan. In 1924, world Muslims lost the symbolic head of the Islamic community when Ataturk abolished the caliphate.

Kemal Ataturk implemented major changes in Turkey and made it a secular state. He was the only leader in the first half of the 20th century who led any serious attempt to modernize and uplift Muslims from their economically depressed condition. Ataturk's attempt to catapult his country into modernism

and to Westernize it was not appreciated by Muslims throughout the world. Instead of assessing and addressing the problems that had led to their decline, they lamented the loss of a figurehead leader, the caliph.

Revival and reform movements

The condition of Muslims in the past two centuries led to the development of many revival and reform movements. These movements had different objectives, including educational and social reform, economic uplift, and religious revival.

One of the reform movements with significant worldwide impact is the religious movement started by Abd al-Wahhab, an Arabian who died in 1792. His reform effort led to the development of the puritanical Wahhabi Islamic sect. Followers of Abd al-Wahhab supported the founder of the present Saudi dynasty, Muhammad ibn al-Saud, and helped him come to power. Since then, the Saudi royal family has let the ideology of the Wahhabis govern their country. They have kept the Wahhabis happy by adhering to religious extremism and exporting their religious beliefs. As part of their effort to project a religiously correct image to their domestic religious extremists, Saudi rulers have patronized extremist schools and religious organizations outside their country. They include many of the madrassas that have been producing religious zealots with minimal knowledge and understanding of the secular world.

Egypt has seen the growth of many religious movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimeen), which has branches in many countries, and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. For many of these movements, the goal has been to slow or prevent Westernization and to establish an Islamic society. Osama bin Laden's right-hand man, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahri, headed one of the factions of the Islamic Jihad that has been active in Egypt since the late 1970s. Its goal is to overthrow the Egyptian government and replace it with an Islamic state.

The end of the colonial era

After World War I, European countries started to think seriously about granting independence to colonies in Asia and Africa. In 1922, Egypt became nominally independent from Britain, while Iraq became independent in 1932. In 1946, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria were granted independence by Britain and France. Muslim countries that became independent after World War II include

Indonesia, Pakistan, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Malaysia, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Kuwait, Algeria, and the United Arab Emirates.

The boundaries of many of the new countries in the Middle East, including Jordan and Iraq, were delineated without much regard for historical or ethnic considerations. Decisions were based on political payoffs; Arab royal families were paid in return for their military help against the Ottoman Empire and others who fought the British and their Allies during World War II, or for other subjective considerations.

Since these national boundaries were not based on factors that would tend to support their legitimacy, the leaders of the newly independent nations had to face enormous artificial problems. The machinations of leaders in neighboring countries forced them to focus on survival and to build up armies instead of an economic infrastructure. This happened to India, Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Kuwait. Instead of moving forward, many of these countries ended up in worse condition than before independence. Generations were denied basic education as well as health and social services. These demarcation decisions laid seeds of trouble for years and decades to come, as has been demonstrated clearly in the Iraq-Kuwait crisis of 1990 and the festering Palestine problem.

Saudi Arabia comes under the Saud family rule

In 1902, Abdul Aziz al-Saud captured Riyadh and started the modern Saud Dynasty in Arabia. He consolidated the oil-rich country and helped the British defeat the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled this region until then. Following the end of Turkish rule, the country was renamed Saudi Arabia, in 1933. An overwhelming majority of Muslims believe that the Arab revolt against the Turks was the result of a conspiracy by the West with two objectives:

- To weaken Muslims by making them fight each other, and
- To gain control of Saudi Arabia's vast oil resources.

EVENTS AFTER 1947

Partition of India

Before the British left India in 1947, they partitioned the colony into two countries: India and Pakistan. Pakistan became the first officially declared Islamic country of the modern era. While it might sound appropriate to provide separate lands for two distinct groups, this decision wrought chaos in the

region. The religion-based partition touched off mass migrations: Hindus migrated from Muslim-majority areas to India, while Muslims migrated to Pakistan from Hindu-majority areas. Still, although millions fled across the boundaries, and more than three million Hindus and Muslims were killed during their migration attempts, many chose to remain behind.

Millions of poor and illiterate Muslims stayed in India, while most educated Muslims and leaders made it to Pakistan. Consequently, Muslims in Hindu-majority India were subjected to blatant discrimination and, lacking leadership, were additionally vulnerable. There are some 123 million Indian Muslims; their condition has gone from bad to worse in the past five decades and continues to deteriorate even now. Most live in ghettos and are periodically attacked by armed Hindus, often actively aided by the police. Since 1947, hundreds of thousands of Muslims have been killed in riots and pogroms. In just one month, March 2002, more than 800 Muslims were killed in a single Indian state, Gujarat. Some estimates put the number of Muslims killed in the riots at over 2,000.

In 1992, the well-known historic Babri mosque was demolished by thousands of ultranationalist Hindus in a well-planned attack. Despite months of warning signs and openly aired threats, the government and police did nothing to prevent the attack. Indian Muslims perceived that event as the worst symbolic act against them; it led to riots that killed thousands of Muslims and destroyed thousands of their businesses and homes.

Kashmir

When India was partitioned in 1947, Kashmir was expected to be made a part of Pakistan based on partition rules. However, the Hindu ruler of Kashmir, which was overwhelmingly Muslim, opted to join India — against the wishes of the Kashmiris. The people revolted, forcing him to ask India for military help; that led to war between India and Pakistan. Intervention by the United Nations led to a cease-fire in January 1949 and India promised to hold a plebiscite, as UN resolutions demanded, to determine the wishes of the Kashmiris. However, India used the cease-fire to buy time and consolidate its physical hold on Kashmir.

Pakistan joined the American-sponsored SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) anti-communist defense treaty in 1954, which was followed by its membership in the CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) treaty. Those actions, which took place at the height of the Cold War, provided India an opportunity

to enlist the help of the Soviet Union, which had started to view Pakistan as an unfriendly nation because of its military ties with America. Subsequently, the Soviet Union vetoed every United Nations resolution on Kashmir that referred to the Kashmiris' right of self-determination and cited India's prior commitment to the United Nations and the Kashmiris.

Since 1947, Kashmir has been a festering problem. In 1989, it exploded into an armed rebellion that is still continuing. More than 700,000 Indian army troops and paramilitary personnel have tried unsuccessfully to suppress a population of only seven million. An estimated 60,000 Kashmiris have been killed since 1989 — the equivalent of more than two million people being killed in the United States. To put this in perspective, some 54,000 American lives were lost in the Vietnam War.

Muslims view the Kashmir issue as a classic example of Western (and particularly American) indifference to Muslim suffering and issues. While America went to extreme lengths to impose and force implementation of UN resolutions on Iraq, it has never required India to fulfill its UN obligations. America has also ignored India's gross violations of human rights in Kashmir, which have been well documented by various human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Violations include thousands of cases of torture, deaths in custody, extrajudicial executions, "disappearances," and 6,300 reported rapes.

According to Muslims, America applies a different set of rules to India for two main reasons. First, it is a large country that benefits American business interests. Second, it is strategically positioned against China, which America considers to be perhaps its greatest potential long-term threat.

Palestine

Israel was carved out of Palestine in 1948 to provide a homeland for the Jews. Since then, Israelis have defeated Arabs in four wars. During the 1967 war, Israel expanded its boundaries considerably and occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Since 1948, Israeli society has prospered economically, while most Palestinians have been living in ghetto-like conditions, either within Palestine or as refugees in other countries, with no hope for the future.

Muslims throughout the world view the Palestine problem as a religious issue. The Israelis now occupy Jerusalem, where the al-Aqsa mosque is located. Al-Aqsa is revered as the third most important Islamic religious site, after Mecca

and Medina. Muslims believe that Jews want to take over the al-Aqsa mosque, which is adjacent to the holiest site for Jews, the Wailing Wall. The basis for such thinking is the attempt by an Australian tourist to burn down the mosque in 1969, two years after Israel occupied East Jerusalem.

Muslims are incensed at the Israeli occupation of Palestine and by the way in which the Palestinians have been oppressed and denied freedom since 1967. Most consider the oppression of the Palestinians as equivalent to the oppression of all Muslims.

The overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran

In 1951, Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh, the nationalist prime minister of Iran, nationalized the oil industry and formed a national oil company in order to control his country's oil resources. The nationalization caused a financial loss to the British government because it owned a significant part of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which was put out of business by Mossadegh's action. It is interesting to note that the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had been paying far more to the British government in taxes than it had been paying to the Iranians. The British retaliated by imposing a worldwide embargo on Iranian oil, freezing Iran's sterling assets, and banning the export of goods to Iran.

The Iranian monarch, the Shah of Iran, opposed Mossadegh. In 1952, Mossadegh resigned after a power struggle with the Shah. However, street rioting forced the Shah to reinstate him. The British, who could not come to terms with their loss, proposed to the Americans that they jointly overthrow Mossadegh. The Americans responded favorably, in part because they had started to get worried about the Tudeh (Communist) party's role and the potential for the Russians to get a foothold in Iran at the height of the Cold War. A British-American plan, code named Operation Ajax, was developed to overthrow Mossadegh.

The CIA and MI6, the British Secret Intelligence Service, jointly executed Operation Ajax in August 1953. Initially, the coup failed and the Shah was forced to flee to Italy. However, the plan ultimately succeeded; Mossadegh was overthrown, and the Shah returned to power. Subsequently, a consortium of American, British, French, and Dutch oil companies reached a deal with Iran to operate its oil facilities. The deal was based on equal sharing of profits between the consortium and Iran.

Arab defeats in four wars

In the first Arab-Israeli war, which took place when Israel was created in 1948, the Israelis defeated the combined armies of its Arab neighbors. In 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal. This action led to military intervention by the British and French, who bombed Egyptian airfields and took over the canal, while the Israeli army moved into the Sinai and defeated the Egyptian army.

In the Six-Day War of 1967, the Israelis again defeated the Arabs, whose coalition included the Syrians, Jordanians, and Egyptians. In that war, Israel reached the height of its expansion and occupied the Golan Heights, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem's Old City.

In 1973, Egypt launched a surprise attack that drove the Israelis away from the Suez Canal. The Israelis mounted a successful counterattack and pushed the Egyptians back to the canal. When a cease-fire was implemented, the Egyptian army was in complete disarray.

The four successive defeats have been a deep humiliation for Muslims, reinforced their perception that they are being targeted and victimized by alliances of non-Muslims, and have introduced a profound sense of frustration and helplessness. They attribute the defeats to superior Israeli technology and military support provided by the United States, which gives Israel aid to the tune of \$3 billion per year, including \$1.8 billion in military aid. Since 1949, Israel has received over \$90 billion in assistance from the United States. It is remarkable that the aid to Israel, whose GDP exceeds that of many European countries, should account for one-sixth of the total US foreign aid.

The 1973 Oil Embargo

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war led the Arabs to impose an oil embargo on Western countries. For the first time in more than a 1000 years, the Arabs were united. Along with the oil embargo, they raised the price of oil dramatically, and the combination caused gasoline shortages in America. The temporary success of the embargo, which disrupted day-to-day life in the West, gave Arabs and Muslims their first sense of power in modern times. However, that was a temporary phenomenon as the price of oil collapsed after only a few years. The loss of pricing power and ability to control the oil market has led to a widespread view among Muslims that American oil companies and Western governments have conspired to hurt oil-rich Muslim countries economically.

Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan

A communist government came to power in Afghanistan in 1978. Their introduction of reforms was bitterly opposed by ultraconservative Muslim Afghans. In 1979, when it appeared that the wobbly government might fall, the Soviet Union sent in military forces to help prop up the communists. The move backfired when Afghans reacted by starting a guerrilla campaign. Americans, sensing an opportunity to weaken the Soviet Union through a proxy war, helped the Afghan rebels. Afghan guerillas were provided billions of dollars in aid and state-of-the-art weapons including the deadly Stinger missile, which helped turn the tide of war.

Muslim men from the world over participated in Afghanistan's war against the Soviets. They responded to the first and only widespread call in modern history for participation in the extreme form of *jihad*, which requires the taking up of arms in the defense of Islam or of Muslims. After a decade of war, the Soviet army was forced to withdraw in 1989. The mujahideen's victory against a superpower was a great morale booster for Muslims throughout the world. However, the victory was short-lived as political and tribal rivalries embroiled Afghans in a civil war that caused far more death and destruction than the Soviet army had inflicted.

The Breakup of the Soviet Union

The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989 changed the political map of Central Asia and led to the creation of many new countries with Muslim majority populations: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. With the lifting of restrictions on the practice of religion in those areas, there was a resurgence of Islam. The new political setup also led to closer ties and economic relations with neighboring countries to the south, all Islamic.

Another consequence of the breakup was the revolt in Chechnya, a predominantly Muslim republic under Russian rule. Russia refused to grant it independence, and the result has been a protracted and bloody conflict that started in 1994 and still continues. Muslims point to Chechnya as an example, in addition to Bosnia, of ruthless suppression of Muslims without any meaningful protest by Western powers.

The Gulf War

In 1990, Iraq captured Kuwait in a lightning attack. The United States reacted to the invasion by organizing a coalition of 28 countries with the objective of driving Iraq out of Kuwait. Many Muslim countries joined the coalition (some out of fear), including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt. In 1991, the coalition forces attacked Iraqi occupation forces in Kuwait. The highly acclaimed Iraqi army, which was expected to put up stiff resistance due to its battle experience in the eight-year war with Iran, was routed in less than four days. Many Muslims view its rout as the defeat of a Muslim country rather than the defeat of an aggressor.

The Bosnia massacres

The breakup of Yugoslavia led to the creation of new countries such as Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia. Bosnia achieved nationhood only after one of the bloodiest struggles in the history of Europe. When Bosnia declared its independence, Serbians started a campaign of “ethnic cleansing,” against Muslims. Mass executions, burning and pillaging, rape, and other heinous crimes were carried out for more than two years. While the world watched in horror, the West stood frozen. An ineffectual arms embargo stopped weapon supplies to the Bosnians, the victims, but did not block arms supplies to Serbian aggressors.

Muslims all over the world believe that the arms embargo, and the West’s reluctance to get directly involved for so long, were driven by its desire to prevent the formation of the first Muslim country in modern Europe. Those who subscribe to this view believe that if the victims had been non-Muslims, the West’s reaction would have been swift and completely different.

Beirut, Somalia, and Southern Lebanon

In 1982, the Israelis invaded Lebanon and occupied its southern portion. Their stated objective was to create a buffer zone that would help protect its settlements from armed Hezbollah guerrilla attacks. However, the occupation proved to be costly as the guerillas extracted a heavy toll on Israeli forces. By 2000, Hezbollah’s continuing attacks and never-ending Israeli casualties forced Israel to withdraw.

In October 1983, a suicide bomber blew up the United States Marines’ barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing more than 200 marines who had been

deployed as part of a multinational peace keeping force between warring Lebanese Muslims and Christians. The devastating bombing led to President Reagan's decision to withdraw American forces from Lebanon.

In 1992, America led an international humanitarian effort to provide aid to Somalia, a Muslim country that had been ravaged by civil war, drought, and famine. However, America quickly pulled out its troops in 1993 after a warlord's deadly attack resulted in the death of 18 American soldiers.

Muslim extremists view these three events as examples of what dedicated Muslims can achieve. They view them as successes in defeating superior and better-equipped enemy forces; and this reinforces their belief that the West can, and should, be taken head on since it does not have the will to fight dedicated soldiers. Such Muslims believe that they can become a force to be reckoned with and, consequently, gain respect and fair treatment by the West.

Financial Crises

Saudi Arabia

Oil-rich Saudi Arabia was one of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East. However, after the Gulf War, its financial situation deteriorated considerably. For months, the government did not pay many local businesses and individuals. At one stage, the Saudi government sought help from international credit markets to help it tide over its budget deficit. In 2001, the budget shortfall was \$7 billion, more than 10% of revenues. The projected deficit for 2003 is \$10.4 billion on estimated revenues of \$45.3 billion. It has been estimated that the total Saudi national debt was over \$170 billion in 2002 — a backbreaking burden.

News of the Saudi financial crisis shocked Muslims (and non-Muslims) throughout the world; it was totally unexpected. The common Muslim perception is that the Saudis, with their billions of dollars in oil revenues, were forced to bankroll the Desert Storm operation, which drained them financially. Since then, the Saudi military budget has also gone up considerably due to weapons purchases. Among Muslims, it is commonly believed — although this cannot be verified — that the Saudis were paying part of the cost of maintaining American troops in Saudi Arabia more than a decade after the Gulf War.

Bank of Credit and Commerce

The Bank of Credit and Commerce (BCCI) was a well-run bank primarily owned by Muslims. During the Afghanistan-Soviet war, it played a major role in the transfer of weapons and funds across countries. BCCI was aggressive in its expansion plans and seemed to be on track to become a major international banking entity. However, it committed a serious mistake when it made a deal to finance the socialist government of Jamaica (which did not want to accept aid from an international lending agency because of unacceptable terms).

According to Muslims, the BCCI action raised a red flag in Western governments. If the deal was a success, the bank could have moved on to bigger deals in more sensitive countries; and that could have obstructed the West's foreign policy and diluted its political clout. Muslims claim that the West did not want a Muslim bank to become powerful and have the financial strength to make such deals, even though the amount of the Jamaican agreement was relatively small. Therefore, the West declared BCCI bankrupt and seized its assets. According to Muslim bankers, the bank was solvent. This theory is plausible, considering the fact that the BCCI shareholders and depositors received very high payouts after bankruptcy proceedings, much higher than in similar insolvencies.

Leadership losses

For the first time in the 20th century, the Muslim world started to think and act collectively in the political and economic arena when King Feisal of Saudi Arabia, a political and religious leader, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan, a charismatic leader and brilliant strategist, began to work together as a potent team.

Feisal was one of the most respected Muslim leaders in history. A religious man, he led a simple and austere life despite the wealth that flowed to the Saudi royal family. He was admired for his principles, independent thinking, and leadership skills. He was also one of the architects of the 1973 Arab oil embargo against the West. In 1975, a Saudi prince who had lived for a while in the United States murdered him. Feisal's murder sent a shock wave through the Muslim world. The prevalent belief among Muslims, albeit unproven, is that the Americans used the mentally unstable prince as a tool to eliminate Feisal because he was an independent thinker and consequently posed a threat to their interests in the Middle East.

Bhutto was overthrown in 1977 in an army coup led by General Zia-ul-Haq. He was accused of being involved in a murder, and was found guilty by a corrupt justice system that usually followed political winds instead of truth; he was hanged in 1979. Muslims tend to believe that America wanted Bhutto eliminated for two reasons. First, he was the brain behind the united actions of the Muslims. Second, he was committed to making Pakistan a nuclear power. According to Pakistanis, Kissinger warned Bhutto that unless he rolled back his nuclear ambitions, America would make an example of him; and they did so through their ally, the dictator Zia-ul-Haq.

Pakistan's Nuclear Bomb

Pakistan, largely illiterate, is one of the poorest nations in the world and has an extremely inadequate technology infrastructure. When Bhutto took power in 1971, he embarked on a program to produce a nuclear bomb. India, a country 10 times bigger, had just intervened in the Pakistani civil war, sided with the Bengalis and defeated Pakistan, which led to its breakup into a truncated Pakistan to the west and Bangladesh in the east. Realizing that Pakistan could never win a future conventional war against India, and that only a nuclear bomb could neutralize it militarily, Bhutto launched a nuclear program as Pakistan's best, or sole, hope of defending itself; and the program ultimately was successful in producing a weapon.

Muslims throughout the world are proud of the Pakistani achievement, made possible by a few engineers and scientists with access to limited resources. It confirms their belief that Muslims are second to none when they are dedicated and work with a purpose. The success of Pakistan's nuclear program is one of the few events in recent history that has elevated the morale of Muslims worldwide. It has given them confidence that they can emulate the performance of Muslims during the Golden Age of Islam.

The War against Iraq

In 2002, the US started to prepare the ground for a war against Iraq. According to the Americans, Iraq was not implementing the UN resolutions mandating that its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) be accounted for and destroyed. The Iraqis claimed they did not possess any such weapons; the American Administration insisted that the Iraqis were lying.

To justify the war and provide legitimacy to its actions, the Americans approached the United Nations with the expectation that a resolution would be passed that would permit it to conduct military action against Iraq. However, there was stiff opposition from many Security Council members and France promised to veto any resolution authorizing military action against Iraq. When the Americans realized they would not be able to obtain UN approval for action against Iraq, they decided to bypass the world organization. In April 2003, they invaded Iraq and toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein.

The American action, which was bitterly opposed by many European nations including France and Germany, appalled Muslims — including those who had no love for the brutal government of Saddam Hussein. The overwhelming majority of Muslims view this as an unjustified war. They believe that the Americans decided to go to war first, based on some hidden agenda, and then tried to justify their decision by finding an excuse that could be fed to the American public. The fact that no weapons of mass destruction have been found (the main reason cited by the Americans for their action) has reinforced their view.

While Muslims almost unanimously opposed the war, they have conflicting views on what inspired America to impose its military might. The reasons Muslims most often cite include a desire to control Middle East oil, preemptive action against the only country that posed a real long-term danger to Israel, an American Administration intoxicated by power, choosing the wrong target in the second stage in the war on terrorism, re-initiation of the Crusades at the behest of the Religious Right (considered close to President Bush), American imperialism, and personal vendetta by President Bush (because his father had been the target of an assassination attempt by Saddam Hussein).

CHAPTER 4: PERCEIVED WESTERN ROLE AND MUSLIM REACTION

ROLE PLAYED BY AMERICA AND WESTERN POWERS

Support for Israel

According to widespread belief among Muslims, American policy has always been one-sided in the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the exception of its stand in the 1956 Suez Canal crisis. As Muslims are quick to point out, America has barely murmured at the following Israeli actions — many of which have been documented in reports published by international human rights organizations:

- Denial of due process to the population under occupation in Palestine
- Arbitrary and punitive blowing up of homes; destruction of orchards and agricultural and industrial installations, as reported by Amnesty International
- Daily atrocities and humiliations carried out against the Palestinians
- Acting as an occupation power for 35 years
- Illegal occupation of Arab lands
- Expansion of settlements (the Israeli euphemism for illegal colonies installed by force in lands that were allocated to Palestinian Arabs)
- Targeted assassinations
- The massacre of 2,000 Palestinian civilians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by the Lebanese Phalange Christian militia, whom the Israeli army permitted to enter the camps (that were under Israeli control)
- Violation of American law (when Israeli forces use American-supplied weapons against civilians)

- Violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which includes prohibitions against willful killings and extensive destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity
- Refusal to implement UN resolutions including Resolution 242, which mandated withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian territories occupied in the 1967 war
- Abuse of human rights including torture and ill treatment during interrogation; Amnesty International has reported that there is credible evidence of serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights by Israeli forces in Jenin (Palestine)

According to Muslims, even two or three of the above actions would have drawn America's wrath if the perpetrator had been any country other than Israel. Since American aid and armaments have been the fuel in the Israeli engine, it is not surprising that the Palestinians and large segments of the Arab and Muslim populations hate Americans.

According to one segment of Muslims, the Israeli action in dispossessing the Palestinians is remarkably similar to what the Americans did to Native Americans. Hence, it is their belief that Americans either see no wrong in what the Israelis have done to the Palestinians, or they cannot preach to the Israelis because their own history is not spotless.

Soft attitude towards Israeli leadership

At the height of the Israeli invasion of the West Bank in April 2002, when Palestinian towns were once again being invaded and destroyed, President Bush praised Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as a "Man of Peace." There is a serious disconnect between the perceptions of Mr. Bush and others who are familiar with the Middle East and with Ariel Sharon. For example, in the *New York Times* of April 21, 2002, former President Jimmy Carter wrote the following about Sharon:

His rejection of all peace agreements that included withdrawal from Arab land, his invasion of Lebanon, his provocative visit to the Temple Mount, the destruction of villages and homes, the arrests of thousands of Palestinians and his open defiance of President George W. Bush's demand that he comply with international law have all been orchestrated to accomplish his ultimate goals: to establish Israeli settlements as widely as possible throughout occupied territories and to deny Palestinians a cohesive political existence.

Since July 2001, Sharon has been under investigation by a Belgium magistrate for alleged crimes against humanity. He was the Israeli defense minister in 1982 when Palestinian men, women, and children were systematically killed by the Lebanese Phalangist Christian militia, the allies of the Israelis, in cold blood at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon over a three-day period. While Israeli forces provided protection and sealed the camps, which were the homes of Palestinian refugees dispossessed by Israeli occupation of their lands, the Phalangist militiamen went on a rampage, killing civilians and mutilating their bodies. According to most estimates, the number of people butchered is about two thousand, though Israeli estimates put the number at eight hundred.

Human Rights Watch has taken the position that the killings at the Sabra and Shatila camps constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Kahan Israeli Commission of Inquiry, in its report on the massacres, found Sharon guilty of indirect responsibility for the slaughter. Sharon was found responsible for ignoring the danger of bloodshed and revenge when he approved the entry of the Phalangist militia into the camps as well as not taking appropriate measures to prevent bloodshed. Others who were held responsible included Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan. Despite the findings against them, they continued to rise politically and two, Shamir and Sharon, rose to the prime minister's post.

It is obvious that there is something quite disingenuous going on when the same person is viewed so differently, even by different groups within one ethnic and religious community (white Christians in the West). Not surprisingly, America is hated because it is perceived to provide special treatment to the Israelis and consistently ignore atrocities against Palestinians and, hence, Muslims.

Support for despots and dictators

There are very few democratic Muslim countries at this time. Unelected rulers, including a large number of despots and dictators, rule most of them. Many current leaders came to power through democratic means but became dictators after consolidating power. While some suppress only those who oppose them, others maintain power by ruthlessly suppressing everyone. A common grievance of Muslims in many oppressed countries is that their rulers

are, or were, being actively supported or aided by America and other Western powers. For example, at some time or other, America supported Saddam Hussein, Zia-ul-Haq, Sukarno, and the Shah of Iran, each of whom violated human rights for more than a decade.

Judging by, and imposing, foreign values

Muslims complain that, by and large, the Western world has a one-sided view of what occurs in Muslim countries and societies. They feel that the West does not realize that the value systems of other countries, especially Muslim, are different from its own and have a right to be different. It does not appreciate the fact that differences in values extend to personal, family, social, economic, legal, religious, and government areas. According to Muslims, the West is decadent in moral values because it permits abortion, supports gay rights, is lenient towards criminals, and tolerates music, television, books and other media that encourage indecency, and so forth. Therefore, the West is in no position to take a high moral ground or judge Muslims. According to those supporting this argument, since America does not allow others to impose their values on it, it should not impose its values on Muslims.

Insensitivity to Muslim feelings

Following the Gulf War, the US established military bases in Saudi Arabia, with the acquiescence of the Saudi government. That decision has caused considerable resentment among a large segment of the Saudi population, who consider the presence of American troops a sacrilege. Many Muslims throughout the world also view the presence of non-Muslim soldiers in Saudi Arabia quite negatively.

Hatred for the American way of life

A large number of American politicians and the overwhelming majority in the media, especially talk show hosts, have incorrectly attributed Muslim antagonism towards America to their hatred for the “American and Western way of life” and its democratic traditions. According to those who subscribe to this theory, Muslims hate American values, its prosperity, and everything else it stands for, and because they are jealous, they want to destroy Western civilization and everything associated with it.

Media bias

According to Muslims, the American media tends to present a one-sided view of Arabs, Muslims, and issues associated with them. They point out that the bias is broad-based and includes newspapers, magazines, books, TV, and radio. The worst offenders are the live radio talk show hosts, with their large audiences and lack of editorial fetters, who perpetuate or reinforce negative perceptions about Muslims. A large number regularly spew hatred against Muslims and one has even called for a Holocaust against Palestinians. They often take an unrepresentative or odd act with which a Muslim individual or country is associated and use it to denigrate all Muslims by creating the perception that such actions are the norm. Muslims are tremendously upset by the fact that much of what is said on the air by biased talk show hosts is pure fiction.

Many knowledgeable Americans are also upset that such hosts are airing material that contributes to stereotyping, and the mixing of opinion with fact (which has been known to hurt other groups in American society including Jews and gays, as well as Muslims). The nature of the shows is such that it is next to impossible for station management to control what is being said on the airwaves and how it is being said.

Friendship of convenience

Pakistan joined the American-led CENTO and SEATO defense pacts in the 1950s. For years, America considered Pakistan a dependable and trusted friend, and used Pakistan as a base for its secret U-2 spy flights over the Soviet Union. However, Pakistan's interests took a back seat in 1962 when its arch-enemy India was defeated by the Chinese in a localized war. To the Americans, India became more valuable as a potential ally against Communist China because it was larger and more strategically located than Pakistan.

In the 1980s, Pakistan suddenly became important again because it could be used as a tool in America's proxy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Therefore, the US poured military and economic aid into Pakistan. However, as soon as the Soviet army lost the war and retreated, Pakistan again fell out of favor. Old issues that had been conveniently ignored (including nuclear development, terrorism, and differences over human rights) suddenly came to the forefront again and Pakistan came very close to being declared a terrorist state. After 9/11, Pakistan once again became valuable because of its potential to

help the West in the war on terrorism and bring the perpetrators of 9/11 to justice.

In the friendship-of-convenience context, Afghanistan is another example cited by Muslims. It was used by America as a tool to fight the Soviet Union. When the Soviets were defeated, the Americans walked away, leaving behind a shattered country in dire need of political stability and economic aid.

The widespread perception among Muslims is that the Americans are only interested in friendships of convenience. The only exception, as they perceive it, is Israel, which they view as an anti-Muslim country. Another widespread belief is that America's "friendship" with Arab oil countries will end the day America's need for Middle East oil goes away.

Double standards

Muslims believe that America does not use the same criteria for Muslims that it uses for itself or its friends. Muslims believe that when America stands to benefit, it either ignores or actively supports violations of its own principles. In a large number of such cases, the sufferers have been Muslims. For example, the Islamic Salvation Front swept the first round of national elections in 1991 in Algeria. However, the army intervened and stopped the election process because it did not want the Salvation Front to take power. The army action triggered a bloody civil war that still continues. Muslims believe Americans and the West chose to ignore the hijacking of the election results and the Algerian army's brutal repression of its own people because the Islamic Front, with its independent ideology, did not fit into their strategic plans.

When Saddam Hussein was America's friend and was actively supported by the US in the 1980s, he used chemical weapons to attack his Kurd opponents — his own fellow Iraqis. More than five thousand people were gassed to death in a single town, Halabja, in 1988. The Americans did not take any meaningful action against Saddam, even though they were troubled by future implications of the event, because he served their strategic interest of containing Iran.

In 1990, when America needed to build a coalition for the Gulf War, it enlisted the support of Hafez al-Assad, the same tyrant who sent his murderous troops into the Syrian town of Hama on February 2, 1982. During a four-week period, Assad's forces massacred more than ten thousand civilians. Many estimates of the number killed are as high as thirty-eight thousand.

America has used UN resolutions to justify its military and economic actions against Iraq. However, it has been very selective in deciding which resolutions should be implemented. For example, the US has ignored Israel's refusal since 1967 to implement UN Resolution 242 mandating its withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territories. It has also ignored India's refusal to implement UN resolutions, passed in the 1950s, that promised Kashmiris the right of self-determination. America has also ignored India's gross human rights violations in Kashmir because there has been no compelling self-interest to spur it to take action. And it has ignored fundamental and human rights abuses committed during the 11-year dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq, who broke his promise to hold elections within 90 days of overthrowing Bhutto, because he served American interests in Afghanistan.

Post-Gulf War Iraq policy

The common Muslim view is that the Americans left Saddam Hussein in power after the Gulf War, even though they disliked him and could easily have removed him, because they wanted him to serve their strategic interests in the Middle East. Since his departure would have allowed Iran to become very powerful and dangerous, America decided to let Saddam stay in power so that he could be used as a counterweight to the anti-American Iranians. However, since the Americans did not want an unfettered and adventurous Saddam on the loose, either, they decided to clip his wings — with the expectation that he could be quickly rearmed and used, if required. Therefore, after the war ended in 1991, an economic embargo was imposed on Iraq that caused severe hardship and deprivation for ordinary Iraqis. While the ruling class continued to live comfortably, life for most citizens became an endurance test.

Children suffered the most from the embargo. More than half a million Iraqi children are estimated to have died from malnutrition or lack of health care. When history books are finally written, this may be considered one of the worst tragedies in human history because it was preventable. In the recent past, the embargo has been one of the primary factors causing Muslims throughout the world to view America and the West negatively. Even Muslims who had no sympathy for Saddam Hussein were appalled at the suffering endured by innocent people and, hence, they viewed the West and America very negatively due to this issue.

Not differentiating between terrorism and freedom struggles

Injustice and oppression are widespread in the world today and have bred many trouble spots. In recent years, seething tensions have escalated into armed revolts. However, even though many uprisings are genuine and deserve to be classified as wars of liberation, they have been slapped with the terrorist label by America. The excuse for assigning such classification, typically, has been the terrorist acts committed by a few members of the liberation movements or associated fringe groups.

In Kashmir, which historically was one of the most peaceful places in the world, more than 700,000 Indian troops have been unsuccessfully trying since 1989 to suppress a small population of 7 million. Indian occupation forces kill an average of 20 civilians every day, and this has gone on for years. If such behavior is not state terrorism, Muslims ask, then what is? Despite having one of the worst records of human rights abuses in the 20th century, India has not been condemned by Americans. Instead, they have restricted their criticism to a few fringe Kashmiri groups whose members have committed terrorist acts.

The West, and particularly America, has not criticized friendly nations committing state-sponsored terrorism with the same level of outrage it has exhibited for others. For example, both India and Israel have been perpetuating state-sponsored terrorism for decades against, respectively, the Kashmiris and Palestinians. While the US has been right in criticizing criminal terrorist acts by Muslims such as some Kashmiri groups, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other PLO groups, they have not exerted their influence to rein in the Indians and the Israelis who have routinely used terrorist tactics against Muslims. The Indians routinely torture suspects, rape women, and burn down shops, homes, and villages in reprisals, as has been documented by many international human rights organizations. The Israelis routinely blow up Palestinian homes, flout conventions of due process, perform targeted assassinations, and violate international law for the treatment of civilians in occupied territories; its leaders are under investigation in Belgium for alleged crimes against humanity. While it is acknowledged that the terrorism perpetuated against Israeli civilians is un-Islamic and is criminal, that does not justify illegal and morally unacceptable Israeli actions which, when carried out by a state, can be categorized as state-sponsored terrorism.

Divide and rule

As is widely taught in many schools in their former colonies, the British were masters of the divide-and-rule policy that enabled them to be successful colonists. This policy was widely used in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. However, the Muslim perception is that the destructive policy was primarily applied against them. It either resulted in Muslim countries fighting among themselves (or with their neighbors) or sowed the seeds for future conflict among nations or ethnic groups, including conflicts such as Arabs versus Turks, Iraq versus Kuwait, Pakistan versus India, and Arabs versus Israelis.

According to Muslims, the incentive for the divide-and-rule policy was to weaken target countries economically and to ensure a good market for British armaments and other products which warring nations would not be able to produce. Muslims feel that their countries have been led into a trap that has forced them to spend billions of dollars on defense instead of productive investments. Unfortunately, even though they want to, such countries cannot find a way out due to the legacy of hatred as well as a lack of innovative and sincere leadership.

The Islamic bomb

In 1974, India detonated a nuclear device and called it a “peaceful nuclear explosion.” It did not elicit any noteworthy negative reaction from Western powers. They accepted, at face value, India’s claim that it was a “peaceful” explosion even though there can be no real differentiation between a “peaceful” and an “aggressive” explosion (or bomb). Both types of explosions use the same basic principles and technology and both are capable of producing death and destruction.

Similarly, Israel has long been known to be producing nuclear weapons. Since it is an American ally, the US chooses to ignore its nuclear program. That attitude is in stark contrast to Washington’s view of the Pakistani nuclear program, which it tried to stop. Western media have been calling the Pakistani weapon the “Islamic bomb,” even though the Israeli and Indian bombs were never called the Jewish or Hindu bombs. To Muslims, this is another item in a long list that reflects the bias of those who desire to create anti-Islam hysteria.

REACTION BY MUSLIMS TO RECENT HISTORICAL EVENTS

Refusing to accept responsibility

Muslims have tended to avoid acknowledging their own responsibility. Too often, they blame others for their problems and poor living conditions. This attitude encompasses political, economic, social, and personal aspects of life. If a country's leader defers to the Americans, Muslims blame America instead of blaming themselves for electing that leader or creating conditions that led him (or compelled him) to make a compromise. If corruption inside their country is rampant, they will blame modernization and the influence of the West instead of blaming themselves for becoming dishonest at the personal level. According to Islam, the person who offers a bribe is as guilty as the person who accepts it. Applying that principle, the responsibility for corruption within each Muslim country lies with its own citizens. Muslims should be careful in analyzing the root cause of a problem and, when applicable, accept their own responsibility instead of finding excuses. In fairness to Muslims, the attitude of not accepting responsibility, and tending to blame others, is fairly widespread in the world. This is especially true in America, where a huge number of trivial lawsuits have clogged the courts as individuals seek to make others take the blame for what has happened to them.

Advocating return to the seventh century

A small minority of Muslims do accept responsibility for the state of affairs that exists in Islamic countries and societies. They believe that the deterioration in the condition of Muslims and their countries is due to deviation from the teachings of Islam and a decline in personal attributes and characteristics. There are two subgroups that acknowledge their mistakes. The first stresses that Muslims should become modernized, continue to use Islamic principles, and make a determined effort to progress in the secular world. The second group is mainly composed of diehard fundamentalists, who advocate the implementation of a system that, while removing those things they see as vices, will economically take the Muslims back almost 14 centuries.

Feeling victimized

A fairly common feeling among Muslims is that the West and America are victimizing them. The daily barrage of negative news emanating from many

Muslim countries, as well as from countries with Muslim minorities, continues to reinforce that belief. Many Muslims believe that the Western world is after them and cannot tolerate their economic uplift or political independence.

A widespread perception is that Europeans never really ended the Crusades or their colonial occupation because they still call the shots, though remotely. Many Muslims have become paranoid and tend to weave every issue and problem Muslims into a conspiracy by the West. For example, some Muslims have subscribed to the ludicrous view that 9/11 was an American plot whose ultimate aim was to occupy Afghanistan in order to control access to Central Asian oil.

Passive hatred

In many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East where the Palestinian issue is highly emotional and America is perceived as the power behind the Israeli oppressor's guns, a large percentage of Muslims hate America. However, such hatred is not deep, except in Middle East core flashpoints, and is primarily directed at American policies and government, not its citizens. The hatred is not caused by jealousy over the American way of life or its prosperity, as some Americans have incorrectly tried to portray. Instead, it can be attributed to the unquestioning support America has provided to Israel, which has suppressed the Palestinians and occupied their lands since 1967. Knowledgeable Muslims reiterate with confidence that when America starts to act impartially in the Middle East, as it did in 1956, the Muslims' hatred for it will dissipate.

Among the Muslims who hate America are two distinct groups. The first group, the overwhelming majority, hate America passively. The second group is consumed by hatred that they want to translate into action. These Muslims are primarily drawn from the central area of suffering — Palestine and the Middle East. However, Muslims with such feelings can be found in practically every Muslim country, though their numbers are not large or significant except in the Middle East and Iran.

Acting prejudiced

There is a small minority of Muslims that is so prejudiced against the West and America that they will never change their views, no matter what happens or which facts are brought to their attention. They will ignore or dismiss any fair and even-handed actions by the West or by Jews. For example, these people

ignore or dismiss the fact that the most vocal critics of the West's policies in Bosnia, when Muslims were being butchered, were Jews. The Jewish community was in the forefront in the attempt to publicize the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims by the Serbs.

Muslims in the prejudiced category have also dismissed the fact that the West helped end the Kosovo war by undertaking a massive bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999. They have also not given credit to the West for ultimately bringing Milosevic, the Serbian strongman, to justice.

Most members belonging to this minority group of Muslims are passive. Their activities are limited to discussing, arguing, and complaining.

Becoming freedom fighters or terrorists

In various countries or regions that have been occupied or oppressed in recent times, many Muslims have taken the path of armed resistance. The recruits for armed struggles in such places, typically, are not deeply religious or practicing Muslims. Many became freedom fighters or terrorists only when their country or region was attacked, in one way or another, and justice and freedom were denied. They chose the path of armed resistance because of circumstances.

There are many Muslim freedom fighters who fight as part of groups having Islamic names. In many cases, the Islamic label can be quite misleading because the fighters, in reality, are nationalists. They do not follow any particular ideology, are not deeply religious and, in some cases, are not even practicing Muslims. The majority of fighters in Kashmir, Palestine, and Chechnya fall in the nationalist movement category.

Exporting mujahideen and terrorists

In the recent past, the freedom struggles of Muslims in countries such as Afghanistan and Bosnia have attracted fighters from other countries. Typically, radical fundamentalists driven by religious zeal answered the call for jihad in Afghanistan. Most of them lacked knowledge about the world, history, and current events. Even their knowledge about Islam was limited to basic rituals and elementary Islamic history. In most cases, they did not understand the background or the cause of the conflict in the foreign country, but they went to fight, anyway. All that they knew was that a jihad was in progress and that mujahideen were needed to help Muslims who were being suppressed or killed. It was easy for scheming leaders to use such people as foot soldiers for a wrong

cause. The Taliban and al-Qaeda demonstrated this in Afghanistan, where low-level recruits were enlisted.

Another extremely small but very motivated group of Muslims finds it more effective, or more feasible, to use a different method of attack. Instead of fighting on battlegrounds, they become urban terrorists who focus on bombing soft civilian and commercial targets. While some have acted alone or in small groups, a few have been guided and used by countries that sponsor state terrorism.

These two radical groups are the ones Muslims need to fear. They have the potential to harm the genuine causes and aspirations of ordinary Muslims. The first group can be misused and misguided into joining questionable causes. The second group's activities are counter to Islamic principles and cannot be tolerated or condoned by civilized people of any background.

9/11: THE HIJACKING OF ISLAM

Why it happened

September 11, 2001, is a day of infamy when the terrorist group al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, hijacked Islam. On that day a devastating, concerted terrorist attack was launched on America in the name of Islam. Suicide pilots flew hijacked commercial aircraft into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon. The attack resulted in the death of thousands of innocent civilians, including more than two hundred Muslims.

The successful attacks, apparently driven by hatred for the United States, were the latest attempt by the al-Qaeda organization to hit American targets. It had previously engaged in terrorist attacks against American interests in many parts of the world. The attacks were ascribed to bin Laden's bitter resentment of the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia as well as American foreign policy, which he viewed as anti-Islamic.

Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian exile, is considered to have planned the 9/11 attacks from his base in Afghanistan, where he operated under the patronage of the ruling Taliban government. He had previously fought against the Soviet army during the Afghanistan war in the 1980s. After the war ended, he expanded al-Qaeda into a worldwide terrorist organization, funding it using his huge inheritance that, by some accounts, had grown to more than \$300 million.

The organization he built attracted thousands of recruits, brimming with religious zeal (and resentment) from all over the Muslim world.

Anti-Islamic act

Those who participated in the 9/11 attack violated many fundamental Islamic principles. First, they killed innocent civilians, which is expressly prohibited by Islam. According to Islam, as is clearly stated in the Koran, the taking of an innocent life is equivalent to the killing of all mankind. In this case, the hijackers killed thousands of innocent people. Second, they committed suicide, which is an unforgivable sin in Islam. Third, they killed more than two hundred Muslims who were working in the World Trade Center. Fourth, one of the hijackers was reported to have been drinking alcohol in Florida the night before the attacks. No Muslim who truly respects Islam and its principles ever drinks alcohol (especially just before certain death), since it is strictly prohibited. This is simply the story of an evil man who used the name of Islam and violated Islamic principles in order to achieve his reprehensible and murderous objectives.

How Muslims view the 9/11 tragedy

American Muslims were shocked, and initially were stunned into disbelief, when the perpetrators of the 9/11 crime were identified. An overwhelming majority of Muslims view the event as a heinous crime and are engulfed by a profound sense of sorrow. They cannot comprehend how innocent civilians could be targeted in the name of Islam, regardless of the frustration they may feel with the West. Subsequently, for most American Muslims, personal safety and the effect on day-to-day lives by the sudden spurt in hate crimes resulting from the tragedy became a common concern. Other concerns regarding how the event and its fallout will impact everyone are similar to those felt by other ordinary Americans.

Throughout the world also, when provided with details of the attack and its destruction, Muslims have classified 9/11 as a crime. That has been especially true when they received their news through television rather than through sources that did not provide graphic details. The exception to this view is in the Middle East, where America is considered synonymous with Israel and oppression and, hence, is hated.

There is a very small minority of Muslims who do not view the 9/11 event as an unprovoked crime. They rationalize bin Laden's actions from a global perspective, viewing America as the unjust supporter of oppressors and tyrants. Many theories circulate, some of them quite ridiculous; some people even believe that the terrorist attack was part of an American plot whose objective was to justify occupying Afghanistan.

After the American invasion and occupation of Iraq, the perception that America plans to occupy Muslim countries in order to control their oil resources has increased exponentially among Muslims. They believe that America has used 9/11 to justify recent anti-Muslim actions — the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. They also believe that the bogey of terrorism and 9/11 will be used to destabilize and/or occupy other Muslim countries such as Iran. Even though an overwhelming majority of Muslims consider the 9/11 terrorist attack terribly wrong and against Islamic principles, some also tend to view it from an Islamic religious perspective. They view it as the punishment and retribution for a wrongdoer. According to Islam, God has His own means of equalizing or punishing injustice that sometimes occurs through unexpected ways to hurt or destroy an evil power, ruler, or individual. Hence, they view this tragedy as God's way of bringing home to America what it had exported to the Palestinians and others in many parts of the world.

Impact on Muslims

The 9/11 terrorist attack has been a defining event and wake-up call for Muslims, especially in America. It has finally forced mainstream Muslims to realize that unless they act and take control, they will have to dance to the tune of the more radical elements that use Islam as a tool for implementing an agenda that is unacceptable to the overwhelming majority of Muslims. 9/11 and the Osama-induced polarization within the community has caused Muslims, especially leaders, to perform serious self-analysis. It has led mainstream Muslims and moderate leaders to become more vocal and involved in community discussions where, typically, radical fundamentalist elements once took the leadership role by default due to their "religious" and "righteous" bent.

The post-9/11 atmosphere has also created fear among American Muslims. They feel that even though they had nothing to do with those involved with terrorism, they are being targeted and profiled by government agencies. This perception has been heightened by the detention of thousands of Muslims

without being charged for over six month, special immigration reporting requirements for the citizens of some Muslim countries, mass deportations of Muslims due to immigration issues, and special scrutiny at airport security checks. The changed environment can be observed at any social gathering where Muslims clam up, even among acquaintances, whenever a political topic concerning Muslims, the Middle East, or terrorism comes up for discussion.

CHAPTER 5: WHERE LIES THE TRUTH

Many issues have caused problems between Muslims and the Western world, especially America. Each group faults the other and, in most cases, they view the same event from completely different perspectives. Not surprisingly, they reach diametrically opposite conclusions. If their complaints and perceptions are analyzed closely and impartially, it becomes obvious that there are faults in perception as well as action on both sides.

The previous two chapters identified and described many defining events and crises that have shaped Muslim thinking and attitudes vis-à-vis the West, and presented the Muslim viewpoint regarding those events and crises as well. This chapter presents an analysis of the major issues that have soured relations and produced distrust between Muslims and the West and, additionally, caused Muslims worldwide to hate America.

The truth lies somewhere between what is perceived by the Muslims and by the West. The objective of Muslim-American relations should be to have a better understanding of the issues rather than to find fault, so that bridges can be built between the two sides. Unless both sides are prepared to identify and acknowledge their mistakes and failings, lasting solutions cannot be found and a better future cannot be hoped for.

ANALYZING MUSLIM COMPLAINTS AGAINST AMERICA

American support for Israel is one-sided

The history of American support for Jews goes back to 1946, even before the creation of Israel. According to *Time* magazine, in its 1951 “Man of the Year”

issue, “To catch the Jewish vote in the US, President Truman in 1946 demanded that the British admit one hundred thousand Jewish refugees to Palestine, in violation of British promises to the Arabs. Since then, the Arab nations surrounding Israel have regarded the state as a US creation, and the US, therefore, as an enemy. The Israeli-Arab war created nearly a million Arab refugees, who have been huddled for three years in wretched camps. These refugees, for whom neither the US nor Israel will take the slightest responsibility, keep alive the hatred of US perfidy.”

American public opinion has been solidly in favor of Israel over the years. Support has remained steady despite the Israeli occupation of Palestine and its oppressive actions as an occupation force for nearly four decades. Americans have tended to ignore Israeli atrocities as well as their violation of human rights and the Geneva Convention. Occupation forces are required to follow international rules and laws in their treatment of civilians in occupied areas, but Israel has violated them repeatedly, knowing that America will protect it.

Americans pride themselves on being among the most fair-minded people in the world, yet they have turned a blind eye to Israeli atrocities and oppression, demonized the Arabs and Palestinians, and blamed them for virtually every crisis. The dichotomy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian problem, and the one-sided American view, can be attributed to lack of information and knowledge. The vast majority of Americans have been either uninformed or misinformed about the Middle East crisis. Prior to 9/11, most of them had, at best, a vague idea of its history, developments, and current status — which has no similarity with the 1948 situation when Israel was a young nation with hostile neighbors. At that time, the unconditional support of the West could be understood and respected by moderate Muslims.

However, despite Israel’s transition from a country in danger to an expansionist power, America has been unwavering in its support for Israel. For Americans, it is simply a case of good versus bad, and the Palestinians have always been bad while the Israelis have always been victims. Since the Arab oil embargo of 1973, Americans have crystallized their negative opinion of Arabs and Palestinians on the basis of one-sided news broadcasts that tended to stereotype Arabs and blame them, and OPEC, for the lifestyle disruptions and higher costs for gasoline, home heating, and other fuel costs. Also contributing to the negative view were some high-profile terrorist acts perpetuated by the Palestinians, starting with the killing of Israeli Olympic athletes. However, Israeli actions over the years, many of which have been illegal and systematic,

have not been taken as seriously as the Palestinian transgressions and, consequently, have not had any measurable impact on American public opinion polls.

It should be pointed out that a very small minority of Americans does exist who are very well informed. However, their influence on public opinion is insignificant due to their small number.

Jewish influence in the Senate is too strong

There is some basis for the Muslim perception that America's Middle East foreign policy is heavily influenced by Israel and by American Jews. An analysis of the US Congress reveals disproportionate Jewish representation in the Senate. In 2003, there were:

- 13 Catholic senators, while Catholics account for 22% of the US population
- 11 Jewish senators, while Jews account for only 2% of the US population

Those who understand demographics and how they impact elections in any country realize that a community or group with only two percent of the population would be considered lucky if it managed to achieve even one percent representation at the national, or Senate, level. While Muslims in America have a population almost equal to that of Jews, they have no representation in either the Senate or the House of Representatives.

Muslims believe that since 11% of the Senate is Jewish, Israel is practically immune from adverse American pressure. They complain that Israel knows that as well and, hence, acts accordingly. A perusal of the Senate record shows that one-sided and broad-based support for Israel is not limited to Jewish senators. Some of the most anti-Palestinian senators are not Jews. Also, it seems unlikely that 11 Jewish senators can consistently direct or influence 89 non-Jewish senators.

A probable explanation for the pro-Jewish sentiment in Congress is that Americans have been exposed to consistently negative reporting about Arabs and Palestinians since 1973 — when the Arab oil embargo caused severe dislocation in the lifestyle of Americans, high energy bills, and long gas lines. For decades, the thinking of ordinary Americans has been molded and reinforced by negative stereotyped images to a point where Americans believe Israelis are virtuous and Palestinians evil, even though that does not reflect reality. It should be realized that senators, representatives of an American population that views Arabs and Palestinians negatively, are highly unlikely to vote against their

constituents' wishes. Unless the American population changes its views, Palestinians cannot expect most senators to change their current leanings.

Palestine issue incorrectly projected as religious struggle

Israel and the American media, as well as Muslim leaders and media, have projected the Palestinian struggle as a religious movement. However, the fact is that the Palestinian struggle has been a national liberation movement against Israeli occupation in which both Muslim and Christian Palestinians have participated with equal fervor. Secular-minded leaders who did not have any religious agenda initially led the movement. The most popular leader was Yasser Arafat, and the main opposition group was the secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), an umbrella group of twenty organizations that included leftists, rightists, and Marxists.

In order to weaken the PLO by making religious organizations strong, Israel encouraged and nurtured organizations such as Hamas. For a while, Hamas confined itself to social work and became very popular. Over time, it became a political force and, not surprisingly, started to promote armed resistance against the Israelis. Hamas and other religious organizations became even more popular as Arafat's popularity declined and Palestinians lost faith in his ability to deliver freedom and control corruption in the Palestinian Authority. At this time, armed resistance against Israelis is spearheaded by Islamic religious groups, though it was not so during earlier stages of the struggle; and they are fully supported by both secular and Christian Palestinians.

The fault for the animosity, therefore, can be laid on both sides. The Muslims and Israelis, for their own ends, have been incorrectly projecting a national liberation struggle as a religious war. Additionally, as a result of the Muslims' failure to strongly condemn suicide bombings (that are completely un-Islamic) this genuine struggle has received very negative coverage in the Western media. The Western press can be faulted because it has been focusing too much on recent events without giving as much attention as it should to the root cause of the problem — the occupation of Palestine since 1967.

America is anti-Islam and anti-Muslim

A widely held view among Muslims is that America is anti-Islam and anti-Muslim; that is not true. The allegedly deleterious actions by America against Muslims cannot be attributed to an anti-Islam or religion-biased policy. Rather,

they are the result of policies dictated by American security considerations, self-interest, and its economic dependence on a vital commodity — oil. Without oil, the American economy will grind to a halt. Hence, making oil supplies safe and reliable is at the top of American policymakers' priorities.

For America, security considerations, economic self-interest (including business interests of corporate America and military sales), and oil are the primary foreign policy drivers while other factors, also considered important, are sometimes forced to take a back seat due to conflicting priorities. There can be no denying America's commitment to democracy and human rights. However, at times, they have been ignored in favor of issues that were perceived, sometimes incorrectly, to be more important due to three factors:

- The Cold War and desire to contain communism
- The never-ending quest to ensure a cheap, safe, and steady supply of Middle East oil
- American hesitancy since the end of the Vietnam War to become militarily involved without clear objectives and an exit strategy

At no stage have American policies been dictated by the desire or plan to harm Muslim interests. In recent times, the interests of America and the Islamic world simply have not matched, hence the current conflict between the two. However, when it has suited America's interests to do so, it has befriended and helped Muslim countries. For example, it currently views Pakistan as a friend because of its support in the war on terrorism.

Support for despots and dictators

The Western powers have been very vocal in preaching democracy and human rights to the rest of the world. However, in violation of its own principles, America has supported some of the world's worst despots and human rights violators, in some cases for many years. American support over the years has included active involvement (such as overthrowing Mossadegh and reinstating the Shah in Iran), passive acquiescence, and massive economic and military aid.

Many of the worst dictators, despots, and corrupt leaders supported by the West have reigned in the Muslim world. They include:

- Saddam Hussein of Iraq
- The Shah of Iran
- Hosni Mubarak of Egypt
- Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan
- Sukarno of Indonesia

- Suharto of Indonesia
- Hafez al-Assad of Syria (though not directly supported, he was a US ally in the Gulf War)

In the countries where these leaders reigned, millions of people were suppressed, tortured, and brutalized for decades in the second half of the 20th century. For them, American calls for democracy and respect for human rights seem hollow and hypocritical.

An argument put forth in America's defense is that it supported many of the dictators at the height of the Cold War when security was of paramount concern to US policy makers. The dictators were viewed as the lesser of two evils, compared to communism; they could be depended upon to provide stable governments, which were often lacking in Third World countries, and to support the effort against communism.

Judging by, and imposing, foreign values

The typical American's knowledge about Islamic and Middle Eastern history, culture, and values is limited. This shortcoming is one of the primary reasons that Americans, unknowingly, take actions that Muslims deem insensitive. Americans tend to make quick judgments regarding foreign issues and cultures based on superficial knowledge and without in-depth study. For example, the Afghan women's burqa, which is not mandated by Islam, has been overblown as an issue. It has been hyped to a point where Americans now consider its disappearance from Afghan society as a major goal that will liberate its women.

Americans do not realize that the Afghans, especially at this time, do not view the burqa as an important issue (if they consider it to be an issue at all). They have far more pressing needs such as safety and security, food, medical treatment, shelter, education, and the restoration and expansion of a national infrastructure. Second, their women will continue using the burqa, which was introduced centuries ago, of their own free will because it is the norm in their society. It will take generations before Afghan women discard it, if at all, on their own initiative — not because Americans think it is a sign of oppression.

When Americans try to impose or suggest their own solutions to Muslim countries, even though they may do so with the best of intentions, the intrusion creates more harm than good. Compared to Americans, who are viewed as arrogant, Europeans are viewed as more considerate of differences with Muslims

because they have had more interaction with Asian and African countries and are less prone to urge their own ways upon others.

It is also pertinent that this issue is not one-sided. Muslims too, are often prone to judge Americans based on superficial knowledge and without first ascertaining the facts. For example, most of them are completely unaware of the fact that America has a very large number of religious people, with an estimated 40-50% of the population considering themselves born-again Christians. Neither are they aware of the objectives, and strength, of the Religious Right (Christian Coalition) movement with whom they share many common values — without realizing it. They are also not aware that, as in the Islamic community, many people in the West oppose practices such as abortion even if they are not opposed by the government.

Insensitivity to Muslim feelings

Muslims who complain about the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia, due to religious reasons, cannot support their claim of sacrilege. Their objections are based on emotions and not any Islamic teachings. According to Islam, Mecca is the only city non-Muslims are specifically prohibited from entering. Muslims consider Medina a holy city as well, but it is not restricted. Most Muslims regard all of Saudi Arabia as a holy land although there is no scriptural basis for that belief.

There is no Islamic restriction on the presence of non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia. In fact, there are hundreds of thousands of Asian non-Muslims, especially from India and Japan, working in Saudi Arabia. However, their presence is not considered sacrilegious even though most of them do not believe in monotheism and, hence, are the worst sinners according to Islam — something that cannot be said about American Christians and Jews who are among the “People of the Book.” Those who oppose the presence of American troops also conveniently tend to ignore the fact that tens of thousands of American oil experts have worked in Saudi Arabia, since the discovery of oil in the 1930s, and their presence was never opposed or considered sacrilegious.

It appears that either the potential of hurting Muslim feelings was underestimated or the decision was forced on the Saudi and American governments by a pressing need for regional security following the Gulf War, which had caused panic and security concerns among the smaller Arab Gulf countries. The common belief among Muslims is that the Saudis made a deal

with the Americans to host military bases to ensure that the royal family, whose support is decreasing in a country with 15-20% unemployment, would have strong military support in case domestic unrest threatened its hold on power.

Hatred for the American way of life

A widespread belief in America is that Muslims hate the American and Western way of life, which is not correct. Those who propound this theory either speak from ignorance or have a vested interest in deflecting the focus from the most important root cause of the American-Muslim problem — the Palestinian-Israeli issue.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims do not hate Americans, their prosperity, or their way of life. For most, to have the American life would be a dream come true. Muslims throughout the world are aware of America's high standard of living, personal freedom, and fundamental rights. They would love to be a part of that lifestyle if they could. However, they do hate American foreign policy that, in their view, is unjust and biased against Muslims and Islam. It is true that Muslims see behaviors in the West that Islam does not support, such as alcohol consumption; but their disapproval is not strong enough to provoke the kinds of negative reactions that result from the Palestinian issue.

A small percentage of Americans realize that there is a different side to the Middle East story. For example, Pat Buchanan wrote in his column at townhall.com on April 8, 2002, "America is not hated in that part of the world where we were once respected because we are democratic, prosperous and free. We are hated because of a deepening perception that the United States cannot conduct a policy independent of Israel's. We are hated because we have provided Israel with the weapons it has used not only to defeat Arab armies, but to annex land and crush Palestinian hopes."

Muslims do not hate or hope to destroy non-Christian countries for ways of life that conflict with Islamic beliefs. Therefore, it does not seem logical that Muslims would hate or wish to destroy any Christian country. Muslims know that most people in the West and America are Christians. Therefore, it does not make sense that Muslims would hate the way of life of a civilization whose moral values are based on Christianity, a sister religion.

American media is biased

American media have played a significant role in stereotyping Muslims and Arabs. They are, to a large extent, responsible for creating the image that Muslims and terrorists are synonymous. Mainstream Muslims do not have access to powerful media and cannot refute the news or misinformation disseminated by the media or unrepresentative Muslim extremists. The result of misinformation and projection of stereotyped images is that the opinion of Americans about Arabs and Muslims has become negative and biased. Since politicians act in accordance with constituents' wishes, there is a bias in American foreign policy against Arabs and Muslims. The net result of such policies has been that Americans are perceived by Muslims to be unjust and biased.

To be fair, the fault is not one-sided. Since the Muslim majority is silent, they have let the extremists, who are an insignificant minority, become their spokesmen by default. The Western media just pick up on what the extremists say and do and, consequently, the overall image of Muslims suffers considerably. The Western media can be faulted because they have not reported with diligence the views of the majority. They tend to focus on and project news that is more sensational. Images of demonstrators flashed from Pakistan consistently show angry Muslim men shouting extremist slogans against America. A closer look will reveal that most of the demonstrators, and almost all the haranguing leaders, sport beards. Even a cursory study will reveal that such demonstrators do not represent the Pakistani society at large, where the bearded population is less than 10%! Such images create the incorrect impression that there is widespread support for the religious extremists who organized the demonstrations, even though the reality is quite different.

It is true that the American media have been incorrectly projecting the Arab-Israeli struggle as a religious struggle between the Muslims and Israelis. However, both Muslims and Israelis must be faulted for that because they too have projected the struggle as a religious one to suit their own ends. Though the armed Palestinian struggle for independence is now being led by Islamic groups, the very significant contribution of secular and Christian Palestinian freedom fighters, even at this time, has not been acknowledged adequately by any side.

In stark contrast to issues concerning Muslims, the same media have refrained, with some exceptions, from calling the Irish civil war between the Catholics and Protestants a religious war. While Palestinian terrorists are called

Islamic terrorists, whether or not they are Muslims, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) terrorists have never been called Catholic terrorists even though they are all Catholics who fight the Protestants in the name of religion.

Since 9/11, Americans have been actively seeking news and information rather than just waiting to be fed by the established media. They have started to inform themselves by seeking information about Muslims and Islam, using unconventional sources such as the Internet and more in-depth sources such as books. They have discovered that there is another side, a better one, to Muslims and Islam — a side that they had not been aware of and that they can relate to.

News is driven by business needs

On any given day, only a couple of news stories receive more than a couple of minutes' coverage by American television networks. All other stories are delivered in two- and three-minute segments, or less. Clearly, the depth of understanding that can be achieved through such superficial briefings is insufficient for anyone really to comprehend the story and its background. Such a news system, which is primarily driven by advertising dollars and the number of viewers tuning in, benefits the corporation operating the television or radio station. It does not serve the national interest, especially in the long run, because the net result is that viewers remain superficially informed about international issues even though they may be viewing the news regularly.

For those who have an interest, there is plenty of information provided in America through a variety of media including cable networks, public TV and radio, national newspapers, books, and magazines as well as a host of Internet sites; but prior to 9/11, there was no overriding interest and, hence, many of these sources remained untapped or underutilized.

A widespread complaint by Arabs and Muslims is that the American media does not adequately cover their viewpoints. It is true that only a limited amount of international, including Arab and Muslim, news is aired in the US; European stations provide noticeably broader coverage. The reason is that to a large extent, news coverage is driven by business needs and requirements that do not favor the broadcast of foreign news. The media likes to present stories that generate widespread interest, which typically are local and domestic rather than international, and pull in advertising dollars. Since international news does not attract many viewers and consequently, advertisers, its broadcast is limited. However, this issue is not a unique American phenomenon. Most media

throughout the world focus primarily on domestic news, especially those operated on a for-profit basis. The only exceptions are the state-run television stations and government-controlled newspapers which suffer from three problems: lack of editorial independence, poor quality, and delayed reporting. Hence, people living in foreign countries are also not particularly well informed about American life and domestic issues, even though they may be knowledgeable about America's impact on world issues due to its importance as the only superpower.

Mujahideen were used and abandoned

During the war against the Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan, numerous calls were made to Muslims throughout the world to join the jihad. Thousands of Muslims heeded the call and joined the war as mujahideen fighters. After the war ended, many of these fighters, especially those from Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries, could not return to their home countries. Their governments did not want battle-hardened, radical warriors to return home because they had the potential to create domestic problems and unrest. Also, many of the mujahideen belonged to banned organizations. With the fear of being arrested on their return, many of them continued to stay in Afghanistan and subsequently joined al-Qaeda.

The Americans and the West appear not to have thought beyond the end of the war against communism in Afghanistan. In contrast to returning American GIs who, over the years, were provided incentives and help in transitioning into civilian life and becoming productive citizens upon leaving the military, the mujahideen were abandoned. That poor decision created bitterness and a vacuum; others, like bin Laden and the Taliban, stepped in. An issue that should have been relatively small was magnified into a serious international problem with far-reaching consequences.

America has acknowledged its mistake in walking away from Afghanistan after the Soviets were defeated which, directly and indirectly, harmed both Afghanistan and America. At this time, the US is striving to assist in the formation of a representative government and has been providing some aid to help rebuild Afghanistan.

Friendship of convenience

This perception is borne out by the facts. However, it should be pointed out that most of the American actions that are resented in many parts of the world, and not just in Muslim countries, were motivated by strategic concerns and took place in the second half of the 20th century — at the height of the Cold War. They were made with the intention of containing the Soviets — not with the intention of harming Muslims. If it appeared that a dictator might help in containing the communists, he was supported as the lesser of two evils. Such unpopular leaders were supported in all parts of the world — from Vietnam to Chile.

America has acknowledged, though belatedly, its mistakes in supporting tyrants in Iraq and other countries — policies for which it has and continues to pay a high price, especially through loss of goodwill and alienation of strategic partners.

Policy implemented by inexperienced politicians

In American presidential election campaigns, domestic priorities and issues drive the agenda. International affairs come in a late second place and, unless there is a major war or a crisis in progress, get little attention. Knowledge and mastery of international affairs are hardly tested during an election campaign. Consequently, a candidate can win and become president despite having only superficial knowledge of international affairs and world history. This has happened quite a few times in modern American history.

A president may be brilliant in his handling of domestic affairs. However, if he is unfamiliar with the complicated issues and problems characterizing foreign countries, his rookie status in foreign affairs gets highlighted immediately when an international crisis erupts (as has happened to President Bush). Unfortunately, time is too short to learn on the job. By the time a president with limited knowledge of foreign issues really starts to understand what is going on and masters the art of handling intractable foreign issues, his term is near its end or the situation has deteriorated and/or gotten out of hand.

The problem of American policy being shaped or implemented by politicians with inadequate knowledge of foreign affairs and history is fairly widespread in both the legislative and executive branches. Such shortcomings exist at all levels. Many members of Congress, including those who are members

of influential foreign affairs committees, as well as cabinet members and White House advisors, also leave much to be desired so far as international experience and knowledge are concerned. While these politicians may be masters of domestic politics, their unfamiliarity with foreign issues and their historical background is pervasive. Consequently, serious foreign policy mistakes are made, with results that are not apparent for years and, thus, leave America with hidden and lingering problems that need to be addressed later on when they have become more serious.

Uninformed Americans

Americans have a domestic-centric view. Therefore, prior to 9/11, most of them had not exhibited more than a casual or superficial interest in foreign affairs, especially pertaining to events in the Middle East and Muslim countries. That was in stark contrast with their interest in domestic news and scandals, especially concerning domestic politicians and personalities. As long as it did not impact their daily lives, most Americans did not actively seek information about current world events and issues, Muslims, and Islam.

For topics of interest to them, Americans actively seek and devour any information they can obtain. Therefore, when the perpetrators of 9/11 were identified as Muslims, there was a dramatic rise in interest in Muslims and Islam. Since then, Americans have used every means available to gain knowledge and understand the background leading up to the 9/11 attack. For most, it has been a revealing exercise as they learned that the world is more complicated than they had thought and, also, that their prior knowledge about Muslims and Islam was either incomplete, one-sided or incorrect.

The information that the vast majority of Americans receive is, by and large, through television network news, which generally does not provide in-depth coverage except during times of crises. Even though many newspapers provide foreign news coverage (and some are outstanding), most Americans' interests are typically confined to domestic news, art, entertainment, sports, etc. Their lack of knowledge in the area of foreign affairs also has deeper roots. In high schools, Middle Eastern and Asian history is taught superficially, if at all. Even where one or two courses are taught, they are insufficient unless the knowledge gained is reinforced outside the class. Hence, a typical American high school graduate lacks adequate knowledge about the Middle East and its dynamics.

Typically, ordinary Americans used to be surprised when they had a lengthy one-on-one discussion with a Muslim colleague about Islam, Muslims, and events in the Middle East. More often than not, they would shake their heads in disbelief and mutter, “I had no idea!” when they heard the other side of the story, especially concerning the Middle East conflict. However, the situation has now changed considerably. Many Americans are somewhat better informed, after 9/11, and positive comments from leaders like President Bush (who ought to be highly commended for their constructive efforts) have made a big difference in making them more informed and also improved the public’s perception of Islam. Opinion polls indicate that since 9/11 the percentage of Americans viewing Islam positively has risen considerably.

Slow response to Bosnian crisis

Muslims throughout the world blame the West for the massacres and “ethnic cleansing” (that is, the slaughter, or fast, forced eviction) of Muslims, by the Serbians, that took place in Bosnia. They believe that Europeans did not want a Muslim country to be created in Europe. They are also convinced that if the victims had been non-Muslims, the reaction by the Western powers would have been considerably different and quicker.

The fact is that with some exceptions, American and other Western countries are loathe to undertake any military action, anywhere, that can cause them to lose soldiers — unless economic necessity dictates it or there is a real threat to their national security. The guiding principle for America after the Vietnam War is said to be the avoidance of any engagement that requires it to commit troops unless a very clear objective, specific goals, and a timetable for withdrawal have been specified. Such requirements take time to be crystallized and, hence, even actions desired by the American administration are delayed. Such delays, to those who do not understand the engagement principles and process, can incorrectly be read as an indication of lack of interest.

Muslims also need to appreciate what happened in Kosovo, where the Serbs were bombarded and driven out by the Western powers. They need to realize that if the delayed response to the events in Bosnia had been motivated by anti-Muslim feelings and considerations, the Western powers would not have taken military action in support of Muslims against the Serbs in Kosovo.

Most world Muslims are unaware, or fail to be appreciative, of the fact that the American and Western governments were widely criticized by many

prominent Western personalities and groups due to their slow reaction and failure to protect the Muslims in Bosnia. Among the most vocal critics of ethnic cleansing and Western delay in responding to the Bosnian crisis were Jews.

Guilty by association

In America, the development of anti-Muslim animosity can be traced to the rise of the Black Muslim movement and the hatred and radicalism espoused by leaders such as Louis Farrakhan. Most Americans do not realize that the anti-Semitism and anti-white rage preached by the Black Muslims are not supported by the basic tenets of Islam. Such hatred, which has disgusted and turned off most Americans, finds no sympathy or support among orthodox Muslims.

The radicalism of Malcolm X also disturbed most Americans. Even though he, himself, came to realize that his beliefs were wrong and converted to mainstream Islam, which preaches race equality, the initial impression created by Malcolm X was too distasteful. Consequently, the American population has retained a lasting negative impression of both Malcolm X and the word *Muslim*, due to name association.

Muhammad Ali, the heavyweight boxing champion, cared for non-blacks — even though most Americans believe otherwise. For example, he gave \$100,000 to a home for the elderly in New York City, which was about to shut down due to financial problems, even though most of its inhabitants were Jews. In order to promote his boxing fights in the 1970s, Muhammad Ali harped on the black superiority theme and highlighted black-white issues. He was very successful in his effort; however, he ended up being hated by most Americans due to draft-dodging and his white-baiting rhetoric — even though he was not a racist at heart. His rhetoric and association with Black Muslims deepened mainstream America's negative image of Islam and Muslims.

British influence and bias

The British, in contrast to Americans, have a history of working against Muslim interests, starting before the 1917 Balfour Declaration that resulted in the partition of Palestine. They have actively worked against Muslim countries including Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran.

When India was partitioned in 1947, the British handed over Punjab's Gurdaspur district to India even though it had a Muslim majority and, according to partition rules, should have been made part of Pakistan. If Gurdaspur had

been awarded to Pakistan, the Kashmir problem would never have existed because India would have had no common border with Kashmir. Pakistanis and Kashmiris widely attribute the transfer of Gurdaspur to India to Lord Mountbatten, who had been the British governor general of undivided India. He was offended and wanted to get even with Pakistan because it had refused to make him its governor general after the partition, even though India had agreed to do so.

In 1951, Iran nationalized its oil industry and created the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC). The Iranian action to become economically independent was vehemently opposed by Great Britain, which did not want to lose its tax revenues and control over Iran's oil resources. Western opposition, spearheaded by the British, led to the virtual collapse of Iran's oil industry and caused serious internal economic problems. In 1953, after the British got the Americans on board, a joint British-American operation was successfully executed to overthrow Dr. Mossadegh, the Iranian prime minister. Then, in 1956, in disregard of international laws, Britain attacked Egypt when it reclaimed its sovereignty over the Suez Canal by nationalizing it.

Since the British have more experience in international affairs due to their colonial past, particularly in countries with large Muslim populations, they have often been followed, rather than led, by the Americans. They have often set a hawkish tone and advised Americans to take a stance on various issues and crises that has not served either American or Muslim interests. For example, they planted the seeds of hatred against the West and America in Iran in 1951 when they tried to cripple the Iranian oil industry and, subsequently, presented a plan to the American government to overthrow the government of Dr. Mossadegh.

War against Iraq

With the exception of the Palestinian problem, the war against Iraq has created more anti-American feelings, among Muslims throughout the world, than any other event in history. In regard to the Palestinian issue, America was only viewed as a supporter of Israel. However, in Iraq, it is viewed as an aggressor and an occupying power. American credibility is at its nadir, in the view of Muslims and, increasingly, in non-Muslim areas of the world as well. Regrettably, America has itself to blame for destroying its credibility. The reasons include:

- Occupying Iraq, when no weapons of mass destruction have been found to justify such an action
- Changing the objective of the war to “regime change” in Iraq — a violation of UN principles
- Making claims, in Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address, regarding uranium procurement by Iraq — claims that were acknowledged to be false. The State Department addendum in declassified documents, according to the Associate Press (July 19, 2003), indicated that the “claims of Iraqi pursuit of natural uranium in Africa are ... highly dubious.”
- Working from the principle of might is right
- Trying to bolster the justification for war by associating al-Qaeda and Islam with Saddam Hussein — a secular leader who was anything but religious
- Making Administration statements that a post-war Iraqi government would have to be “approved” by America; this appeared to indicate a questionable commitment to democracy in a post-Saddam Iraq
- Applying double standards. The US has taken no meaningful action against North Korea, even though it has acknowledged possessing nuclear weapons and, in contrast to Iraq, has a missile delivery system capable of hitting America directly

One of the actions which has done most damage to America’s reputation (and not just in the Muslim world) has been the refutation of the American claim that it respects the voice of the UN as represented by its resolutions. When it could not obtain Security Council approval, which meant its request was rejected, it decided to ignore the implied UN resolution — no war against Iraq. In other words, America is as guilty of flouting the will of the world as Saddam Hussein and other violators of UN resolutions have been over the years.

Despite the difficulty of analyzing an event that is still unfolding, it is apparent that the Americans may have made a big mistake. At least for the short term, America has reinforced the widespread negative perception of the United States among Muslims. Additionally, America now appears to be bogged down in a guerilla war that has started taking a steady toll. Unless the United States is perceived to have changed its attitude, and demonstrates its willingness to get to the root causes of Muslim-West problems, the negative perception of America is not going to decrease and we can expect terrorism to remain a festering international problem.

ANALYZING MUSLIM ISSUES AND FAILURES

Lack of education is widespread

Islam stresses education and encourages the quest for knowledge. The first injunction Prophet Muhammad^P received from God was the verse, “Read in the name of your Lord Who created” (96.1). However, Muslims have not paid much attention to literacy and education in the past few centuries, despite that injunction and other encouragement by the prophet, whose teachings they are required to follow.

For the majority of Muslims, especially in recent times, the main objective of becoming literate has been to read the Koran in Arabic. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of non-Arab Muslims are taught to read basic Arabic. However, such an exercise has questionable benefits. Some 78% of Muslims are non-Arab and therefore when they read the Koran in Arabic, they can barely understand what they are reading. Such “literacy” offers no practical and educational benefits in the secular world and neither does it enable such students to understand the teachings of Islam directly from the source (Koran).

In many parts of the world, Muslim girls are denied access to basic education, even where opportunities exist. Today, Muslim literacy rates are among the lowest in the world. With this weak foundation, it is not surprising that Muslims are at an economic disadvantage in most parts of the world. Without good education, they cannot compete in the job market or avail themselves of opportunities that can improve their lot. While there are many socio-economic reasons and other external factors for their present condition, the ultimate blame for an uneducated community rests on the Muslims’ own shoulders because they have not given education the priority it deserves.

Priorities are wrong

Human beings are required to make choices at every stage in their lives. In order to succeed, they need to prioritize the problems to be addressed and then select the best approach from among available choices. If choices are ranked correctly, the chances of consistent success are improved considerably. However, the requirement for prioritization is not limited to an individual’s own preferences. It extends to the community to which the individual belongs. For the overall success of a community, correct prioritization at both the personal and collective levels is a key requirement.

Muslims have not been good at prioritization. For too long, they have ignored important issues that should have been at the top of their list. For example, education has not been emphasized in recent memory. Neither has democracy and, along with it, accountability. Long-range and strategic options have ranked low because they do not produce immediate results. Focusing on the wrong issues due to incorrect prioritization has caused major problems for Muslims for centuries and has contributed to their decline in nearly every part of the world.

Religious extremists are in control

Religious fundamentalists are usually very vocal and politically active. Many, such as some pro-lifers in America, become aggressive and use violence when they cannot get their way. Muslim fundamentalists are no different. They frequently are well organized and, quite often, create the impression that they are stronger in numbers than they actually are. In many countries, they are the only organized opposition to rulers who have reached, or retained, power through dubious means. Such rulers try to keep fundamentalists satisfied by acceding to their demands as long as their own power is not negatively impacted. For example, Pakistan is an Islamic country where religious parties have garnered more than five percent of the seats in only one national election since independence in 1947. Despite that, they were able to pressure democratically-elected Bhutto, a leftist non-religious Muslim who was quite popular, to pass religion-driven legislation in 1974 that declared the Ahmadiyya sect to be apostate and non-Muslim.

Even in moderate Muslim countries, religious fundamentalists hold considerable power despite lacking government authority, especially in the day-to-day affairs of the state. They try, and often succeed, in deriving authority from their righteous stance and moral high ground. Such people have honed their ability to use Islam as a tool for befuddling the common man, who often cannot separate these personalities from religion and, consequently, cannot make an objective evaluation of religion-painted issues.

Historically, many Muslim rulers used the name of Islam while performing reprehensible acts for which there is no place in Islam. For example, Mahmud Ghazni invaded India 17 times between 1000 and 1025. He plundered its temples, famous for their wealth, including the well-known Somnath temple. While his barbarity was not restricted to non-Muslims (as exemplified by what he did to

the Muslim ruler and people of Multan), his actions against the Hindus were against the tenets of Islam. His reprehensible actions earned Muslims the animosity of Hindus that persists even after one thousand years.

Religious extremists have often given a bad name to Islam, even in modern times, by mistreating, persecuting, or killing minorities. Islam clearly prohibits compulsion in religion. While the vast majority of Muslims are tolerant and get along with non-Muslim neighbors in all parts of the world, religious extremists have done Islam and other Muslims a great disservice by creating the perception that Muslims are intolerant.

Religion used as a cover to achieve ends

Since time immemorial, religion has been and continues to be a powerful tool for mobilizing and exploiting people in all parts of the world. Muslims are more susceptible to such mobilizing calls, which enjoin religious duty and obligation, due to their collective responsibilities specified by Islam. In too many cases, leaders in Muslim countries have put a religious cover on issues in order to obtain support they could not muster by using only secular merits.

The two most important struggles from the Muslims' perspective at this time are in Palestine and Kashmir. Both of them started in regions that were characterized by religious tolerance. In both places, national liberation struggles were started and led for many years by secular nationalist organizations seeking to throw out the occupying powers. However, in both cases, the leadership was ultimately taken over by parties that presented the resistance to occupation as an Islamic religious struggle against the Jews and Hindus. Despite the change in leadership, in both Palestine and Kashmir, secular parties have continued their struggle to obtain freedom, even though they have been overshadowed by the religious radicals.

In Palestine, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other religious groups were successful at presenting a genuine national liberation movement as a Muslim versus Jewish state struggle. Similarly, in Kashmir, the secular Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front was displaced by a number of religious groups who managed to project the struggle against Indian occupation as a religious uprising against the Hindu oppressors. The reality is that even though Muslims are in an overwhelming majority in Kashmir, they have desired to regain their independence due to their history and nationalism rather than any animosity

towards Hindus. In Kashmir, Muslims have lived peacefully for centuries with Pandits, who are high-caste Hindus.

The religious groups in Palestine and Kashmir have been very successful in mobilizing opposition to the Israelis and the Indians. Ever since they took over the resistance, the cost of occupation for the Israelis and Indians has skyrocketed in terms of lives and money. However, the use of terrorism, especially in Israel, has also harmed the genuine liberation movements due to extremely negative press coverage in the West; this also has given Islam a bad name. The religious leaders, who fight in the name of a religion that condemns terrorism, should first have become well versed in their own religion before using it to achieve their objectives. The use of terror is clearly prohibited in Islam. It also does not justify illegal means to achieve a goal even if the objective is noble. Suicide bombing, which is a crime according to Islam — and especially the exploitation of misguided teenagers for that strategy — is something that every Muslim ought to condemn.

Palestine incorrectly portrayed as a religious struggle

The Palestinian struggle started out as a freedom movement led by nationalist Palestinians, both Muslim and Christian. Both al-Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization, which started active resistance against the Israeli occupation, were secular organizations. One of Israel's bitterest enemies, and the least compromising, has been Dr. George Habbash. He is a Christian leader who heads the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

The Palestinian struggle first took a religious turn in 1969 when part of the al-Aqsa Mosque was gutted in an arson attack by an Australian visitor, two years after Israel occupied East Jerusalem. Also, as Arafat's failures became apparent and people lost faith in his ability to deliver on his promises, frustrated Palestinians looked elsewhere for leadership. Hamas, which had a social base and a record of community service, and other religious groups became popular and took on a leadership role in the resistance movement against the Israelis.

The Muslim error is that they have viewed the Palestinian struggle as an Islamic struggle, whereas in fact it is a national war of liberation, and mistakenly believed that the Palestinians were being oppressed due to their being Muslims. The fact is that both Christian and Muslim Palestinians have been oppressed and they both hate the Israelis equally. However, perception becomes reality.

Muslims believe that Palestinians are being subjected to suppression and humiliation just because they are Muslims; and it is not surprising that America, which has been supporting Israel unconditionally for decades, is associated with the oppression of Muslims.

The Kuwait crisis was initiated by Iraq, not America

Many Muslims view the Gulf War and the pitting of Muslim coalition forces against Iraq as a conspiracy by America and the West to continue their scheme of making Muslim countries fight each other. They believe that the objective was to weaken Muslims as a follow-up to an earlier plot to drain the Iranians and Iraqis by making them fight each other for eight long years.

Unfortunately, Muslims who subscribe to this view conveniently forget the root cause of the problem — Saddam Hussein. He is among the worst, most evil men this world has ever seen. Despite his known characteristics, Saddam was actively aided, politically and militarily, by the Americans who used him as a proxy against the Iranians who had fallen out of their orbit in 1979. In addition to gassing his own people, he committed naked aggression against his neighbors, Iran and Kuwait. The two Iraqi-instigated wars left Iran and Iraq's economies in shambles, destroyed Kuwait's infrastructure, bled Saudi Arabia financially, devastated a generation of Iraqis and Iranians, and killed over a million Muslims.

Bhutto was responsible for his own downfall

The unfortunate fact is that the executed prime minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, despite his brilliance, was power hungry and paranoid. Among his major crimes was his refusal to accept the results of the 1970 elections, in which his party came in second; that led to a bloody civil war and the ultimate breakup of Pakistan in 1971.

Bhutto was responsible for his own undoing. He rigged the Pakistani national elections in 1977. The common belief in Pakistan is that he would have won the elections, though with a smaller majority, even without the rigging. However, his paranoid nature led him to manipulate the elections, which triggered widespread street riots. The anti-Bhutto demonstrations and riots continued until the military, headed by General Zia-ul-Haq, dismissed Bhutto and took over.

Saudi non-oil exports have started creating major problems

The Saudi royal family's rule is considered by many Muslims to be un-Islamic because it violates the Islamic principle that a ruler should be selected through an elective process; this is particularly ironic because of the royal family's self-appointed "Guardian of Islam" position. Both orthodox and radical Saudi Arabians question the religious legitimacy of the royal family and Saudi government. Therefore, as part of its effort to appear legitimate and cater to the sentiments of domestic religious fundamentalists, the Saudi royal family has run the country in a rigidly orthodox manner and initiated a program to export Islam.

The export program has involved funding religious extremist groups and madrassas in foreign countries. The products of that program are dogmatic, Wahhabi-type mullahs and religious zealots whose knowledge is limited to basic Islamic principles and teachings. Typically, such people lack secular education and their minds are closed to anything that appears materialistic or Western. A large number of Taliban soldiers were drawn from schools funded or supported by the Saudis.

The more recent Saudi export has been even more dangerous. Investigators say that a majority of the 19 hijackers who participated in the 9/11 atrocity were Saudis. If they had been nationals of just about any other country, the American government would have had a completely different attitude and reacted far more aggressively against that country. The soft approach only confirms what is widely believed by Muslims — that America will do almost anything to ensure that the Saudis are not displeased because they control vast oil reserves.

Americans have failed to see the bigger picture of what the Saudi connection to 9/11 means and why so many Saudi nationals were involved in that attack. The event clearly indicates that there is very strong anti-American feeling even in friendly Saudi Arabia and, therefore, America should seriously analyze the causes for that sentiment and how it can be changed.

Poor communication and use of media

The media is a very powerful tool that can create, reinforce, or change views about almost any issue. One of the problems Muslims have been facing is their negative image that has been projected by the media in America, especially since 1973, for a number of reasons and faults that can be attributed to both sides, as explained earlier.

The Israelis, using the media and their powerful lobby in Washington and elsewhere, succeeded in portraying Palestinians as Islamic terrorists many years before the first suicide bomber struck. India has also misled the world about Kashmir and its own record through a very effective public relations and media campaign. It has succeeded in focusing world attention on India as the “biggest” democracy and on its secularism, which project a positive image, while systematically and consistently killing Muslims in riots, occupying Kashmir by force since 1947, violating the human rights of Kashmiris and Sikhs, and even demolishing the historic Babri mosque. In March 2002, more than eight hundred Muslims were killed and thousands of their homes and businesses destroyed during an anti-Muslim pogrom in the Indian state of Gujarat. According to the Human Rights Watch report of April 30, 2002, Gujarat state officials were directly involved in those killings.

Muslims lack a widespread projection of their side of the story using various media. This shortcoming has hurt them in the past and continues to do so now. While mastering media techniques, Muslims also need to ensure that their extremists are neutralized. They should not be allowed to project themselves as the spokesmen of the majority nor be allowed to carry out acts that, in the long run, harm the reputation and causes of Muslims worldwide. While the importance of positive media cannot be overestimated, Muslims should realize that even the most positive media coverage will not ultimately negate the effect of systematic criminal and terrorist acts perpetuated by a few using the name of Islam. Therefore, such elements should be completely marginalized.

Muslims lack role models

Over the centuries, many Muslims served as great role models for the generations to come. However, in the modern, fast-paced life of instant communications, there are very few Muslim role models. Role models, especially with national recognition, are lacking in politics, government, economics, medicine, law, social life, and sports.

Earlier role models, especially historical figures, can be used in the modern age in some ways, such as promoting characteristics and qualities that can be emulated at personal and family levels. However, few historical figures are readily seen as relevant to modern issues. Muslims need new leadership models who can be looked up to from both religious and secular perspectives. They are

needed at both national and personal levels. There is a dearth at the national level because Muslim leaders have let down their followers, time and again. At the personal level, the lack of an educated community has limited the number of individuals who might rise to become role models for the Muslim community.

The majority is silent

The majority of Muslims throughout the world are silent and apathetic regarding what goes on outside their personal sphere. They are only interested in their day-to-day life, primarily due to economic and social circumstances. The silence of the majority is misinterpreted and/or misrepresented; and the most vocal Muslims are the radicals and extremists who, unfortunately, get maximum attention and media coverage. When the media focus on extremists and shows them shouting, "Death to America!" it appears that Muslims are thirsting for blood. What is not apparent or explained by the media is that such people are less than five percent of Muslims. Osama bin Laden and other extremists represent ordinary Muslims about as accurately as the likes of David Koresh and the KKK represent the average American, or as the IRA represents Catholicism and the Pope. The Muslim silent majority, for whom the American way of life is a dream they would love to have, rather than destroy, needs to shake off its apathy and become more involved and outspoken. Failure to do so will ensure that its representation will be in the hands of those whose actions have already done considerable harm.

Leadership has failed consistently

Muslim leadership has, by and large, been an abject failure in practically all parts of the world since the early days of Islam. Failure extends to political, economic, and religious leadership. Leadership failure has been an extremely important factor leading to the development of the conditions in which Muslims find themselves in at this time. It is quite apparent that unless Muslims produce better leaders, they cannot hope for a dramatic change in their existing condition. They need to realize that leaders, in most cases, are a reflection of the society at large. Therefore, unless Muslims instill good personal qualities within themselves and change for the better, their future leaders will continue to let them down.

Jihad hijacked

Muslims have let jihad be hijacked by both Muslims and non-Muslims. For centuries they have viewed many conflicts as jihad (even though they were not), by allowing themselves to be misled by Muslims who had selfish and wrong agendas and objectives. The two primary reasons for their being led astray are emotions, and ignorance regarding jihad. Muslims share the blame for the negative perception of jihad among non-Muslims, especially in America, because they have failed to counter misinformation and misinterpretation regarding jihad. Their passive attitude has contributed to the perception that they are associated with an intolerant and aggressive religion.

On the other hand, Western media have helped paint an incorrect picture of jihad and what it stands for. Most of the media usually have simply reported the exhortation of Muslim extremists, urging jihad, without presenting adequate additional information about an emotional and hot topic as required by good journalism standards. In the past, such collateral information would have clearly shown that many of those issuing the jihad calls were misrepresenting Islam for their own criminal agendas. Though many recent articles and news stories have accurately reported the primary objective of jihad — which means a personal inner struggle — and how ordinary Muslims view it, the lack of such information in a timely way has contributed to its very negative perception in the eyes of Americans.

CHAPTER 6: FAILURE OF MUSLIM LEADERSHIP

The decline of Islamic power and the plight of Muslims, especially in the 20th century, have many causes directly attributable to Muslims. While some blame can be assigned to individuals, a significant amount of responsibility can be attributed to failed Muslim leaders. Many of them led their countries on the path of destruction — politically, economically, and socially. In many cases, countries ready to become powerhouses ended in disarray due to corruption, mismanagement, and misrule by despots, dictators, and incompetent rulers. The following sections list some of the worst Muslim leadership failures, political and religious, in the modern age.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Organization of Islamic Conference

After an attempt was made in 1969 to burn down the al-Aqsa mosque, located in Israeli-controlled Jerusalem, Muslim countries got together and created the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The primary objective of the OIC was to unite Muslims. However, all it has succeeded in doing is to organize annual conferences where the leaders of the member countries meet and issue statements. In more than three decades, the OIC has yet to produce anything practical or meaningful.

The OIC leadership is composed by and large of national leaders who do not represent the will and aspirations of their people. Most of the leaders have either not been elected or they won in elections that were not free. Most of them

have risen to leadership positions through manipulation, deceit, heredity, military coups, questionable elections, and other dubious means — all un-Islamic practices.

Genuine leaders have to rise and be accepted and respected by the population at large before they can be truly representative. Only when that happens can a toothless organization like the OIC have the moral authority to lead and make decisions. For that to happen, Muslims should not look to America or the West because they respect democracy or are powerful. Instead, they should accept their own responsibility and take appropriate steps for achieving democracy within their own countries.

Arabs

The Arab world has had more than its share of dictators and despots, and they continue coming in an endless parade. It is not unusual for a feared, detested, or incompetent ruler to be followed by an even worse one. The brutality of some of these leaders, their suppression of their own populations, and making their neighbors live in fear are completely un-Islamic.

Saddam Hussein was the worst Arab ruler in modern times; his character is well known. It is regrettable that a large number of Muslims sympathize with him: they forget or are ignorant of the fact that Saddam is responsible for more Muslim deaths (resulting from the Iran-Iraq war that he started) than anyone else in history, except Stalin.

Hosni Mubarak, of Egypt, who runs a corrupt and inefficient administration that has not uplifted the life of the Egyptian masses despite billions in American aid and loan write-offs, is out of touch with the feelings and aspirations of his people.

Hafez Assad of Syria was another brutal dictator. His troops systematically massacred more than ten thousand men, women, and children over a period of weeks in the town of Hama, which was sympathetic to the opposition.

Kaddafi is another dictator who has kept himself in power for more than 30 years. His misrule had practically ruined Libya's economy, despite its vast oil resources, even before the economic embargo was imposed due to the bombing of Pan Am 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in 1988.

Iran

Iran, an oil-rich country, has had two major leaders in the past half century. The Shah of Iran, a Sunni, ruled the country until the Khomeini-led revolution overthrew him in 1979. While the country did make good economic progress during the Shah's tenure, fueled by massive oil revenues, wealth distribution was very inequitable. The Shah also suppressed the Shias, who accounted for 80% of the population, and anyone else who dared oppose him. Torture of opponents by the feared SAVAK, the secret police, was widespread during his reign. When the people finally rose against him, the Shah had no choice but to flee.

Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from exile in France in 1979. He was a spiritual leader who let the country be run by other politically motivated ayatollahs. The new dogmatic rulers, with their hardline, medieval views, succeeded in ruining an economy that had been quite vibrant. During their rule of more than two decades, the Iranian economy has struggled. Opposition has been stifled and human rights have been violated even though Islam guarantees them. Additionally, the condition of women has gone from bad to worse under the rule of the ayatollahs. After the revolution, the family protection law was abrogated; this effectively denied women the right to divorce. Women were restricted from certain professions (such as law) and university programs (such as agricultural engineering and veterinary sciences), barred from being judges, and required to obtain the permission of the father or husband in order to travel abroad.

Pakistan

Pakistan was a country of hard-working people that was born with great dreams, after great sacrifices, in 1947. It had vast potential and initially made good progress. However, in the past three decades, three powerful leaders have failed it miserably. That this Islamic country is still intact after all it has gone through in the past half century is nothing short of a miracle.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Zia-ul-Haq, and Nawaz Sharif either had comfortable parliamentary majorities or the backing of the powerful military while they were in authority. They were extremely powerful and could practically rule by decree. As is well documented in government white papers, judicial records, newspaper reports, and human rights reports issued by various organizations, all three were responsible for many abuses and crimes.

The three leaders rigged elections, made corruption a part of daily life, killed political opponents, patronized generals who smuggled drugs, made a mockery of the justice system and its judges, humiliated the figurehead president, introduced guns into the society, bought state industries at fire-sale prices in the name of privatization, used sectarian extremists to kill innocent people, and murdered religious minorities. Each one of these is a major crime according to Islam, which is the official religion of Pakistan.

Unfortunately, Pakistanis tend to blame other countries, especially the West, for their mess rather than lay the blame squarely where it lies — third-rate leaders who left the country in political and economic chaos. The inability to acknowledge that the fault can be their own is common among Muslims.

Indonesia

Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world. It had great economic potential when it became an independent country in 1949 after more than three centuries of Dutch colonial rule. After independence, two of its rulers, Sukarno and Suharto, reigned over Indonesia for decades. However, both of them were failures during whose rule corruption and nepotism became institutionalized, human and fundamental rights were abused, and democracy was denied to Indonesians. The opposition, which included communists and the people of East Timor, was suppressed and punished by killing of hundreds of thousands of people and the razing of hundreds of villages.

When Sukarno was forced to leave after a failed communist coup attempt in 1965, the country was polarized and came close to economic ruin. Suharto, who followed him, also turned out to be an incompetent ruler. His rule was characterized by failed policies, corruption, cronyism, and nepotism that caused the country, which had the potential to be an Asian powerhouse, immense economic harm. On the religious and political front, Indonesia's 1975 occupation and subsequent ruthless suppression of Catholic-majority East Timor has contributed to the perception that Islam is intolerant.

Algeria

It has been the misfortune of Muslims in modern times that whenever they got rid of a dictator or an occupying power, the replacement often turned out to be equally bad or even worse. After Algeria won its freedom from the French, following an armed struggle characterized by tremendous suffering and sacrifice,

its new local rulers let the country down. In the new setup, democracy was denied and the Algerian rulers ruined the economy despite abundant oil reserves. For more than a decade the country has been racked by civil war. It started when the army prevented the Islamic Salvation Front, which easily won the first round of elections, from coming to power by canceling the second-round elections. The civil war, which has been extremely brutal and dirty, has killed tens of thousands of innocent people.

Afghanistan

After the Afghan mujahideen defeated the Soviet army, their own tribal rivalries came to the forefront. The result was a vicious civil war, even more destructive than the war against the Soviets, that destroyed Afghanistan economically, politically, and socially. More people have been killed in the post-Soviet civil war than were killed in the war against the communists. The civil war also led to an anarchic situation in which the Taliban came to power. They ruled with an iron hand and implemented rules, especially for women, which were backward even by Afghan standards. On the political level, they made the mistake of allowing Osama bin Laden to establish terrorist bases in Afghanistan. The result has been even more destruction, at the hands of Americans, following the 9/11 attack.

Palestine

Yasser Arafat was instrumental in launching the Palestinian resistance against the Israelis after they occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967. Since the beginning, he was the undisputed leader of the PLO, which was primarily led by secular freedom fighters. A politically inept leader, Arafat interfered in the affairs of the countries that supported him. He failed to win the genuine support of Jordan and Lebanon, who provided refuge to Palestinians at tremendous economic, social, and political cost. Consequently, the Palestinians suffered tremendously when those countries turned against them. Under Arafat's leadership the Palestinians, instead of resisting the Israelis through guerilla warfare, made terrorism their main weapon and targeted soft targets.

Arafat's failure to show any concrete results, after decades of ineffectual struggle, ultimately forced the Palestinians to look elsewhere for leadership. The result has been the liberation movement takeover by extremist organizations such as Hamas and the introduction of new tactics, such as suicide bombings,

which has created a negative perception of the Palestinians in the West despite their genuine struggle.

The list of failures and strategic mistakes that can be attributed to Arafat, which have prolonged the Palestinian struggle and held the Muslim world hostage since decades, is extensive. It includes failure to grab many opportunities and make peace, failing to sincerely condemn or control terrorism, supporting Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War, widespread corruption in the Palestinian Authority, lack of accountability, misuse of aid after the Oslo Agreement was signed, nepotism and cronyism, failure to conduct elections and uphold democracy, and refusal to delegate authority.

Kashmir

Sheikh Abdullah was the undisputed leader when the Kashmiri Muslims started their freedom movement in 1931. After a few years, due to strategic differences, some of his colleagues left his National Conference party and started their own organization — the Muslim Conference. In 1944, when the leader of India's Muslims, Jinnah, declared after a fact-finding mission that the Muslim Conference was the true representative of the Kashmiri Muslims, Abdullah flew into a rage. His hoodlums humiliated Jinnah by garlanding him with shoes in Baramulla.

In 1947, India was partitioned and according to the rules, Muslim-majority areas were to be incorporated into Pakistan and Hindu-majority areas into India. In violation of the partition rules, Kashmir's Hindu ruler, against the wishes of his Muslim subjects who were in the overwhelming majority, decided to join India. Abdullah supported the unpopular decision because he feared that he had no political future in Pakistan since it was headed by Jinnah, whom he had mistreated and humiliated. Out of self interest, he supported an Indian occupation that has only brought misery, death, and destruction to Kashmir. The Kashmir issue has severely harmed the economies of India and Pakistan. and this, along with the Palestinian problem, has caused considerable distress to Muslims throughout the world.

Abdullah's rule until 1953 was marked by widespread mistreatment, torture, and exiling of his opponents. He was known to personally join the riot police and beat up demonstrators. From 1953 to 1975, he appeared to oppose India but never stated the ultimate objectives of his movement. In 1975, when India offered him the Chief Minister's position, without honoring any prior

commitments to the Kashmiris and the UN, Abdullah grabbed the offer and confirmed what had long been suspected — that he only desired power and personal gain. His second stint as a ruler, was marked by corruption and economic mismanagement which led to widespread unemployment among educated youth who ultimately, in desperation, started an armed revolt in 1989.

A demagogue and an autocrat, Abdullah could not tolerate disagreement and refused to listen to any advice. He was a hypocrite who would start his speeches by reciting the Koran, and yet refused to stop the proliferation of liquor stores because he did not want to lose revenues from taxes on alcohol — a product banned in Islam. Abdullah finally destroyed his party when he bypassed loyal party stalwarts, who had given a lifetime to the Kashmir freedom movement, by nominating his politically inexperienced and insensitive son Farooq Abdullah as his successor. Farooq turned out to be even worse than his father. During his rule, tens of thousands of civilians were killed by the Indian armed forces.

RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabian rulers are the custodians of the Kaaba in the city of Mecca. They are viewed as the spiritual leaders of world Muslims, who look to them for moral leadership. However, except for Feisal, Saudi kings have failed miserably to provide leadership to the Muslim world. Their stand on world issues has rarely reflected the views and aspirations of average Muslims.

Un-Islamic activities in Saudi Arabia have caused considerable harm to the reputation of the Saudi royal family. Alcohol is easily available to the royal family and to those with the right connections, even though it is strictly prohibited by Islam. Civil and criminal laws are not uniformly applied to Saudi citizens and non-citizens. It is not unusual for a Saudi to be let off while, for the same crime, an expatriate Muslim is awarded the maximum sentence and, in many cases, deported. This flouts Islamic law, its concept of justice, and what Prophet Muhammad^P preached in his last sermon — that all people are equal.

Instead of providing religious and moral leadership at the national level, where it is needed, the Saudis have deemed it more appropriate to provide it at the grassroots level. However, their view regarding what should be exported is not in sync with the rest of the Islamic world, which does not agree with the

dogmatic beliefs of the Saudis. Saudis follow the rigid and puritanical Wahhabi sect that interprets Islam in a way that is not acceptable to the overwhelming majority of Muslims.

The Saudis have tried to provide leadership to the Islamic world in their own unique way. They have been exporting their brand of Islam by funding organizations that turn out rigid clones and dogmatic Taliban types through madrassas. At such institutions, students are taught by teachers uneducated in non-Islamic subjects. They also do not provide secular and balanced education, which is required for success in the modern world. This leadership method has failed, as has been shown by the end result in Afghanistan.

Iran

The Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s continued for eight bloody years. Except at the beginning, when one side had the upper hand and a counterattack succeeded, front-line positions were fairly static within a narrow war zone near the border. Because Ayatollah Khomeini believed Iran was in the morally right position and he expected ultimate victory, he refused to end the war. When he finally realized an outright victory was not possible, Khomeini agreed to end the war, and peace descended on two war-weary nations. However, it arrived only after a devastating loss of life, estimated to be more than a million, and severe economic damage to both countries.

The Iran-Iraq war could have been brought to a close years earlier. The failure of both countries, and Iran in particular, to negotiate an earlier end to the war has had a very detrimental impact on the political and economic situation in the Persian Gulf area. The war economically set back the two largest Muslim countries in the region by at least 20 years. Politically, it created enmity that will persist for generations.

The World

Religious leadership in most countries with large, or majority, Muslim populations is practically nonexistent. Political leadership in such countries is usually completely separate from religious leadership. Typically, political leaders are secular and do not carry any weight in religious affairs.

The activities of the religious leadership are confined to mosques and religious schools. Their most important tasks include leading daily ritual prayers and the Friday congregational prayer. A few scholarly leaders also issue Islamic

rulings on issues confronting Muslims. However, many religious leaders hardly know the religion, other than its basic rituals, and cannot be expected to provide real leadership.

Muslim religious parties with political aspirations do exist in many countries. Typically, such parties are ultraconservative and do not command the allegiance of more than 5% to 10% of the population. Despite their appeal to religious feelings, they lack popularity because the majority of people prefer candidates who they think can provide them with the basic necessities of life. This is a common theme throughout the world and is best exemplified by the phrase, "It's the economy, stupid!"

America

American Muslims are among the most highly educated Muslims in the world. Their community includes many learned religious scholars who have made their mark in both the secular and religious worlds. They have an excellent opportunity to create a community that can be a model for Muslims all over the world, in a country that affords many opportunities and permits religious freedom. American Muslim leaders have not yet succeeded because they have been unable to unite.

Some Muslim communities with dedicated members have done highly commendable work. However, politics, leadership battles, infighting, lack of or limited democracy, ethnic issues, and a host of other problems plague many Muslim communities and Islamic centers. American Muslim leaders, most of them immigrants, are more interested in personal status and position, which they tend to inflate through the size of their mosques, than in providing service to the community outside their mosques. Many of these centers, instead of being independent, appear to be under the influence of the Saudis.

American-born Muslim leaders have yet to make their mark, though a few have great potential, including Hamza Yusuf (Mark Hanson). A white American who converted to Islam, Hamza is charismatic, a brilliant orator, and a highly accomplished Islamic scholar who speaks Arabic fluently. He has become one of the most respected American Muslim religious leaders. Before meeting with President Bush in the White House on September 20, 2001, he said, "Islam was hijacked on that plane as an innocent victim."

Unfortunately, instead of building through a positive approach, Hamza initially harangued against Jews and practically everything American during his

khutbas (Friday sermons). He would put down leading American universities, characterizing them as Jewish, and advise his audience to stay away from such institutions. His negative impact on impressionable youth, reflected in their reduced motivation for achieving success in the secular world, has been apparent for some time. According to a February 15, 2002, article in the *Wall Street Journal*, Hamza has toned down his rhetoric and modified his views. Hamza's acknowledgment of his errors and his modified views are welcome signs because they show that he has the courage to acknowledge his mistakes, a characteristic that has been somewhat lacking in Muslim leaders. Muslims need such leaders who have the capability to influence Muslim youth, the future leaders who can help show Americans what Islam is really like and end the stereotyping of Muslims. They must support leaders such as Hamza who can build bridges between Muslims and America.

CHAPTER 7: JEHAD HIJACKED

The invocation of the word *jihad* conjures up different images, depending on whether the person is a Muslim or a non-Muslim, because it has been misinterpreted and maligned for centuries. For non-Muslims, it brings up images of war-mongering Muslims bent upon forcibly converting non-Muslims to Islam. For Americans, it brings up images of bin Laden advocating jihad and, consequently, images of an attack on civilian targets and government. For a few Muslims, the cry of “jihad” is a call to take up arms to protect Islam and Muslims. For ignorant extremist Muslims, whose numbers are insignificant, it means the subjugation of non-Muslims. However, for those who know and understand Islam, jihad has a far different objective that has nothing to do with violence and war, except in exceptional circumstances.

VIOLENCE, COMPULSION, AND WAR

Does Islam preach violence

Islam does not preach violence. It prohibits forced conversions or the use of force against innocent or unarmed people. It does not allow the use of violence for spreading Islam. Islam also prohibits the destruction of property. However, it does allow self-defense or the taking up of arms against aggressors. The Koran says, “Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors” (2:190).

In recent years, some of the most high-profile terrorist acts in the world that have impacted Americans have involved Muslims. They include the Lockerbie Pan Am bombing, the World Trade Center bombing in 1993, and the attack of September 11, 2001. These acts helped create the perception that Muslims are violent and intolerant extremists. The stereotyping by some in the American media has not helped; they have chosen to blame Muslims and/or Islam rather than the specific perpetrating groups and individuals whose actions were in contradiction of the tenets of Islam.

The Muslims' stereotypical image of intolerant and aggressive religious zealots, creating fear among non-believers, is far from reality. A very small number of Muslims do subscribe to extremist views, just as some followers of other religions do; but they are not representative of the vast majority of Muslims. Their beliefs also do not reflect the teachings of Islam — especially concerning violence. Extremists and terrorists represent Islam and Muslims as much as David Koresh, who used the Bible to justify his actions, represented Christianity. Similarly, Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden represent Islam as much as Adolf Hitler and Timothy McVeigh represent Christianity.

The fact that Islam is neither violent nor extreme is now well recognized. President Bush and many other American leaders have stressed this fact, which has helped promote understanding and remove some misconceptions. President Bush earned the respect of Muslims for stating this quite forcefully, after 9/11, when Americans were very emotional.

Did Islam spread by force

Over the years, due to constant repetition, the myth of suppression and forced conversions by Muslims has taken hold. One region in particular where Muslims have been severely taken to task is the Indian subcontinent. India was ruled by Muslim dynasties for more than six hundred years, while the very powerful Mughals ruled with an iron hand for more than three hundred years. The Mughal kings frequently married Hindu women and were extremely tolerant, with the exception of Aurangzeb.

Despite Islamic rule over India for six centuries, its Muslim population is barely 12%. Its Muslim rulers permitted religious freedom to be exercised and Hinduism continued to flourish. If the Muslim rulers, who governed with absolute power, had used force to convert Hindus, India at this time would have been a Muslim-majority country. One factor contributing to India's dim view of

Muslims is the death and destruction caused by Tamerlane, a Muslim, in 1398 when he sacked Delhi and killed one hundred thousand people. A fact frequently ignored by Islam critics is that India was ruled at that time by a Muslim belonging to the Tughlaq dynasty.

In Kashmir, where the Muslim population of the valley is 95%, King Rainchan and his queen followed different religions — Hinduism and Buddhism — and could not decide which of them should convert. In 1314, they decided to resolve the issue by adopting the religion of the first person whose voice they would hear the next morning. At dawn the next day, they heard the Muslim call to prayer and decided to convert to Islam. Following tradition, their subjects also converted to Islam.

When Muslims defeated the Byzantines and others, they did not forcibly convert anyone. Instead, the local people's contact with the Muslims often led to their conversion to Islam. In the Golden Age of Islam, Christians and Jews were extremely well treated. Often, during the period of the Islamic empire, Jewish minorities fled to Muslim countries to escape persecution by Christians. Jews returned to Jerusalem after Salahuddin defeated the Crusaders and retook Jerusalem. The following points also refute the claim that Islam was mostly spread by force:

- Muslim merchants spread Islam along ancient trade routes. Countries converted in this way include Indonesia, the largest Muslim country, which never saw the arrival of Muslim armies.
- In America, millions have converted to Islam through peaceful means.

Is Islam tolerant

According to Islam, acceptance of God and the performance of His worship must be of one's free will. As a consequence, Islam guarantees freedom of belief. According to the Koran, "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). If someone is coerced into accepting Islam, such acceptance becomes worthless because there can be no sincere conversion without free will.

Islam preaches that minorities and their places of worship must be protected. It allows non-Muslims to run their own courts for implementing family law. The following examples illustrate how Muslims practiced Islam when its teachings were being implemented correctly:

- Muhammad^P forbade the destruction of Christian and Jewish places of worship.

- Umar, the second caliph, refused to pray inside a Christian church in Jerusalem when Muslims conquered it. He did not want them to consider his action as a tradition and, subsequently, insist that Muslims pray inside the church or convert it into a mosque.

- After the Muslims conquered Jerusalem, Umar granted freedom of religion to the Christians and also permitted Jews, whose entry had been barred by the Christians, to re-enter Jerusalem.

- Jews as well as other non-Muslims flourished under Muslim rule in Spain, which lasted for eight hundred years.

- Muslim dynasties ruled over India for more than six centuries; and yet Hinduism remains the religion of 81% of its population.

Freedom of religion granted to minorities led to Christians and Jews supporting, and welcoming, Muslim rule in many places. In 641, it was the archbishop of the Egyptian Coptic Church who asked Muslims to get rid of the Romans. Despite Muslim rule for centuries over vast areas with large Christian minorities, they continued to flourish, especially during the Golden Age of Islam. If Muslims had been as intolerant as Isabella of Spain, no Christians or Jews would have survived under their rule.

Islam was also absorbed easily in most countries because it did not seek to impose radical cultural change. An important factor in its success was allowing regional identities to remain distinct. This can be observed in the differences among Muslims ranging from Libya to Indonesia and from Europe to America.

Perception of Islamic intolerance: A disconnect

There is a common perception among non-Muslims, especially in the West, that Islam is an intolerant religion and that it does not respect human rights or the religious freedom of minorities. This perception is based on three misconceptions.

First, nowadays, many Muslim countries are run by dictators or royal families who do not respect freedom, democracy, or human rights. Although outsiders might therefore associate such conduct and such attitudes with Islam, these rulers' actions violate Islamic principles. Islam actually guarantees human rights and religious freedom to its minorities.

Second is the accusation that Islam was only spread by the sword and that most nations were forcibly converted. The facts do not support the accusation, especially in the most widely quoted examples. While it is true that Muslims made many conquests during their initial expansion, most of them entailed restoring freedoms and removing oppressors. During those expeditions, most

Muslims were driven by the zeal to spread the word of God. However, they did not force local populations to convert to Islam. Much later, some misguided rulers did force conversions in contravention of the injunction in the Koran, “There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256). The spread of Islam through such means was insignificant. However, it helped create the perception that Islam is intolerant even though it opposes any forced conversions.

Third is the vague and inaccurate association of feared historical figures such as Genghis Khan and Halagu with Islam. For example, due to lack of knowledge among many Muslims and non-Muslims alike, Genghis Khan is mistakenly believed to have been a Muslim because of his last name — a common Muslim surname at this time. Both Genghis and his grandson Halagu, two of the most feared rulers in history, wrought death and destruction over vast areas that became part of the biggest empire in the world. Their names are associated with brutality, massacres, and intolerance. Halagu first defeated Muslim countries or dynasties and committed atrocities wherever he went, but subsequently he converted to Islam.

Why Muslim tolerance has declined

Muslim tolerance has declined considerably since the early days of Islam. It is an irony that the more Muslims have strayed from their religion, the more intolerant they became — in violation of their own Islamic beliefs and teachings. In contrast, the West has become more tolerant the more it has distanced itself from religion, which had been associated with intolerance and persecution.

Forced conversions made under Islamic rule; but they were done against the teachings of Islam. Such acts of intolerance have not been any different, or more frequent, than those perpetuated by Christians or others in the past. We must recognize that intolerance and persecution carried out by anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim, does not make that person’s religion guilty, especially if the faith prohibits intolerance and forced conversions clearly and without caveats.

When Islam permits war

Islam permits a Muslim to take up arms for a number of reasons, including self-defense, defending the religion, defense of basic human rights, persecution, or if he is forced from his home. It allows risking a life for a righteous cause, even though life is considered sacred, in order to prevent injustice from being triumphant.

Islam permits hostility against those who practice oppression but not against those who refrain from aggression. War is viewed as the last option and can only be fought under certain rules. Islam lays down strict rules of combat which include prohibitions against:

- Harming civilians
- Destroying property, crops, trees, and livestock
- Continuing fighting if the enemy seeks peace
- Committing treachery
- Mutilating dead bodies
- Exceeding bounds (restriction that any retaliation cannot exceed the originally perpetrated injustice)

JEHAD

Concept and purpose of jihad

The word *jihad* is derived from the Arabic *jahada*, which means to struggle. In practical terms, jihad means constant striving to achieve righteousness and justice through all means, including spiritual, moral, and material. In extreme cases, it can be invoked to take up arms and risk one's life for a cause such as the defense of Islam. However, the greatest and most common jihad, which is also the most difficult, is the struggle with one's self.

The following are examples of actions that can be considered jihad:

- Attempting to put God, whom one cannot see, ahead of everyday life and issues such as family, job, desires, pursuit of wealth and success, social life, and society
- Resisting pressure from family, friends, and society to act or live in a way that does not please God
- Personal struggle with one's self
- Making an effort to wake up for the mandatory early morning prayer
- Trying to be virtuous and fighting temptations
- Striving to submit to God in various aspects of life
- Practicing religion in the face of oppression and persecution
- Resisting injustice
- Standing up against unjust laws or a dictator
- Speaking the truth even though the boss may not like it
- Ordinary but difficult acts such as quitting smoking or controlling one's temper
- Serving parents

The following actions do not constitute jihad:

- Terrorizing minorities or civilians
- Fighting for land or nationalism
- Fighting for power
- Fighting for wealth, honor, or revenge
- Fighting to force others to accept Islam
- Fighting against evil by using violence
- Making jihad a tool of oppression

Misconception about jihad

Jihad is primarily a personal struggle against one's inner self and not a holy war against non-Muslims or a tool of oppression and forced conversions. However, the common perception among non-Muslims is that it means "Holy War," or a declaration of war against infidels. Its invocation creates fear and images of violence and forced conversions at the point of the sword. This perception is completely divorced from reality and does not represent what Islam teaches about jihad.

Both Muslims and the Western media are to be blamed for the incorrect perception about jihad. Muslims have used the term casually and incorrectly — applying it to situations that have nothing to do with jihad. The Western media has failed, while reporting on jihad, to present its true perspective. The term has also been misapplied and hijacked by terrorists. While the war in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 could be termed a true jihad (which is what made it well-known to Americans, to start with), its subsequent application by terrorists like bin Laden is a travesty.

When war or armed action can be justified as jihad

The struggle against one's inner self is referred to as the "greater jihad." The struggle against outside forces, which involves the taking up of arms, is referred to as the "lesser jihad." Islam allows Muslims to take up arms under the jihad banner for a number of reasons including:

- Self-defense
- Struggle against tyranny, exploitation, and oppression; can be against Muslims or non-Muslims
- Defense of one's own country
- Defense of Islam or a Muslim country (such as Afghanistan, which had been invaded by the Soviet Union, and whose citizens were being killed indiscriminately even though it had not threatened any of its neighbors)

Unholy wars

The term *Holy War* is a foreign concept to Islam. The term was coined by the Christians during the Crusades and has no basis in Islam. Wars, in the name of Islam or by Muslims, to grab territories, oppress, or forcibly convert non-Muslims can be classified as unholy wars because they have no Islamic sanction.

Over the centuries, rulers in all parts of the world have waged wars for expanding territories, increasing personal power, spreading religion, gaining honor and fame, increasing wealth and accumulating riches, and other reasons. Such rulers have been associated with all religions, including Islam and Christianity. In many cases, Muslim rulers used Islam or jihad as a rallying cry to obtain support for wars that violated Islamic principles or had questionable motives that had no relevance to Islam or jihad. In the view of Islam, such wars were wrong and cannot even be justified, much less classified as jihads.

TERRORISM

Islamic view of terrorism

The objective of terrorism is to target civilians in order to create fear in a society. Since such an objective is in conflict with clearly stated Islamic principles, true Islam cannot support terrorism. The Islamic view of terrorism has been clearly stated in the Koran and also by Prophet Muhammad^P. According to the Koran, the taking of one innocent life is equivalent to the killing of all mankind.

If a person commits an act of terrorism, it does not negate or change the principles of the religion he claims to follow. If a Catholic IRA terrorist detonates a bomb in London, it does not mean that Catholicism supports or encourages terrorism. Similarly, if a Muslim commits an act of terror, it does not mean that Islam condones or encourages terrorism.

Many terrorists are part of genuine liberation movements. However, even though the perpetrators of terrorism may have genuine goals, such as liberating their country from oppression or an occupying power, the Islamic view of their actions is based upon the following principles:

- Illegal means cannot be used to justify the end result
- Acts of terrorism that harm innocent people are prohibited
- Attacking occupation forces is acceptable

Both state-sponsored and individual acts of terrorism are un-Islamic

Terrorism can be committed by an individual or by a country. However, the word *terrorism* these days usually refers to acts of terrorism by individuals or small groups. According to Islam, terrorism is wrong whether it is committed by:

- an individual
- a group
- a state

According to Islamic principles, all the actions in the following list are wrong because they can be classified as terrorist acts:

- Saddam Hussein's chemical attack on Kurd villages
- Bombing civilian areas during wartime
- Muslim governments terrorizing Christian minorities in Sudan and East Timor
- Suicide bombing of the World Trade Center
- Army killing of civilians in Hama, Syria
- Blowing up of a passenger bus by a suicide bomber in Israel
- Indiscriminate demolition of civilian homes and the killing of civilians by Israel in Jenin, Palestine
- Israeli soldiers killing stone-throwing Palestinian children who are demanding an end to occupation
- Indian army's routine burning of shopping centers and homes in Kashmir
- Deliberate destruction of towns and villages in Chechnya by the Russians
- Sudanese government's bombing of civilian and humanitarian targets in southern and central Sudan
- Burning of crosses by the KKK
- Killing fellow workers in a post office
- Bombing an abortion clinic (even though Islam prohibits abortion)

No one has a monopoly on terrorism. Both individuals and states carry it out throughout the world. It is implemented in the name of religion, national interest, personal belief, and racial superiority. The practice of terrorism is not restricted to the so-called rogue states or small groups. It is also perpetuated by mainstream countries. Some have terrorized the citizens of countries they have occupied, such as Palestine and Kashmir, for decades. The Islamic view is that all types of terrorism are wrong, whether they are committed by an individual or by a state.

Suicide bombing and martyrdom

A soldier in a war can be very brave and take many risks. So long as there is a chance of surviving, a soldier's life-jeopardizing actions are not considered wrong by Islam. In every society, Muslim and non-Muslim, an extremely brave soldier's actions are glorified because he places his own life at considerable risk in order to achieve an objective. However, a suicide bomber falls in a different category.

A suicide bomber undertakes a task knowing that it will lead to certain death. In other words, such a person undertakes to commit suicide in order to achieve a specific objective. According to Islam, suicide is one of the worst possible sins. Recently, suicide bombers have been referred to as martyrs. However, Islam considers a person to be a martyr only if he is killed while fighting against evil or defending Islam. A suicide bomber, instead of being killed by someone, kills himself. Therefore, such a person cannot be referred to as a martyr. Unfortunately, many young, uninformed and frustrated Palestinian Muslims have been misguided into thinking that they will become martyrs and go to heaven if they commit suicide.

Is Islam responsible for terrorism carried out in its name

In recent times, Islam has been blamed for acts of terrorism carried out in its name, even though such acts were against Islamic principles. While it is true that Muslim terrorist organizations have carried out many acts of terrorism in recent years, it should be noted that many non-Muslim terrorist organizations, including the Basque ETA and the IRA, have also been very active. One of the earliest terrorist organizations in the Middle East was the Irgun Zvai Leumi, a Jewish organization that was very active in Palestine from 1931 to 1948.

The following points should be kept in mind when attempting to relate Islam to terrorism:

- Islam considers all terrorism acts to be wrong without exception.
- Catholics and Christians have been pioneers in modern terrorism, even before the Black September Palestinian group made world headlines in the 1970s. The four oldest terrorist organizations in the modern world are the Catholic ETA (Basque-Spain), Catholic IRA (Ireland), Christian Nagas (India), and Christian Mizos (India), all of whom have been routinely conducting terrorist bombings and killings for three or four decades.
- Every Palestinian bombing or terrorist act is classified as Islamic even though Christian Arabs are also actively resisting the Israelis.

- The Irgun, a Jewish terrorist organization, blew up Jerusalem's King George hotel, killing 90 people, in 1946. In 1948, it participated in the massacre at Dier Yassin village where 250 civilians were systematically murdered. Menachem Begin, the ex-prime minister of Israel, was an Irgun leader.

No religion, including Islam or Catholicism, should be blamed and held responsible for acts of terrorism carried out in its name. Terrorism is a crime against humanity and no religion should be associated with it, despite what the perpetrators say, because none sanctions it.

FUNDAMENTALISM

What is fundamentalism

These days, a person is usually considered to be a fundamentalist if he belongs to the most conservative wing of his religion. Some people label as fundamentalists those Christians who are opposed to abortion, homosexuality, physician-assisted suicide, sex education in schools, and other issues. Among Christians, however, fundamentalism refers to the rigidity with which a group imposes its beliefs and interpretations of the scripture on others. Islamic fundamentalism can be defined based on the degree of conservatism or liberalism of its followers. However, Islamic fundamentalism is being incorrectly associated with extremists and terrorists who *violate* its principles rather than those who follow it strictly.

A conservative, or fundamentalist, uses his religion as a model for guiding and living his life in the modern world. In contrast, an extremist uses violence and terrorism to achieve his objectives. Extremists may or may not be religious fundamentalists — though they often are, in the case of Muslims. A distinction must be made between a fundamentalist and an extremist. There are many Islamic fundamentalists all over the world whose fundamentalism is limited to their routine daily lives and religious rituals, but the percentage of Muslim extremists is very low. However, in some areas such as the Middle East, they have considerable strength and pose a definite threat to Israel and America.

What Islamic fundamentalism represents

The true fundamentalists in Islam and Christianity are the ones who desire a return to basic traditional values and practices. They want their followers to be sheltered from the ills of modern life such as immorality, immodesty,

homosexuality, disrespect for parents, materialism, etc. Islamic fundamentalists also desire the implementation of rule by Sharia in Muslim majority countries. The overwhelming majority of Islamic fundamentalists are pious people who respect traditional values and are not in conflict with the Koranic teachings of tolerance and moderation.

A true Muslim is a fundamentalist so far as the practice of the religion is concerned. A person who truly follows religious teachings cannot be an extremist because Islam prohibits violence and terrorism while teaching moderation and tolerance.

Who and where are the Muslim fundamentalists

Most Middle Eastern terrorists appear to be fundamentalist Muslims so far as the daily practice of their religion is concerned. However, they share little with fundamentalists who are religious conservatives. Terrorists represent a radical wing that believes in achieving objectives through violence. Their objectives can be quite varied, including creating an Islamic state, freeing a country from occupation, overthrowing a secular government, and implementing rule by Sharia.

The extremist fundamentalist movement is fueled by social, religious, and economic conditions in many Muslim countries. They include lack of democracy and human rights, restricted personal freedom and fundamental rights, autocratic and unelected political leadership, refugee life, inequitable distribution of wealth, widespread poverty, lack of education, high unemployment, and lack of justice.

What has swelled the ranks of fundamentalists

More and more Muslims have turned to fundamentalism, and in some cases to extremism and terrorism, for a number of reasons in the past two decades. They include:

- Economic failure of Muslim countries and inability to provide jobs for their youth
- Corruption and injustice in many Muslim societies
- Worsening situation of Muslims worldwide
- Call for jihad against the Soviets during the war in Afghanistan
- Crises in Palestine, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Kashmir, and Chechnya
- Iranian revolution
- Worsening Saudi economy and the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia
- Resurgence of Islam in many countries

CHAPTER 8: BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

WHAT WORLD MUSLIMS NEED TO DO

Address root causes of problems

In order to improve their overall condition and status, Muslims need to identify the root causes of problems afflicting them by thoroughly analyzing their issues. It is essential that the diagnosis be accurate because addressing symptoms, rather than causes, will not achieve anything meaningful. Once root causes are identified and solved, minor problems will fade away. The approach must be disciplined, which is counter to the tendency to implement solutions that show results in a shorter time and have more political capital associated with them.

Prioritize correctly

Resource limitations and other conditions significantly influence when and how communities resolve problems. They force prioritization that determines the sequence in which problems are addressed, based on their relative importance to the community. The degree of success that will be achieved by Muslims in addressing their problems will depend upon their approach and how they prioritize their issues. In theory, the prioritization task appears to be quite easy. In practice, it is difficult because there is no unity among Muslims and, consequently, prioritization becomes an uphill task. However, each country can prioritize independently and use the results to solve its own problems. After

successful countries achieve some of their goals, they can become models for other countries which failed to prioritize correctly.

Recognize Israel

The Arab-Israeli issue is one of the root causes of problems between Muslims and America and the West. The conflict has diverted Muslims' resources, drained them emotionally, and prevented much needed economic development. While it is recognized that Arabs suffered injustice when Israel was created, Muslims need to move forward. There can be no turning back of the clock. They should make a serious effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. They must negotiate with Israel in good faith, just as the Israelis must negotiate in good faith, and make it clear that they will provide Israel full recognition as part of a comprehensive treaty.

Stress educational, scientific, and technological development

An educated community, which is an essential requirement for meaningful development, is either missing or very small in most Muslim societies and countries. Muslims have extremely low literacy rates, and they lag in science and technology. The effort to create an educated society should start at the lowest level and extend to higher education. Meaningful incentives should be provided for achieving higher degrees, especially in engineering, science, and technology.

Muslims have the potential to be as successful as any other community, but they need education. Collectively, an educated community or group can achieve a lot, as exemplified by the Pakistani nuclear program which was developed by a few Muslim engineers and scientists in an underdeveloped country. They had the will and found the way against all odds to develop a nuclear bomb to ensure Pakistan's survival.

Achieve economic independence

A study of the economies of Muslim countries reveals that the majority are weak financially. An economically dependent and financially strapped country has limited options and can rarely act independently, even when its national interests are at stake. To achieve economic independence, Muslim countries must be prepared to make sacrifices they have not been willing to make in the past. They must be fiscally responsible, even though it might be beneficial in the

short term to act otherwise, or they will perpetuate too many long-term problems.

Many of the actions that leaders or governments take are in response to the demands of its citizens. If citizens cooperate, it is easier for the government to implement necessary measures. On the flip side, citizens can force the government to act responsibly and implement fiscally sound policies so that the economy is strengthened rather than weakened. Muslims need to understand these basic facts and do everything within their power to force their governments to act responsibly and, when required, cooperate with measures taken in the national interest.

Introduce social reform

Each Muslim country has unique social problems. They should be solved through the introduction of appropriate social reforms, which have been long overdue. Muslim societies should reflect the fairness and social equity that Islam enjoins — not the unfair systems they have implemented in violation of the Islamic principles they profess to follow.

Muslim societies need to respect and implement women's rights instead of just paying lip service. They should include women in education reform. Legal systems should be overhauled so that ordinary people can address grievances and hope to obtain justice, which is their fundamental right guaranteed by Islam.

The rights of workers should be respected. They are rarely honored in many Muslim societies. Bonded labor systems, where people are literally enslaved for life due to their own or inherited debt, should be banned. Land reforms need to be carried out in feudalistic societies so that those who work get the benefit of their labor.

Strive for unity

According to Islam, Muslims are expected to regard other Muslims as brothers and sisters in a united brotherhood. However, unity has been an elusive objective; Muslims have been divided since the time of the caliphs. There are problems, sometimes over trivial issues, between different sects and countries that periodically turn into serious inter-sect riots and result in bloodshed. Instead of focusing on differences, Muslims should unite and rise above petty considerations. They should respect and tolerate the views of others, Muslims and non-Muslims, as Islam enjoins them to do. Muslims should unite in the

achievement of common goals. If they are united, they will command greater respect and have greater clout than a disunited community can ever hope to achieve.

Shift from negative to positive objectives

The past few centuries have not been good for Muslims. This reality has encouraged a negative outlook that in and of itself now adds to their problems. Their objectives have tended to be more negative than positive: the urge to bring down or extract revenge is easier to implement than a goal of building something. Muslims should look forward, not back, and be constructive with positive objectives that will uplift them.

On the political front, Muslims should reconcile with estranged neighboring countries. They should rise above negative and painful events and, where applicable, prevent historical enmity from continuing. On the fiscal side, they should also take a positive approach and set positive objectives. For example, a positive objective can be a goal to increase the country's revenues by 10%, in order to help pay off an existing loan in a shorter period. A negative goal would be to obtain a \$100 million loan to cover a deficit without aiming to raise revenues or cutting costs.

Become more responsible

Muslims should become more responsible and change their existing attitude of blaming others at both personal and collective levels. They should perform self-examinations frequently and accept their mistakes. They should stop blaming others for their problems. They need to be more open-minded and less prejudiced. Instead of jumping to conclusions, they should first attempt to evaluate the situation, circumstances, and motives thoroughly before blaming someone else. Performing self-analysis and acknowledging mistakes can never harm — only help.

Learn to help themselves

Muslims should not expect anyone to pull them out of their morass. They need to remind themselves of the Islamic belief that God does not help those who do not help themselves. Foreign aid, special treatment, protection, or sympathy will not help them in the long run. Muslims must change themselves

— no one else can do this for them — to become as self-reliant as possible and solve their own problems.

Become politically active

The Muslim masses are usually not politically involved in their countries. Politicians have taken advantage of their lack of participation and, consequently, they have ended up being regulated and ruled by third-rate legislators and leaders. Also, in most Muslim countries and societies, professionals and high achievers do not become politicians. The political arena is left for underachievers and, in too many cases, men of questionable character for whom the legislature and government are passports to wealth. It is not surprising that leaders who come out of such systems are of low caliber and, in many cases, corrupt and shady. Every Muslim should become involved in his country's political process. Professionals and other highly educated individuals should enter the political arena to enhance its quality and performance.

Pick good leaders and make them accountable

Leaders are a reflection of the society they rule. Usually, with some exceptions, corrupt societies produce corrupt and incompetent leaders. Muslims must uplift their character where it is lacking and take on the responsibility of picking good leaders who reflect the character of the society that elects them.

Once in power, leaders should not be given a free hand. They should be made accountable for their actions and performance. Typically, when a corrupt ruler is removed, the new ruler does not prosecute the departing ruler. The reason for ignoring an ex-ruler's illegal activities is self-interest. The new ruler wants to continue a corrupt system which will protect him from prosecution when he ultimately leaves office. If prosecution does take place, the objective is often to ensure that the ex-ruler, a rival, will not return to power.

The silent majority should become vocal

Extremists are a very small percentage of the Muslim community. They do not reflect the thoughts, hopes, and aspirations of the average Muslim. Despite that, they have received disproportionate attention and headlines because the media, American as well as foreign, are too eager to report their vehement and inflammatory rhetoric. It is time for the Muslim majority to make themselves heard and end the tyranny of the extremists who have hijacked Islam.

Avoid self-righteous superiority syndrome

A characteristic that many Muslims in the modern world tend to have is self-righteousness and a sense of superiority. This is exemplified by an Arab Muslim who illegally parked his car and blocked a driveway in front of a house when he went to attend the Friday noon congregational prayer in California. When he came out of the mosque, the vexed homeowner, who had been unable to get out due to his blocked driveway, confronted him. A heated exchange followed and the Muslim was abusive. When mosque management heard of the exchange, it asked the Muslim to apologize. He refused, saying, "I cannot apologize to a Christian!" Muslims should follow Islamic principles and judge issues based on merit and not according to the personalities, religions, or countries involved.

Communicate with non-Muslims

The many misunderstandings between Muslims and non-Muslims stand in the way of better relations. Removing misunderstandings should be a top priority for Muslims. They need to communicate with non-Muslims and try to remove misconceptions, misunderstandings, and false notions about Islam and Muslims. In the modern age, communication is a vital skill that many Muslims are sorely lacking. They need to address this shortcoming and develop superior communication skills — at both the personal and community levels.

WHAT AMERICA AND THE WEST NEED TO DO

Address root causes of problems

Just like Muslims, the Western world needs to address the fundamental causes of its problems with the followers of Islam. It should make a serious effort to understand Islam and Muslims by engaging in a serious and constructive dialogue. The West, and especially Americans, must determine which mistakes were made and what have been the causes of their problems with Muslims. Such issues should be addressed through active engagement and dialogue with Muslims at every level from personal to national.

Be a fair peace broker and guarantee Israel's security

America has the position and leverage to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict if it is even-handed. It has not succeeded so far, despite serious attempts, because it has not acted as a neutral peace broker. America is still capable of resolving the conflict by meeting the second of the following three peace requirements:

- Arab responsibility: Israel must be granted full recognition by all its Arab neighbors
- American responsibility: America must guarantee Israel's security for 50 to 100 years
- Israeli responsibility: Israel must vacate all Arab lands captured since 1967

If Israel's security is guaranteed, it will not be able to use its small size as a pretext for retaining occupied territories. Arab neighbors will realize that Israel has been guaranteed its survival and act accordingly. It is recognized that there are many issues that will need to be worked out, including the right of return and free access to the holy sites in Jerusalem. However, all remaining issues will be far easier to settle once the three core issues (acceptance, security, and return of occupied lands) are resolved.

Be informed and sensitive

Western countries should be better informed about Islam and Muslims. The West, and Americans in particular, should do whatever it takes to understand Muslims and interact with them. For those who desire to be informed, there is no shortage of sources, especially on the Internet. There are thousands of mosques and Islamic centers in the Western world where useful information can be obtained. At such sites, Muslims can be observed first-hand as they go about their rituals and day-to-day religious and social activities. These sites can also be the first point of contact for initiating a dialogue with members of the Islamic community.

Americans should be more sensitive and realize that there exists a world outside the US, with different beliefs and values. Americans should try to recognize, respect, and be sensitive to the differences that exist between the Islamic and Western civilizations. They should also avoid having a one-sided and patronizing attitude.

Plan for the long-term

American planning for the Middle East appears to be characterized and driven by the following factors:

- Demand for oil that must be fulfilled so the economy is not negatively impacted
- Desire for maintaining the status quo so oil supplies are not disrupted
- Ensuring that nothing is done to cause a fallout in the next election

The first item ensures that America will need to deal with the Middle East for the foreseeable future. The second item ensures that no step can be taken, even if it has the potential to provide long-term stability, if there is any chance of creating short-term supply issues. The third item ensures that no step can be taken, even if it leads to the long-term solution of the Middle East conflict, if it displeases the extremely powerful pro-Israeli lobby — which will happen if America becomes even-handed and tries to impose a just settlement.

In order to be successful, American policy must be fair and just. An even-handed American Middle East policy will lead to long-term stability in the region by providing justice to the people living there. Such a policy carries serious domestic risks and problems for any American leader who tries to support it. However, unless such a politically unpopular step is taken, or a breakthrough substitute is discovered that makes oil an expendable commodity, the Middle East problem will not go away. Unless America implements a fair policy and Middle East issues are resolved, it will remain in conflict with Muslims.

Match actions to words

Americans must practice what they preach. They cannot be selective in the application of the principles they honor. Americans should treat all violators of human rights in the same way. A friendly country that commits a crime must be treated the same as a rogue state. If democracy is a valued principle, then dictators in friendly and unfriendly countries should be treated or penalized equally. If a friendly country is guilty of state-sponsored terrorism, it should be treated no differently than an unfriendly state committing the same crime. Similarly, calls for the restoration of human rights should be addressed to all violators and not just unfriendly nations.

Be unbiased and fair

While there are many issues between Muslims and the Western world, only a few can be classified as serious and very difficult to solve. The major problem that has created Muslim animosity against the West, and especially against America, is the Palestinian issue. It is the core issue that drives everything else in the Middle East. While Europeans are fairer in their approach, due to their proximity and greater dependence on imported oil, Americans need to go a long way before they can be considered fair. Until Americans are perceived to be even-handed in the Middle East and other places where Muslim interests are involved, hatred for America will not dissipate.

Do not paint all with the same brush

Muslims are very diverse politically, culturally, and socially. They are spread out all over the world and should not be stereotyped. One of the most common mistakes non-Muslims make is to confuse Muslims and Arabs. Only about 22% of Muslims are Arabs. The result of this confusion is that some of the Arab and Palestinian fallout has negatively impacted non-Arab Muslims. Care should be taken to ensure that each group is judged by its actions and deeds unless there is a clear trend that can be related to all Muslims.

Engage Muslims

Living in silos is the perfect way to create misunderstandings between any two groups. To avoid such a situation, non-Muslims should make a concerted effort to communicate with Muslims. Interaction will help eradicate stereotypes and misconceptions. It will also help build a good relationship based on many shared values and beliefs. Interaction will also show that in day-to-day life, Muslims and non-Muslims face the same issues, problems, and challenges. Interfaith meetings and exchanges should be encouraged. Visiting mosques and the homes of Muslims will remove many barriers and misconceptions. Other ways to engage Muslims should be fully explored and utilized.

Build on common values

There is no dearth of common values between Muslims and the Western world, which is predominantly Christian and Jewish, faiths that Islam respects. Belief in God is a basic Islamic and Judeo-Christian principle. Muslims,

Christians, and Jews share high moral values, family values, business and ethical values, and respect for human rights. These and other common values should be identified and built upon to create mutual understanding and respect.

WHAT AMERICAN MUSLIMS NEED TO DO

Assume world leadership

Muslims in America are diverse and highly educated. Excluding Black Muslims, the majority of Muslims are either first- or second-generation immigrants from the Middle East, Far East, or Africa. They have been exposed to and understand the Muslim thought process and psychology. These Muslims also understand the West, which puts them in a unique position to become the bridge between the West and Islam. American Muslims should lead the way for world Muslims, which is only possible if they act in a united way. American Muslims can lead only if they show Muslims in the rest of the world their successes in a modern society and in building a model Muslim community.

Leave baggage behind

Many immigrant American Muslim leaders bring a lot of associations, assumptions, and ideas from their countries of origin. Some reflect non-democratic methods of operating institutions, the way other sects or women are treated, etc. These leaders tend to take actions and positions detrimental to their local Muslim community. Frequently, their actions become the basis for infighting and splits that project a negative image. A common cause for splits is the tendency of some Muslim community leaders to follow the Saudis, whom they consider to be on the spiritual high ground, even though the majority does not share their view. Muslims in America should think and act independently without being manipulated by, or being beholden to, external governments and organizations.

Focus on the bigger picture

Many American Muslims have lost sight of the big picture and, instead, focus on trivial issues that have divided their community and prevented them from moving forward. These include issues such as control of mosques, election of officers, deciding which days the Eid festivals should be celebrated, whether

women should be allowed on a mosque's governing board, Friday sermon language (English or Arabic), and whether one or two persons should deliver the Friday sermon.

For Muslims, bigger issues have typically taken the back stage. Issues such as how to marginalize extremists, national issues that have the potential to impact the viability of Muslims as a community, how to keep youth interested in Islam, and how to bring non-practicing Muslims into the fold should be focused upon rather than trivial issues that split the community and cause important issues to be ignored.

Put their own house in order

The image of American Muslims is mixed. At work, they command respect and are recognized as dedicated workers. However, they have also created negative opinions in neighborhoods across the country. Many mosques have become neighborhood problems due to widespread illegal parking, especially at the Friday afternoon prayer time and during evenings in the fasting month of Ramadan. If mosque leaders cannot manage basic tasks such as ensuring proper parking, starting prayers on time, running democratic administrations, and letting women run for office, it is a poor reflection on their capability to lead. Unless they learn to practice what they preach, such as consideration for neighbors, a negative image will continue to be projected about Islam. It is imperative that Muslims develop the respect and trust of Americans through personal actions and the way they run their institutions.

Avoid double standards

Orthodox Muslims throughout the world insist that their women wear hejab, a headscarf, which they believe is an Islamic requirement. However, despite being religious, many mistreat their women, mentally and physically, and deny them the basic rights Islam guarantees. In America and the Western countries also, many orthodox Muslim men insist that their women wear the hejab and that their daughters be educated at home. However, these same men have no hesitation in working with women who wear revealing clothes at work. If they had the courage of their convictions, they would walk off their jobs and trust God to provide them with an income, a belief that true Muslims are expected to have. Such people have weak beliefs or double standards. The application of double standards, which is a universal problem, extends to many

areas. Muslims everywhere should make a determined effort to identify and rectify questionable or unfair practices.

Lead by example and marginalize extremists

Muslims in America have to act as ambassadors of Islam. The example they set becomes the basis by which Americans relate Islam to Muslims. They must be proactive and open dialogues with non-Muslims. They must become the catalyst for starting communication with members of other communities and correcting misunderstandings.

Muslims in America have a difficult task in raising their children in a society where it is easy to deviate from Islam. They must use a middle-of-the-road approach, which Islam enjoins, that strikes a balance between religion and the worldly life. They also have a duty to ensure that extremist elements within the community are marginalized through their own active participation in community affairs. They need to speak up as forcefully in denouncing terrorism and tyranny of the extremists just as many non-Muslim Americans spoke up on behalf of Muslims and Islam. They need to support Muslim leaders like Hamza Yusuf, who spoke up fearlessly in support of his beliefs and rejection of terrorism.

Plan for the long term

There is widespread stereotyping of Muslims in America. Negative press far outweighs positive reports and stories. Talk show hosts are having a field day bashing Muslims and Islam. Muslims are not practiced at articulating their position and have difficulty to communicate or respond effectively; they are depressed by the barrage of one-sided news. They must realize that their history in America is very short. It takes time to organize and become effective. A cursory study of Jewish history reveals that for a long time they were discriminated against and stereotyped in America. At this time also, Jews face discrimination in many areas of the country. Initially, they were not organized to face their unique challenges. Over time, they have created superior communication and organizational capabilities that can be quickly mobilized to address any issue. Muslims must have long-term objectives and work diligently to achieve them.

Be involved in the political process

American Muslims should become involved in politics at the grassroots level. A community as large as the Muslims, numbering in the millions, needs to become mainstream and be represented in local government, state legislatures, and Congress. Unless they have their own representatives, Muslims can never hope to be heard where it counts. Even if they cannot elect Muslim representatives at this time, they have the strength to become swing vote blocks in many districts. A difference of even a few individual votes, or blocks of votes, can make a significant difference, as was demonstrated in the Florida vote in the 2000 presidential election. With their ability to swing election results, legislators will be forced to listen and address Muslim issues. However, Muslims first need to become a meaningful part of the election process.

Master communication techniques

One of the most important tools in the modern world is communication. In the past, Muslims did not realize the importance of this tool and did not use it in an organized manner. They have started to address that shortcoming and have organized at least one very effective group — The Council for American and Islamic Relations (CAIR). Over the past few years, CAIR has rebutted many incorrect news stories and perceptions about Muslims. It has also managed to pressure many American companies to apologize or reverse corporate actions viewed as anti-Muslim.

Over time, organizations such as CAIR will prove beneficial in projecting the correct image of Muslims and rebutting incorrect information. However, to be even more effective, communications need to be extended beyond issuing rebuttals and statements. Serious efforts should be made proactively to communicate with power centers, groups, and individuals throughout the country.

A challenge for Muslims is to prevent their communications and public relations organizations, such as CAIR, from deviating from their stated purpose and objectives or allowing leadership to pass to those with a different and undesirable agenda.

Stress common values

There are many common religious, moral, and family values shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Muslims believe in free enterprise and

entrepreneurship, ethics in business, democracy, and other values that are the foundations of Western societies. American Muslims should stress common values and use them as the basis for dialogues and promoting better understanding for their religion.

Develop mirror image of society professionals

At this time, most Muslims in America want their offspring to focus on a few professions such as medicine, engineering, and computer science. They should also stress other equally important fields such as journalism, law, communications, and marketing. The Muslim community should include professionals from all fields who can extend the reach of Muslims to all sections of society. Such professionals will enable it to communicate with, and better understand, the people of the country they live in.

Appreciate what America has provided

There are some Muslims who, despite living in America, love to bash it. They participate in the American Dream and enjoy its benefits, including economic and financial opportunities, lack of discrimination, personal freedom, freedom of speech, and religious freedom. Despite enjoying these benefits, they find fault with everything American. Such people, who are performing a great disservice to Muslims, should compare what they left behind in their former countries with what they are experiencing now. If America is not better, or if the country they came from is faultless, they should go back. America has its flaws but it is the responsibility of those living here, including Muslims, to rectify them. For that, a democratic process exists and Muslims can participate in it just like other citizens.

Reach out for a better future

The name of Islam was used to justify a criminal act by Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda organization. Similarly, there are powerful elements in America which, to serve their own purposes and agendas, have been smearing Islam and Muslims. 9/11 has been a godsend for people who have used the event to their advantage by employing scare tactics and spreading false information about Islam and its followers, primarily by associating terrorist actions with Islam.

9/11 caused a paradigm shift. It made Americans acutely aware that something was seriously wrong and that they were hated. They have since been

conducting their own investigations, researching on the Internet, visiting mosques, meeting local Islamic organizations, talking to Muslim colleagues at work, studying the Koran and, most important, asking themselves probing questions about why the 9/11 tragedy occurred. Many have been surprised by what they discovered about Islam and Muslims, the prevalence of false notions about Islam, Islamic beliefs shared by Christians and Jews, and the extent to which news reaching them had been filtered. Consequently, it has led many to rethink and reevaluate their views about Islam and Muslims.

Muslims were shocked by what happened on 9/11. They too have started to seriously analyze the 9/11 act and its implications, the current conditions of Muslims and how they developed, why they are being viewed as terrorists, and how a terrorist organization hijacked Islam.

The combination of change and reevaluation among Muslims and Americans is very positive. It provides hope that the two groups will be able to build on common ground and start a new chapter with foundations of respect, tolerance, justice, and mutual understanding. There have been mistakes on both sides. If both sides look forward and learn from the past, there can be high expectations for a better, peaceful, and prosperous future for everyone.

PART II

UNDERSTANDING ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

CHAPTER 9: MUHAMMAD^P

The religion of Islam, which was started by Prophet Adam, was formalized under the prophethood and leadership of Prophet Muhammad^P. Muslims are mandated in the Koran, whose teachings they are not to question, to obey him. They are also required to accept all of his rulings with full conviction. Islam instructs Muslims to use his life as a model for living their own day-to-day lives. They are enjoined to emulate everything that he did, minor or significant, in all aspects of his life including personal, social, and political. Therefore, in order to understand Islam and Muslims, it is imperative to study the life and character of Prophet Muhammad^P.

PRE-PROPHETHOOD PERIOD

Birth and childhood

We can trace the ancestry of Muhammad^P to Prophets Abraham and Ismail. He was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570. His father, Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib, died before he was born and his mother, Amina, died when he was six years old. Muhammad^P was raised by his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, who belonged to the respected Qureysh tribe. After Abd al-Muttalib's death, Muhammad^P was raised by his uncle Abu Talib. He never learned to read and write, even though he was born in a leading Meccan family, and remained illiterate until his death.

As a child, Muhammad^P was sent into the desert, as was customary, to live with a Bedouin family for a few years. The tough life of the Bedouins prepared him for the difficult times that he was to face later on in life.

Life as a youth

Muhammad^P underwent many experiences during his youth including working in the desert as a shepherd and traveling with a trading caravan to Syria. When he was in his twenties, he was hired by a wealthy widow, Khadijah, to manage her business. His job involved traveling with and managing her trading caravans, which brought him in touch with people of different cultures and religions.

Even when he was young, Muhammad^P did not like, or participate in, the paganism and idol-worship that was prevalent in Arabia at that time. He did not behave like most youth and, even at a young age, was highly respected by the people of Mecca due to his personal qualities, especially honesty and trustworthiness. The respect was so high that Muhammad^P came to be better known as al-Amin (the Honest) and al-Sadiq (the Trustworthy). Due to his exemplary character, he would often be called upon to become the arbiter during disputes.

At the age of 25, Muhammad^P was approached with a marriage proposal by his 40-year-old employer, Khadijah, through an intermediary. He accepted the proposal and they were married in 595. Their marriage lasted until her death in 619, almost 25 years later. The marriage resulted in six children — four daughters and two sons. None of the sons survived past childhood.

State of Arabia at Muhammad^P's birth

When Muhammad^P was born, Arabia and many other parts of the world were in a state of moral decay. Arabia, in particular, was in a moral and social abyss characterized by polytheism, idol-worship, ignorance, and superstitions. Customary practices and problems included burying new-born girls alive, tribal conflicts, drinking, injustice, tyranny, and lack of women's rights. Their good qualities, like bravery, generosity, confidence and firmness of belief (though wrong), were outweighed by their vices.

The polytheism and moral decadence of the society around him did not go unnoticed by Muhammad^P. He contemplated for years but could not come up with any solution for the negative practices that he observed. Therefore, he

remained silent and developed a habit of retreating to Hira, a cave on a hill near Mecca, in order to meditate.

PROPHETHOOD

The Koran is revealed

At the age of 40, when he was at Hira, Muhammad^p was approached by the Angel Gabriel, who conveyed to him his first revelation from God. That was followed by many more revelations, which continued until his death in 632. The Koran is the compiled version of those revelations.

The prophethood of Muhammad^p begins with the first revelation of the Koran in 610. It marks the beginning of his campaign to eradicate all the evils that he had observed among his fellow Arabs. Muhammad^p managed to convert the person who was closest to him, his wife Khadijah, right away. In the next two decades his message was accepted in practically all of Arabia.

Preaching in Mecca

Muhammad^p started to preach Islam to the people of his city, Mecca, after he became a prophet. His attempts were initially met with some amusement and, occasionally, anger. The preaching against their idols upset many Meccans because it repudiated their ancestors' beliefs and also had the potential to severely reduce the large business generated by idol-worshipping pilgrims visiting Mecca.

The character and reputation that Muhammad^p had developed made many people, especially those who were honest and upright, listen seriously to what he was preaching. Consequently, many people started to convert to Islam. However, there were many, including powerful personalities, who opposed Muhammad^p. They tried their best to dissuade him from preaching an alien concept — the worship of one God. However, despite opposition that kept increasing, Muhammad^p continued to preach and conversions continued at a steady pace.

Basic message and theme

Muhammad^p basically reiterated the message that the earlier prophets had communicated — that there is only one God and that He alone must be

worshipped. He preached that this world is transitional and that one should prepare for the hereafter and the Day of Judgment. Another fundamental message, though that was not preached during the early days, was that Islam encompassed all spheres of life — not just religious or personal.

Muhammad^P also preached against prevalent evils and told the Arabs to turn away from:

- Worshipping multiple gods, and idols
- Immorality
- Materialism
- Killing new-born girls
- Treating women as chattel (an article of movable personal property)
- Tribal in-fighting and revenge
- Exploitation and injustice
- Superstitions

PERSECUTION

Ridicule and threats

The Meccans tried many methods to stop Muhammad^P from preaching. At first, they tried to dissuade him directly and through his family elders. Next, they tried to ridicule him. When even that failed, they started to use threats. However, even they had no effect on Muhammad^P. The next step was to boycott him and his followers. The social and economic boycott, by powerful opponents, created a very difficult situation for the prophet and his followers. However, he continued to stand firm despite some very trying times.

Bribery

Pilgrims from all across Arabia came to Mecca every year to worship at the Kaaba. Therefore, the Meccan pagan leaders became very worried when Muhammad^P started to speak out against idol-worship and the numerous idols in the Kaaba. They were alarmed at the prospect of losing their idol-worshipping pilgrims if Muhammad^P were allowed to succeed. Hence, after ridicule and threats failed, they tried a potentially more costly option: bribery. They offered everything that they thought Muhammad^P might want, including leadership, wealth, and kingdom. He responded by saying that he would not forsake his mission, which was commanded by God, even if they put the sun in his right

hand and the moon in his left hand. Despite many offers, Muhammad^p remained steady, turned down all offers that were made, and continued with his preaching.

Intensified persecution

The Meccans intensified their persecution. Those who joined Islam were humiliated, abused, beaten, tortured, and even killed. The persecution forced some Muslims to seek asylum in Abyssinia, which was ruled by a Christian king. For those who were left behind, the situation in Mecca continued to deteriorate. Even Muhammad^p himself was not spared physically and, in Taif, he was attacked and physically injured.

Flight to Medina

Muhammad^p had been preaching Islam in Mecca with great patience since 610. In 622, he received God's command to emigrate to Medina, a city 260 miles to the north. When the Meccans got wind of his plan, they hatched a plot to assassinate Muhammad^p in his home. However, he managed to escape the killers and arrived safely in Medina. The migration event is called Hijra and marks the first year of the Islamic calendar.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC SOCIETY

An Islamic state and society are established

Muhammad^p was welcomed by the people of Medina, many of whom had already accepted Islam during their trips to Mecca. The non-Muslims of Medina were tolerant and more receptive to his message. They provided him with the atmosphere in which he could spread the message of Islam and start to develop an Islamic society. It was in Medina that Muhammad^p received most of the Koranic revelations that address the political and administrative aspects of Islam.

The move to Medina led to the establishment of the first Islamic society and state over the next ten years. However, the path to their establishment was not easy, even after the migration to Medina, because the Meccans still considered Muhammad^p to be a threat. They did not give up their active opposition to him.

Continued opposition from Meccans

In Medina, many people converted to Islam, which also started to spread to the surrounding areas. The Meccans soon realized that the new society being set up in Medina would become, with the passage of time, more and more dangerous for them. Therefore, they decided to move militarily against the Muslims.

In 624, the Meccans assembled a large military force and marched towards Medina. The Muslims, who were poorly armed and outnumbered three to one, faced them in a pitched battle at Badr. However, the well-equipped Meccans were no match for 313 dedicated warriors and suffered a crushing defeat.

The Battle of Badr, a milestone for Muslims, increased their confidence. For the first time, they became conscious of their own power and ability to withstand more powerful forces. That confidence was instrumental in their ability to defeat stronger armies in later years. It was also taken as a sign of divine intervention, which helped to convert many more people to Islam.

The Battle of Badr made the Muslims' enemies realize that there was a new paradigm in place. They were surprised to observe the Muslims engage in unusual practices. Their abnormal acts included serving better food to war prisoners than they ate themselves and releasing a prisoner if he taught an illiterate Muslim to read and write.

More battles

The Meccans did not give up after the defeat at Badr. A year later, in 625, they assembled an even larger army of 3,000 warriors and again marched to Medina. This time the battle took place at Uhud. Initially, the Muslims were successful on the battlefield. However, just as victory was in sight, they suffered reverses when some archers prematurely left their positions, thinking that the battle was over. Consequently, many Muslims were killed and others, including Muhammad^P, were wounded. However, the Meccans again failed to achieve their objective of defeating the Muslims.

Two years later, in 627, the Meccans came back with an army of 10,000. The Muslims dug a trench around Medina as a protective barrier, which the Meccans were unable to breach. After a failed siege, the Meccans retreated, leaving the Muslims victors in what is known as the Battle of the Trench.

Return to Mecca

In 628, the Muslims and Meccans signed the treaty of Hudaibiyah, in which the Meccans acknowledged Muhammad^p's political authority and provided some concessions to the Muslims. However, the allies of the Meccans violated the treaty in 630, which caused Muhammad^p to lead an army of 10,000 to Mecca. Mecca did not put up a fight and the Muslims captured the city without any loss of life. Muhammad^p forgave his enemies, declared an amnesty, and returned to Medina. The remaining Arabian tribes who had not converted to Islam quickly came into its fold after the fall of Mecca.

In the tenth year of the Hijra, Muhammad^p made his last pilgrimage to Mecca. There he delivered his farewell sermon, in which he stressed the rights of women and the equality of all human beings irrespective of their being black or white, Arab or non-Arab. With the establishment of an Islamic state and society, Muhammad^p's mission was accomplished and he died shortly after that in 632 — ten years after he had migrated to Medina and less than 23 years since he became a prophet.

MUHAMMAD^p'S QUALITIES AND STATURE

Personality and characteristics

Muhammad^p was an extraordinary person with many defining qualities and characteristics. He filled many roles including prophet, statesman, legislator, commander, philosopher, teacher, judge, husband, father, and grandfather. He was honest, humble, just, compassionate, kind, considerate, and brave. Muhammad^p lived an extremely simple life and treated everyone with respect and equality. He practiced what he preached and has been a role model that all true followers of Islam have tried to emulate.

How Muhammad^p is viewed by followers of Islam

Muhammad^p, while he is viewed as a prophet and messenger of God, is considered to be just a human being — with none of God's divine attributes. In accordance with the Koranic verse (33:40), which describes Muhammad^p as the *Seal of the Prophets*, Muslims believe that he is the last prophet in a long line of prophets. For them, Muhammad^p is not an object of worship. However, they

respect him so much that whenever his name is uttered, they add the words “Peace and blessings be upon him.” His life is viewed as the model that all Muslims are expected to emulate, as much as they can, in their day-to-day lives.

Place in history

Muhammad^P has been one of the most influential personalities since God created man. He has been the most successful of all religious personalities in this world. He transformed and uplifted a backward and illiterate nation into a united country with high moral standards. He formalized a religion whose 1.2 billion adherents, scattered throughout the world, use his life as the model for living their daily lives. He achieved results that influenced the world in the past and continue to do so now.

In Michael H. Hart’s book, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons In History*, Muhammad^P has been ranked at the top of the list. According to Hart, “My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world’s most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.”

CHAPTER 10: BASIC ELEMENTS OF ISLAM

ISLAM, ALLAH, AND MUSLIMS

The Meaning of Islam

How the word Islam is derived

The Arabic word “Islam” means “Submission to the will of God.” It is derived from the root word “s-l-m,” which means “peace.” The word Islam, though not the concept, was introduced in the Koran. The concept of Islam is traceable to the first man, Adam, who submitted himself to the will of God. In a broader sense, Islam implies the achievement of peace by submitting totally to the will of God. In the ordinary use of the term these days, Islam refers to the religion that was formalized by Muhammad^P in Arabia.

Islam’s central concept is the oneness of God — belief in a single, supreme, and divine creator — along with the prophethood of Muhammad^P. Islam is a religion that is not identified with Muhammad^P’s name — he is merely the person who formalized it. In contrast, Christianity is derived from Christ, while Buddhism is named after its founder — Buddha. In the case of Islam, its name is associated with God. Hence, misnomers like Muhammadan are considered offensive by Muslims. According to Islam, despite his status as a prophet, Muhammad^P is not divine and must not be worshipped. Muslims do not pray to him or through him.

What submission implies

The concept of submission requires that a person must submit to God completely, sincerely and willingly. In practice, it means that one should obey all of God's commandments and live according to His law. His basic commands and guidance, which were revealed through His various prophets, are:

- There is no deity but God
- He is one, unique, and sovereign
- He is the only one worthy of worship and obedience
- Only through submission and surrender to God, and actively obeying His commands and laws, can one live in peace and attain salvation
- Submission makes a man aware of his place in the universe, of God's sovereignty, and of his obligation to Him
- Submission entails recognizing and submitting to God's plan

Allah

Allah is the Arabic word for God. It is derived from two words: *al* (the) and *ilah* (God). Therefore, it literally means *The God*, which implies "The one and only God." Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews also use the word Allah when referring to God. In Aramaic, a language that Jesus also spoke, the word Allah is used for God. In principle and concept, there is no difference between Allah and God. Contrary to some misconceptions among non-Muslims, Allah is:

- Everyone's God
- The same God that Christians and Jews believe in and worship
- The One and Only God
- Not some idol or creature that the followers of Islam pray to

The word Allah, which is the personal name of God, has some unique characteristics. It has no plural or gender in the Arabic language. Its other defining characteristics are:

- He is the only God
- He begets not nor is He begotten
- There is none like Him

Ninety nine attributes of God are mentioned in the Koran and Hadith. It is through these names that Muslims try to apprehend and understand God. The names include The All-Merciful, The All-Knower, The Protector, The Provider, and The Helper.

Who is a Muslim

Muslim is an Arabic word that means “a person who submits.” It refers to a person who follows Islam and submits to the will of God. In Western countries, Muslims are referred to as Moslems. Muslims consider Adam, the first prophet, to be the first Muslim because he was the first follower of Islam. They also view all other prophets as Muslims because they also submitted to God and followed His commandments.

The basic criterion for joining Islam is simple. In principle, the moment someone rejects the worship of everyone except God, he becomes a Muslim. The formal procedure for becoming a Muslim involves making the formal declaration of faith, “There is no god except God and Muhammad^P is the messenger of God.” This declaration implies belief in God with all His attributes, His messengers, their messages, and all the scriptures that they brought. Once formal entry has been made through the declaration of faith, Islam requires that one become God-conscious and, until death, continuously choose between right and wrong.

Muslims do not believe in the concept of original sin. They believe that Adam was forgiven by God when he prayed for pardon and that every child is born free from sin. Also, when someone becomes a Muslim, sincerely, all his previous sins are forgiven and he starts a new life with a clean record. However, while such a person becomes eligible for paradise after becoming a Muslim, he remains accountable for all his future actions.

While the declaration of faith is simple, it requires sincerity. Its recitation leads to an obligation to meet the following requirements:

- Worshipping no one except God
- Always distinguishing between the Creator and His creations
- Fulfilling the rights of God
- Following a life based on the five pillars of Islam:
 - Declaration of faith
 - Praying five times a day
 - Fasting during the month of Ramadan
 - Charitable giving
 - Performing the Hajj pilgrimage
- Choosing between right and wrong
- Fulfilling the rights of human beings
- Accepting the fundamental beliefs of Islam
- Implementing Islam’s moral and ethical standards of living

BACKGROUND AND TEACHINGS

Islam builds upon the older religions' teachings

These days, reference to Islam means the final form of Islam preached by Muhammad^P. However, Muslims do not consider that he founded Islam; they view it as the final version of a religion whose basic principles and roots go back to Adam — the first man and the first prophet. Ever since Adam, various prophets and messengers have reiterated the same basic message of God's oneness to their people.

According to Hadith, there were about 124,000 prophets, of which 25 are mentioned in the Koran including Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus. According to the Koran, "And every nation had a messenger (10:47)." The message delivered by the prophets, while tailored in some regions as per the requirements of the time that it was delivered, retained the basic and fundamental concept — submission to God.

Muslims believe that the last, and what is considered to be the perfect, message was delivered by Muhammad^P in the seventh century. Muhammad^P is viewed as the final prophet of Islam during whose time the religion was perfected. Therefore, he will not be followed by any more prophets. The basis for such a belief is the Koranic verse, "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion (5:3)."

Basic message and teachings

The basic message of Islam is that God is one, unique and sovereign. He is distinctly separate from His creations and only He, and not His creations, should be worshipped. Worshipping any of God's creations, either directly or indirectly, or attributing His qualities to them, is a cardinal sin in Islam.

A Muslim is expected to seek God's pleasure in every aspect of his life by obeying His commandments and following His guidance. Muslims are expected to:

- Live in accordance with God's laws
- Live a God-conscious life
- Strive to come close to God, as all beliefs and practices are geared to meet this objective
- Exhibit high moral qualities and characteristics such as honesty, integrity, patience, humility, etc.

- Be socially responsible
- Participate in worldly affairs in addition to religious obligations

Basic teachings include that:

- This world is just a preparation for the hereafter
- God rewards and punishes in this world and in the hereafter
- We must be satisfied with what God has given us
- Each person is responsible for his or her own actions
- Make a conscious effort to overcome temptations; control passions and desires
- God accepts sincere repentance
- Satan drives people to sin
- There is no intermediary between God and man
- All humans are equal without regard to race, class or gender
- There is no demarcation between religion and state (or politics)
- Everything good for spiritual and physical health is permitted while anything harmful is prohibited

Fundamental beliefs

The fundamental beliefs that Muslims must accept unconditionally are the following:

- Belief in God with all His attributes and qualities
- Belief in angels
- Belief in divine scriptures — the books of God
- Belief in prophets and messengers
- Belief in the Day of Judgment — when everyone will have to account for his actions in this world
- Belief in divine decree or pre-ordainment — everything that takes place in this world only happens with God's knowledge; He controls human destiny

Purpose of human life and man's responsibilities

According to the Koran, God created man as His vicegerent or ambassador on earth — the highest level among creations (2:30). The earth and everything in it was created for man's benefit. A Muslim believes that man's life has a purpose beyond physical needs and material activities. The objective is to worship and obey God because man was created for that very purpose. The goal is to attain the best of both worlds: on earth and in the hereafter. However, that does not imply becoming a hermit in perpetual meditation. It means to worship Him,

know Him, and to implement His commands and laws in all aspects of life, while carrying on a normal day-to-day life.

As God's ambassador, man has certain responsibilities that he must discharge. He has to fulfill the purpose of his existence and implement God's plan on earth. To help him, God has provided intelligence and the freedom to choose, which entails responsibility as well as reasoning power. Therefore, if he fails to follow God's commandments and His message, and commit wrong deeds, he will be unable to discharge his responsibilities and, consequently, be held accountable. Hence, to help and guide man, God sent many prophets since the beginning of time.

Rewards and punishments

Islam clearly indicates the rewards and punishments that man can expect by following or straying from the right path, in this world as well as in the hereafter. Obedient people can expect to be rewarded for their good deeds while those committing bad deeds can expect to be punished. According to the Koran, "On the day when every person will be confronted with all the good he has done and all the evil he has done, he will wish that there were a great distance between him and his evil (3:30)."

For some deeds, the punishment to be meted out in this world is clearly indicated. They include crimes such as murder, stealing and adultery. However, even if a person escapes punishment for such crimes and other transgressions in this world, there will be no escape on the Day of Judgment. For Muslims, such a belief becomes a great incentive to fear God's punishment and, therefore, try to be good in this world and follow His commandments.

Salvation

According to Islam, for God to accept deeds that will lead to salvation, a person must:

- Believe in God and His oneness
- Perform deeds and operate in faith based on sincerity and true conviction — not compulsion or blind following
- The deeds must be in accordance with Islamic teachings, as mentioned in the Koran and taught by Muhammad^P

On the Day of Judgment, God will judge every man and woman in accordance with their beliefs, thoughts, deeds, and adherence to, or rejection of, His commandments and laws. Those who reject His message and commands will

not attain salvation; they will be sent to hell where unbelievers and sinners will be placed until eternity. To attain salvation, one has to believe in God, follow His injunctions, and combine belief and practice. The determination of whether a person goes to heaven or hell will be made by God, who alone knows about every act and deed committed by that person. He will be the ultimate judge who will decide the fate of every person.

IMPORTANT ELEMENTS DEFINING ISLAM

More than a religion: a way of life

Islam is more than a religion. While its foundation is the belief in one God and obedience of His commands, which are central to everything else, Islam is actually a complete way of life for its followers — from cradle to grave. It extends beyond the performance of some rituals to encompass all spheres of life including:

- Spiritual and religious
- Personal
- Family
- Moral
- Ethical
- Political
- Social
- Economic
- Business
- Legal

Islam's tenets and rules cover individuals, societies, and governments. They provide guidance in dealing with and treating others including family members, relatives, society, and other nations. They also teach how to live one's daily life and prepare for the hereafter.

Universal appeal

Entry into Islam, which tries to reach out to all human beings, is not restricted as Judaism is. Acceptance into the Islamic fold is not limited to Arabs, some chosen people, or a particular nation or tribe. Islam rises above race, ethnicity, gender, color, nationality, social standing, and other narrow considerations. It is also not restricted to any period in time. The message

delivered by Muhammad^P is supposed to be final and, hence, eternal. Its principles and laws are not subject to change now or in the future.

Islam exhorts Muslims to consider other Muslims as brothers and sisters. That teaching effectively breaks down boundaries across countries. Islam makes Muslims in all parts of the world think of Muslims in foreign countries, who share the same beliefs, as being in the same brotherhood or *Ummah*.

The religion of Islam has some 1.2 billion followers who are scattered all over the world in practically every continent and country. Arabs make up only 22% of the total Muslim population, though some sources indicate that this number is even lower — about 18%. This low figure is contrary to the widely held belief among non-Muslims that Muslims are primarily Arabs. In fact, there are almost as many Muslims in just two Asian countries, Pakistan and India, as in all the Arab countries combined.

Rigid on fundamental principles

The basic principles of Islam are inviolable and no human being has the authority to change them. According to Islam, anything that is revealed in the Koran, which is the primary source of Islamic laws, cannot be deviated from and must be obeyed without question. They include all the do's and the don'ts. Besides the Koran, Muslims are required to follow the sayings and practice of Muhammad^P. They are mandated to follow him through God's commandment in the Koranic verse, "We sent not a messenger, but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of Allah (4:64)."

Islam strongly discourages any innovations (called *Bid'ah*, in Arabic) in its laws, principles or practice — such as the acts of worship. It does not accept the starting of something new, as part of the religion, unless there is a basis for it in the Koran or *Sunnah*. Innovation restrictions extend to both additions and deletions. A person who makes any changes to God's mandated laws is considered to be committing polytheism, which is considered a grievous sin in Islam. However, innovations in science, technology, medicine, and other fields are encouraged.

Flexible

While Islam is very rigid regarding basic principles, beliefs, and practices, it does permit a fair amount of flexibility. As a general principle, if something has not been specifically prohibited, either by the Koran or by Muhammad^P, it is

permissible. Islam allows new laws to be made, to deal with change and progress, so long as they do not conflict with fundamental Islamic principles and rules, established beliefs and practices (such as fasting and prayers), or established rules and regulations governing marriage, inheritance, and other situations.

Practical and balanced

Contrary to the general view among non-Muslims, Islam supports a balanced and middle road position — not extremes. It attempts to strike a balance between the requirements of this world and the next. The Koran says, “Seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world (28:77).”

Islam, in contrast to the formalism of Judaism and spirituality of Christianity, encourages man to have the best of both worlds. It encourages balance in various aspects of life. It does not encourage one to be either a spendthrift or a miser. Islam encourages marriage rather than celibacy. It allows people to accumulate wealth while mandating charity for those who have the means and assets. Islam mandates justice for both Muslims and non-Muslims, rulers and their subjects, as well as for rich and poor people.

Common misconceptions about Islam

Contrary to some common misconceptions,

- Islam does not support customs such as forced marriages, denial of education to girls, and genital mutilation: these are tribal and cultural practices that are not supported by Islam.
- Islam does support human rights, very strongly.
- Islam is not against democracy. Only laws that go against Islamic Law and God’s commands are not supported.
- Islam does not hold women to be inferior to men. Islam considers all humans equal, with their final destination being determined by their righteousness — not their gender.
- Muslims do believe in God and Jesus. Muslims believe in God, which means the same as Allah. However, Muslims do not believe that Jesus was the son of God. Muslims are required to believe in Jesus but only as a prophet.
- Islam does not condone terrorism. According to the Koran, the killing of one innocent human is equivalent to the killing of all mankind.

- Islam is tolerant. Islam forbids compulsion in religion. Non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic state are free to practice their religion and the safety of their life and property is guaranteed.
- Islam is not racist. According to Islam, all people on earth are equal.
- The Nation of Islam movement is not a part of Islam. The Nation of Islam espouses many principles that Islam rejects completely — such as considering a human being, Wallace Fard, as God incarnate, and the notion of black superiority; that is in complete contradiction to the equality and mutual respect taught by Islam.

SYMBOLS AND FESTIVALS

Spiritual centers

Mecca

Mecca, which is located in western Saudi Arabia, is the religious and spiritual center of Islam. It is important because:

- Islam started in Mecca, where Muhammad^P first received the Koranic revelations
- It is the site of the Kaaba towards which Muslims, throughout the world, face when offering their ritual prayers. The Kaaba is the symbol of unity and equality for Muslims throughout the world.
- It is the place where Hajj is performed

The Kaaba was built as a place of worship by Abraham and his son Ishmael. It has been rebuilt many times since then. Pilgrims performing the Hajj are required to circle the Kaaba. In recent years, its surrounding area, which is part of the Grand Mosque of Mecca, has been expanded considerably to accommodate the rising number of pilgrims. At one corner of the Kaaba is the Black Stone, believed to be a meteor, which pilgrims attempt to touch or kiss when they circle the Kaaba. The belief is that Abraham placed it in the Kaaba as a sign of God's affection. According to Islamic belief, the reward of one prayer inside this mosque equals the reward of 100,000 prayers in any other mosque.

Medina

Medina, which is the Muslims' second holiest site, provided refuge to Muhammad^P when he had to flee Mecca due to persecution. It is located near the historic Badr and Uhud battlegrounds where Muslims won their first victories

against the people of Mecca. The Masjid Nabavi mosque, built by Muhammad^P, is also located in Medina. Its subsequent expansion caused it to encompass Muhammad^P's home, where he was buried upon his death. According to Islamic belief, the reward of one prayer in Masjid Nabavi equals the reward of 50,000 prayers in any other mosque.

At Medina the first Islamic society and state came into existence. Customarily, after the completion of the Hajj pilgrimage requirements, many pilgrims visit Medina for a few days even though it is not a ritual or mandated requirement.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the third most important city for Muslims. It is the city where many prophets preached and, consequently, is considered a spiritual symbol by many religions including Islam. It is also the site of the al-Aqsa mosque from where Muhammad^P ascended to Heaven for a brief visit in 620. In that journey, undertaken in a single night, Muhammad^P traveled from Mecca to Heaven, via Jerusalem, and then back to Mecca.

The Islamic calendar

The Islamic calendar starts from 622 — the year in which Muhammad^P migrated to Medina. It is called Hijra, which means migration, and is lunar based. Each of the 12 lunar months is either 29 or 30 days long. A new month starts whenever the new moon is sighted. Since a lunar year is about 11 days shorter than the solar year, the Islamic calendar cycles through the various seasons. The Islamic months are Muharram, Safar, Rabi al-Awwal, Rabi al-Thani, Jumada al-Awwal, Jumada al-Thani, Rajab, Shaaban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhu al-Qidah and Dhu al-Hijjah.

The sighting of the moon is an important event for Muslims. It determines the start of Ramadan fasting, the celebration of various festivals such as the two Eid holidays, and the start of the Hajj pilgrimage.

Festivals and religious days

Festivals

The two most important religious festivals for Muslims are:

- Eid al-Fitr (celebration of fast breaking)

- Eid al-Adha (celebration of sacrifice)

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan — the month during which Muslims fast every day from dawn until sunset. It falls on the first day of Shawwal and is marked by an early morning congregational prayer followed by celebrations and feasting. Relatives and friends are visited on the day of Eid al-Fitr while children are given gifts or cash.

Eid al-Adha commemorates Prophet Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son at God's command. It also marks the end of the Hajj pilgrimage, which falls on the tenth day of Dhu al-Hijjah. On that day, an early morning congregational prayer is offered. After the prayer, Muslims visit their relatives and friends. The highlight of the Eid al-Adha festival is the animal sacrifice. Every family with the means to afford it sacrifices an animal, typically a goat, lamb, cow or camel. The sacrificed animal's meat is distributed to relatives and poor people.

Lailat al-Qadr

Lailat al-Qadr, or the night of power, falls on one of the last ten nights of Ramadan. It is generally believed to fall on the 27th of Ramadan. In 610, on Lailat al-Qadr night, Muhammad^P received his first revelation of the Koran. Muslims celebrate that historical event by staying up most of the night offering special prayers and reciting the Koran.

Congregational day: Friday

A special mandatory congregational prayer is offered in mosques every Friday around mid-day. It is marked by a short speech, called a Khutba, by a religious leader or the mosque imam. The Muslim Friday service is somewhat similar to the Sunday service for Christians. Some Muslim countries use Friday as the weekend holiday instead of Sunday.

CHAPTER II: THE SIX BELIEFS

BELIEF IN ONE GOD

Core concept: Oneness of God

The core and fundamental concept in Islam is the oneness of God (or “Tawheed,” in Arabic). According to Islam, God is the creator and sustainer of this universe and, for those who believe it, His supremacy provides a rational explanation for the existence of this complex universe.

The belief in God can be described in different ways:

- He is divine and unique in every way; He has no partner or son
- He is the most merciful and the most beneficent
- He is self-sufficient and supreme
- He is eternal, infinite and mighty
- He is merciful and compassionate
- His knowledge encompasses the whole universe
- He is all-hearing, all-seeing, and all-knowing; He knows what is apparent and what is hidden as well as the past, present, and future
 - He is the only one who is worthy of being worshipped; no one else has that right
 - He is accessible to all; anyone can approach Him directly without any intermediary
 - He has no physical form or attributes
 - He is the law-giver and judge
 - He loves those who obey Him, forgives those who repent, and does not punish unjustly
 - Nothing can happen in this world without His will

- He has complete authority over life, death, and destiny — both good and bad
- He is the one who can restore after death

Unconditional acceptance

According to Islam, God expects total and unconditional acceptance of His commandments and laws from man of his own free will. Man is the only creation to whom He has given:

- A mind that can think
- Freedom of choice

The freedom that has been granted to man puts him in the position of having to decide whether to be a slave to God's creations and his own desires, or to Almighty God.

In Islam, there is no room for legislating laws that in any way conflict with or supercede God's laws. He has not given anyone the right to suspend, cancel or change His laws. Anyone who attempts to do that is in conflict with the basic concept of God's supremacy. Consequently, according to Islam, such a person commits the serious sin of equating himself with God.

BELIEF IN ANGELS

Who are the angels

Belief in angels is a basic Islamic belief. Angels are God's creations who simply follow God's commands in a very precise way. The most famous angel is Gabriel, who is also known as the angel of revelation. He was responsible for carrying God's commandments and messages to the various prophets and messengers. His last such duty was in revealing the Koran to Muhammad^P. Gabriel also announced to Mary, the mother of Jesus, that she would be expecting a child — the Messiah that was awaited by the Israelis.

Every living person has two angels on duty at his side at all times. One of them records his good deeds and the other one records his bad deeds or sins. According to Islam, all of a person's deeds will be presented and weighed, good versus bad, on the Day of Judgment. Other important angels are:

- The angel of death, who makes his appearance when a person is about to die

- The angel who will blow the horn on the Day of Judgment
- The angel who is responsible for nature (sun, moon, rain, galaxy, etc.)

Attributes and tasks

Angels are strictly spiritual entities that do not need any food, drink or rest. They do not have any physical needs and are constantly serving and worshipping God. They only obey God's commands and act as messengers to His prophets, meting out His punishments and other tasks. In contrast to humans, angels are intelligent beings but do not possess the free will to act as they like. While Muslims are expected to respect them, angels are not to be worshipped.

BELIEF IN GOD'S REVEALED BOOKS

Belief in divinely revealed scriptures

A divinely revealed scripture is a book or collection of writings that has been revealed by God. Many scriptures were revealed over time, to various prophets, with the objective of communicating God's command's and guidance to a particular nation, tribe or group of people. Islam teaches that all the scriptures must be respected and believed in. A Muslim cannot be considered as one unless he believes in all of them.

God used Angel Gabriel to communicate with all the prophets and reveal the various scriptures. The only exception was in the case of Moses, with whom God communicated directly.

Scriptures that a Muslim believes in

God revealed many scriptures to his various messengers over thousands of years. As part of their beliefs, Muslims believe in those scriptures as being the actual word of God. The scriptures mentioned in the Koran include the:

- Scrolls revealed to Abraham
- Torah (Taurat) revealed to Moses
- Psalms (Zaboor) revealed to David
- Gospel (Injeel) revealed to Jesus
- Koran (Quran) revealed to Muhammad^P

The Koran was revealed by Angel Gabriel to Muhammad^P in segments over a lengthy period stretching from 610 to 632. The verses that were revealed during that time span had many objectives including issuing God's commandments and

laws, providing historical examples (of rewards and punishments), responding to the current situation or needs of the Muslim community, provide advice, lift morale and provide guidance.

Belief that pre-Koran scriptures have been corrupted

While Muslims believe in the original scriptures that were revealed to the various messengers before the Koran, they do not believe that their current versions are authentic. They believe that, over time, the original scriptures were subject to additions, deletions, changes, and distortions, many of them intentionally done by those seeking to benefit from the changes. Muslims believe that the versions of earlier scriptures that are currently available consist of the original divine revelations as well as new materials that were authored by men. Since it is impossible to identify the genuine and doctored parts of a particular scripture, they cannot be used with any confidence.

The Koran is the last scripture that was revealed, in Arabic, by God. It reaffirms the fundamental principles contained in the previous scriptures. The Koran is still available in the exact version in which it was revealed to Muhammad^P without even a single punctuation change. Since the older scriptures currently available are not considered authentic, Muslims only follow the Koran.

BELIEF IN PROPHETS AND MESSENGERS

Who were the prophets and messengers

The prophets were the chosen people of God who received revelations from Him. They, in turn, had to convey His message to their people. The prophets, who numbered about 124,000, were sent to every nation throughout the world. Their common message was monotheism, how to live righteously in accordance with God's commandments and laws, and how to attain salvation. The prophets were not sent to predict the future.

Muslims are required to believe in every prophet sent by God. The most important ones who have been identified in the Koran are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad^P. A messenger is a special type of prophet — one to whom a book of God has been revealed. Some of the messengers (called

“rasool,” in Arabic), include Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad^P. A nabi is a prophet to whom a scripture was not revealed.

According to Islam, all the prophets were Muslims. They were humans and none had God’s divine qualities or attributes. They cannot be worshipped nor can supplication be made to them because such activities are considered polytheist.

Purpose and common message

Man was created by God so that he would worship Him and lead a life of virtue. God’s expectation of man has been that he would base his life on His guidance, commandments, and laws. In order to make the people who were required to worship Him aware of His commands and laws, God sent His prophets to every nation with clear instructions and guidance.

A very important objective of the prophets was to connect human beings to their creator. Their common message was the call to worship only God, without any partners, and to submit to Him completely. Those who rejected their message became disbelievers. While some laws brought by the various prophets were different, there was no difference in their basic teachings, principles, and message. The prophets also had an important task of issuing warnings of punishments to be meted out, in this world as well as in the next, for those who disobeyed God. In addition, they brought news of rewards for those who obeyed God’s commandments and laws.

How Muslims regard other prophets

All the prophets and messengers who came periodically to renew the message were men of high character who preached the same eternal message. Therefore, Muslims respect all of them without any exception. They do not reject any messenger — unlike the Christians, who rejected Muhammad^P or the Jews, who rejected Jesus. In fact, Muslims are the only ones who consider belief in all the prophets an article of faith.

Muhammad^P’s role as the last prophet

In some cases, a message brought by a prophet changed earlier messages to reflect changes in society due to the passage of time. However, the basic message of all the earlier prophets remained the same — oneness of God and life after death. Muhammad^P was sent to confirm the earlier messages brought by the

various prophets. He also had to remove deviations that had crept into the message over time and rectify the lifestyle deterioration that had crept into society.

Muhammad^P, the last messenger of God, is known as the seal of the prophets. According to Islam, he delivered the complete and final message that all future generations are expected to follow. Although Muslims believe in all the prophets and messengers, they are required to follow the specific message delivered by Muhammad^P who gave mankind one message, a complete code of life, and made Islam a universal religion. According to Islam, no prophet will follow Muhammad^P. Therefore, anyone claiming to be a prophet after him is considered to be an imposter.

Muslims are expected to follow two sources of guidance in their lives. The first is the Koran — the word of God. They are also required to emulate Muhammad^P's lifestyle in every phase of their life, wherever it can be incorporated.

BELIEF IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

Life and death

Islam teaches that life and death are in God's hands. He has appointed a specific time for everyone to transition from life to death. The Koran makes frequent reference to the fact that death is inevitable. When the news of someone's death is heard, Muslims are taught to say, "From God we come and to God we go," and to accept God's decree. Even though the sense of loss and grief for a loved one may last for a very long time, outward mourning is required to end after three days.

Islam teaches that man's present life on earth is only a temporary phase, which has been described as "cultivation of the hereafter." It is a test, where one prepares for life in the hereafter — which will continue forever. Every individual has to go through this very important trial preparation and test. Therefore, Islam teaches that one should prepare for the ultimate destination by living a good life on earth and following God's commandments.

Day of Judgment

According to Islam, just like Christianity, the universe will be destroyed on the Day of Judgment. On that day, the dead will be resurrected, the soul will be reunited with the body, and all human beings will have to answer for everything that they did during their life on earth. Their fate and future happiness, or unhappiness, will be decided based upon their beliefs and deeds on earth.

The deeds to be judged by God include intentions, thoughts, words spoken, and actions taken throughout the course of one's life. Those whose good deeds outweigh the bad deeds will be rewarded with admittance to heaven, where they will stay forever. However, hell will be the destination of those whose bad deeds predominate. Among those who have been promised hell are the unbelievers, polytheists, and hypocrites.

On the Day of Judgment, when the dead will be raised from their graves and rejoined with their souls, there will be no escape for anyone. No lawyers, wealth or clever arguments will enable anyone who has done bad deeds to evade judgment. On the other hand, those who were never rewarded on this earth, despite leading exemplary lives, will be acknowledged and compensated through admittance to heaven.

Benefit of having accountability

For man, there is a great benefit in knowing that there is ultimate accountability and life after death. It makes life more meaningful. A person knows that trials, tribulations, and present difficulties are only temporary. Therefore, if he continues to perform good deeds and obey God, he will ultimately be a winner and go to heaven. Such a belief makes it easier to lead a virtuous life on earth. It helps protect against a host of evils and sins such as dissatisfaction, crime, corruption, dishonesty, and injustice (since it is a sin to deny someone justice, a Muslim will try to avoid causing injustice just as he strives to avoid dishonesty).

Life after death

When a person dies, his soul is separated from the body and, later, it is reunited with the body when it is laid in the grave. There the angels question him and ask him to identify his Lord — which will mark him as a believer or a non-believer.

After death, a Muslim's body is first washed, wrapped in a clean white shroud, and buried after a funeral prayer. While the buried body decomposes into dust after some time, the soul continues to live on. It will remain passive until the Day of Judgment when resurrection will occur and everyone is held to account. Life in the hereafter will be real, spiritual as well as physical, and one will live with both body and soul.

According to Muhammad^P, the following acts continue to help a Muslim even after death:

- Charity that the deceased has given
- Knowledge that he has left behind (writings, teachings, etc.)
- Prayers on his behalf by his children, relatives, friends or others
- Actions of a righteous child or student

Paradise and Hell

Only God knows the real nature and description of heaven and hell. In the Koran, heaven is described as a place of gardens and rivers where all the desires of a person can be satisfied. In heaven, no evil or sickness will exist and every wish will be granted. However, hell is described as a horrible and torturous place engulfed by fire where a person will suffer indefinitely. According to Muhammad^P's description of hell, "There are things which no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no mind has ever conceived." Based on these descriptions, man can expect his reward or punishment in the hereafter to be extreme.

BELIEF IN PRE-ORDAINMENT (AL-QADAR)

Fate and divine decree

The sixth Islamic article of faith is belief in God's decree, al-Qadar, or pre-ordainment. It means that nothing can happen anywhere in the universe without the will of God. Anything that does take place, good or bad, happens as God ordains it. Although man may think, according to his human capabilities, that events occur due to some immediate cause(s), their occurrence is actually due to the wish of God. However, although God has the supreme authority, He has granted human beings flexibility and authority that enables them to make appropriate choices and exercise judgment.

The belief in divine decree is based on the following:

- God knows everything about the past, present, and future due to His infinite knowledge
- God has recorded everything that is going to occur until the Day of Judgment
- Everything that happens takes place according to God's will
- God created everything

In Islam, a person who believes in God from the depth of his heart is called a *Mumin* — a person who has faith or *Iman*. Every Muslim is expected to strive to become a Mumin, whose attitude is reflected in his actions. For example, a Mumin will not:

- Permit difficulties to weigh him down and cause depression; instead, he will try his best to change the adverse situation and then be patient if he does not succeed despite his best efforts — realizing that it was divine decree
- Ask God for something specific; rather, he will ask God for whatever is best for him in both the worlds because God, and not man, knows what really is best for him

Free will and the ability to choose right or wrong

Al-Qadar does not rule out the existence of free will. Islam does not want man to believe that he is being forced to make wrong decisions because everything is ordained and God has knowledge of everything. According to Islam, God has given man free will and, hence, man is free to choose between good and evil or right and wrong. No one is forced to make a decision — right or wrong. Therefore, whatever man chooses to do is his own responsibility.

A sinner cannot use al-Qadar as an excuse. He commits sins by his own free will. A sinner has no knowledge of what God has decreed for him since no one can know what God has decreed until it actually happens. Therefore, he cannot justify his actions by saying that God decreed it.

According to Islam, God has made His own master plan. However, that must not make one a fatalistic or prevent one from making his own plans. Muslims are encouraged to plan and choose when presented with various options. However, if their plans do not work out despite their best efforts, they are expected not to lose faith. In case of failure, they are encouraged to accept the fact that the results were not reached despite their best efforts due to the will of God and, therefore, they should be satisfied with the result even though it was not desired.

How belief in al-Qadar is beneficial

The belief in al-Qadar brings peace of mind, especially during bad times. For example, if an undesirable result occurred as a consequence of one's act, the person is assured that it only happened because it was ordained. Such a view prevents grieving about what happened. Instead, the person is more concerned about whether the act was good, because he wants to be rewarded by God at some stage.

The al-Qadar belief also brings humility and modesty. It makes a Muslim realize that success is only achieved because God helped and willed it. If He had wanted to, God could have prevented that success. It also provides confidence because a person is assured that he cannot be harmed without God's will.

CHAPTER 12: THE FIVE PILLARS

ACTS OF WORSHIP IN ISLAM

Concept of Ibadah (worship)

In Islam, worship consists of far more than the performance of ritual acts of worship, such as prayers and fasting. It encompasses everything that one says, believes, or does for God's pleasure including:

- Rituals
- Beliefs
- Social interactions
- Personal acts
- Community service
- Other activities

In Arabic, the word “Ibadah” means worship as well as service. Therefore, the Islamic concept of worship, or Ibadah, means worshipping as well as serving God. It derives from obedience and slavery to God. The essence of Ibadah is the feeling of gratitude towards God. In Islam, every action performed with the intention of pleasing God, or carrying out His commands, is considered to be an act of worship or Ibadah. Acts that can be considered Ibadah include visiting a sick person, helping a stranger, and forgiving someone.

An important aspect of any act of worship is the intention behind it. That is the factor that determines how a deed is judged — whether it is the fulfillment of an act of worship, a particular obligation, or any routine act. Through intentions, one's daily routine can be turned into worship or Ibadah. Acts that can be converted into worship include the performance of personal and social

interactions, eating, drinking, sexual relations with spouse, supporting the family emotionally and financially, and other routine acts.

Ritual worship: The five pillars

There are five pillars of Islam and all of them are mandatory for Muslims. They are:

- Declaration of faith: to recite at least once during a lifetime, “There is no God but God and Muhammad^P is His prophet”
- Prayers: to pray five times per day
- Alms-giving: to give charity annually, at a rate of 2.5% of savings
- Fasting: to fast for one month during the month of Ramadan
- Hajj: to visit Mecca for pilgrimage once in a lifetime, if financial and physical conditions permit

None of the five pillars can be ignored or rejected by a Muslim. They are viewed as the foundations upon which faith is built and include both faith and ritual worship. If one fails to follow any of the five pillars, it is considered to be a very serious sin in Islam.

The acts of worship are intended to achieve the following:

- Make the believer accept God's sovereignty
- Make the believer surrender to God
- Make the believer obey God's commands
- Constantly remind the believer of God
- Organize a believer's life, and everyday activities, around it
- Elevate a believer morally and spiritually

Non-ritual worship

Many types of activities, besides formal ritual worship, are considered acts of worship in Islam. They can be as varied as:

- Seeking knowledge
- Social courtesy and cooperation when performed for the sake of God; acts can be as simple as greeting someone with a smile, providing encouragement, or visiting a sick person
- Performing normal duties
- Showing kindness to family members
- Performing deeds of righteousness

With Islam regulating every aspect of life, performing day-to-day activities according to the Islamic way ensures that the believer is performing worship all day long. The knowledge that a great reward awaits him ensures that a true

believer will always be trying his best to be good, even without the incentive of worldly benefits, in every aspect of his life.

PILLAR #1: DECLARATION OF FAITH (SHAHADAH)

Basic declaration for accepting or reaffirming Islam

The first pillar of Islam is the declaration of faith. It is called the “Shahadah,” which means witness in Arabic. The declaration, which is in Arabic, can be translated as, “There is no god but God; Muhammad^P is the messenger of God.” Recitation of the Shahadah is used as the formal means of entry into Islam.

The declaration of faith can be broken into three parts, each of which has fairly deep implications:

- “No god” implies a rejection of polytheism — indicates that no one can share the divine attributes of God.
- “but God” affirms monotheism and what it implies — that God is the only one worthy of worship.
- “Muhammad^P is the messenger of God” affirms the prophethood of Muhammad^P. It implies following the teachings of Muhammad^P.

The acceptance of God and His oneness, or Tawheed, is the fundamental and central concept of Islam. The declaration of faith, when recited in sincerity, means that the person saying it:

- Accepts the unique position and sovereignty of God and, therefore, surrenders to Him; such a person affirms and restricts divinity to God alone.
- Rejects the worship of everyone other than God, including angels, prophets, God’s creations, and any human being no matter what his position, religious standing, wealth or power.

Importance of Shahadah

There can be no entry into Islam unless a person recites the Shahadah — the declaration of faith. The first pillar is the foundation upon which everything else is based. If a person does not accept either God or Muhammad^P, through denial of a part or all of the declaration, it means he rejects Islam. The Shahadah is recited in the call to prayers, which precedes every ritual prayer, as well as in the ritual prayers. It serves as a constant reminder of God and His messenger.

When a non-Muslim recites the declaration of faith, all of his previous sins are forgiven and he starts a new life with a clean slate. For Muslims, the

declaration is a commitment to a life of service in the way of God. It puts them on the path where they have to constantly worship Him and, in every aspect of their lives, make a conscientious decision to choose good over evil.

PILLAR #2: PRAYER (SALAT)

Requirement and objective

The second pillar of Islam is ritual prayer, which is called “Salat” in Arabic. Muslims are mandated to pray five times a day. The time required to complete these prayers, which are of different length, varies from approximately five to ten minutes. The timing is:

- Dawn (Fajr): to be performed between dawn and sunrise
- Noon/Early afternoon (Zohar): to be performed in the early part of the afternoon
- Mid-late afternoon (Asr): to be performed between late afternoon and sunset
- Sunset (Maghrib): to be performed from sunset until just before the Isha prayer starts
- Nightfall (Isha): preferably to be performed from the time when twilight disappears until one-third of the night has passed; however, it can be offered until dawn

A person can pray ritually more than five times a day. It is usual for Muslims to offer special ritual prayers, even though they are not mandated, for many special occasions. Special prayers are offered when a Muslim wants to thank God for some special favor or achievement, during times of adversity, when entering a mosque, and on other special occasions.

A ritual prayer can be offered anywhere including the home, office, factory, corridor, playground, shopping center or any place else. However, it is recommended to offer as many prayers as possible in a congregation, preferably in a mosque. When any ritual prayer is offered, the worshipper must turn his or her face in the direction of Mecca. However, there is no such requirement for informal, non-ritual, prayers.

Benefit of prayers

There are many features and benefits of prayer. Some important benefits are that:

- Prayer increases God-consciousness and enables direct contact with God five times a day.
- On the Day of Judgment, the first question required to be answered by everyone will concern the performance or non-performance of the mandatory prayers.
 - Prayer:
 - makes a believer strive for the hereafter.
 - enables a believer to show devotion and obedience to God.
 - strengthens fear and love of God.
 - reminds the believer of God and His commands.
 - provides an opportunity to thank God for His blessings, ask for forgiveness and request His guidance.
 - becomes the distinctive characteristic of a believer.
 - is the practical manifestation of faith.
 - makes a believer disciplined.
 - uplifts morally and spiritually.
 - enhances community feelings due to congregational prayers.
 - helps the believer avoid bad deeds by constantly recalling one's dedication to do good.

Prerequisites for prayers

There are a few prerequisites that need to be met before a ritual prayer can be offered. They include:

- Ablution (called “Wudu,” in Arabic): includes mandatory washing of face, hands, and feet as well as wiping the head; wiping neck and ears, and rinsing the mouth, are recommended
- Full ablution: if someone has had intercourse, or a woman's menstruation has just ended, a bath is mandated prior to prayers
- The chosen spot for offering the prayer, as well as the prayer rug, should be clean
- Shoes must be taken off if they are unclean
- Informally reciting in one's own words, in any language, the intention to perform the formal ritual prayer (which is in Arabic)
- The face is to be turned towards the direction of Kaaba (Mecca); it should be noted that God, and not the Kaaba, is the object of worship

How a prayer is performed

An informal, non-ritual, act of worship can be performed at any time and anywhere. Such worship requires no specific actions to be performed or words to be recited. Recitation, if any, can be performed silently or aloud. It is also not

necessary to face Mecca for informal worship. Such worship, or informal prayer, can be performed as many times as one desires during the day or night.

The formal prayers, which are required to be memorized and recited in Arabic, are performed as per a specific procedure. However, there are some minor variations, both in actions and in the prayer recitation, among various Islamic sects. The most commonly followed prayer procedure involves the following sequence of steps:

1. Stand up; face the direction of Mecca, and make an intention to offer the prayer.
2. Raise both hands to the ear level or the shoulder and say "God is the Greatest."
3. Fold the arms over the chest, with the right over the left.
4. Recite, "Praise and glory be to you O God. Blessed be Your Name, exalted be Your Majesty and Glory. There is no God but You."
5. Recite, "I seek God's shelter from Satan, the condemned."
6. Recite, "In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful."
7. Recite the opening chapter of the Koran (al-Fatiha).
8. Recite any other chapter, usually a small one, or a few verses from the Koran.
9. Say, "God is the Greatest," while bending over and placing the palms on the knees.
10. While still bent over, say: "Glorified is my Lord, the Great!" three times.
11. Stand up and say, "Allah listens to him who praises Him" and "Our Lord! Praise be for You only."
12. Say: "God is the Greatest."
13. Prostrate to the ground so that the forehead, palms, nose, knees, and toes touch it.
14. Say: "Glory to God, the Exalted" three times.
15. Say: "God is the Greatest" while changing from the prostrate position to a sitting position.
16. Say: "God is the Greatest" while changing from the sitting position to the prostrate position.
17. Again, say: "Glory to God, the Exalted" three times.
18. While saying, "God is the Greatest," stand upright.
19. Fold the arms over the chest, with the right over the left.
20. Repeat steps 7 through 17.
21. Sit down in a kneeling position, with the lower part of the legs touching the ground.
22. Recite "Tashahud" and "Salat Ala An-Nabi," which are verses containing supplications and prayers (see next section for their translation).

23. Turn the face to the right and say, "May the peace and mercy of God be on you."

24. Turn the face to the left and say, "May the peace and mercy of God be on you."

In the procedure just explained, the worshipper completed two "rakat" or units. Each rakat involved touching the forehead to the ground two times. All the formal prayers comprise either two, three or four rakats, which means bowing four, six or eight times respectively. The mandatory component of the dawn prayer comprises two rakats, both the afternoon prayers four rakats, sunset prayer three rakats, and nightfall prayer four rakats.

Examples of verses recited during ritual prayers

al-Fatiha

This is the opening chapter of the Koran, which is recited in every ritual prayer. The following is its translation:

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful
Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds
The beneficent, the merciful
Master of the Day of Judgment
Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek
Show us the straight path
The path of those whom Thou hast favored
Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray

Tashahud

All our oral, physical, and monetary ways of worship are only for God
Peace, mercy and blessing of God be on you, O prophet
May peace be upon us and on the devout slaves of God
I bear witness that there is no god but God
I bear witness that Muhammad^P is His slave and messenger."

Salat Ala an-Nabi

O God! Send your mercy on Muhammad^P
And his posterity
As you sent your mercy on Abraham
And his posterity
You are the most praised, the most glorious
O God! Send your blessings on Muhammad^P

And his posterity
As you have blessed Abraham
And his posterity
You are the most praised, the most glorious

After completion of a ritual formal prayer in Arabic, worshippers typically offer supplications, usually in their own language. The post-prayer dialogue with God can cover a wide range of subjects including request for help, acknowledgment of his favors, gratitude, forgiveness, wishes and desires.

Congregational prayers

The ritual Friday afternoon prayer is a mandatory congregational prayer. It is preceded by a short sermon which can be delivered by any knowledgeable Muslim, in any language (though Arabic is recommended). The sermon can address any topic, with the most popular subjects being religion, current events, politics, community affairs, and social issues. Prayers are usually led by the most knowledgeable, or older and pious, person in the congregation. The basic requirement for leading the prayer is that the leader must have memorized the few Arabic verses that are required to be recited during the performance of the formal prayer.

Muslims are encouraged to offer their daily ritual prayers in a congregation whenever possible. A congregational prayer can be performed with as few as two worshippers. Such a prayer can be offered, just like any other prayer, at home or elsewhere. However, if it is offered in a mosque, it is awarded the highest reward.

In a congregation prayer, all the worshippers stand next to each other in straight lines. The leader recites the prayer loudly and the congregation follows him as he performs the various actions of bowing, kneeling, and prostrating. A benefit of the congregational prayer is that it fosters a sense of equality because all the worshippers have to stand and prostrate together, irrespective of whether they are farmers, workers, sheiks, ministers, millionaires or paupers. A king may pray in the line behind a janitor. At prayer time, all classes vanish and everyone is reminded of God — their object of worship.

Call to prayer

In Muslim communities, there is a call to prayer five times a day. The call to prayer consists of the following verses:

God is the greatest; God is the greatest
God is the greatest; God is the greatest
I bear witness that there is no god except God
I bear witness that there is no god except God
I bear witness that Muhammad^p is the messenger of God
I bear witness that Muhammad^p is the messenger of God
Come to prayer; Come to prayer
Come to success; Come to success
God is the greatest; God is the greatest
There is no god except God.

Role of imams in prayer

Mainstream orthodox Islam does not recognize formal priesthood and, hence, there exists no formal, hierarchical, or religious authority in Muslim societies. However, within the Shia sect, which constitutes about ten percent of the Muslim population, there is a well-organized formal religious hierarchy. Nowadays, in many Muslim communities, mosques retain paid imams or prayer leaders who lead the five daily congregational prayers. Some religious scholars with extensive education in theology, called “Ulema,” also lead prayers and religious functions. They are highly respected but they have no authority to change any law or Islamic tradition. They are viewed as spiritual teachers who provide Islamic education and guidance in the day-to-day life of the Muslim community.

PILLAR #3: ALMS-GIVING (ZAKAT)

Requirement and objective

The third pillar of Islam is mandatory alms-giving. In Arabic, it is called zakat, which means purification. In this case, the reference is to the purification of wealth from greed, miserliness, and selfishness. According to Islam, everything in this world belongs to God and any wealth held by man is in trust as a temporary custodian. A part of the wealth accumulated by an individual belongs to other people and must be distributed to them. If the trust is not discharged, the wealth becomes impure and unclean.

In practical terms, zakat is a simple wealth tax that individuals who meet certain criteria are required to pay. Failure to pay zakat is considered a serious

sin. Its importance can be gauged from the fact that it is mentioned more than 30 times in the Koran, usually in conjunction with prayers.

Zakat is levied on the net wealth that a person has accumulated. To estimate the zakat due, all the assets are first valued and totaled. Assets to be totaled include cash, investments, inventory, etc. From the total assets value (minus a few exemptions that are allowed), all debts and liabilities are subtracted. The remainder is subject to zakat at a flat 2.5% rate. If liabilities exceed assets, no zakat is due.

It should be noted that a person's residence as well as his personal car are exempt from zakat; they are not included in the assets used in the zakat calculations. There is some disagreement among the various Islamic schools of thought about the value of jewelry to be included in the zakat calculations. Some consider jewelry to be an exempt item.

Benefits of zakat

The expected benefits from paying zakat are that it:

- Brings the believer closer to God through this act of worship
- Earns rewards for the giver who will be compensated in the hereafter
- Shows devotion to God by following His command
- Redistributes wealth without hurting those who have accumulated wealth
- Makes the rich provide for the poor and needy; helps them get rid of any greed and selfishness that they may have
- Makes people think about the disadvantaged members of society and contributes to social stability
- Makes people acquire qualities like sympathy, mercy, and benevolence

When and how much Zakat needs to be distributed

Zakat is due once a year and every individual can choose his own time to pay it. Most Muslims prefer to pay during the holy month of Ramadan, though that is not a requirement. The recipient of zakat must meet certain eligibility requirements. It is the responsibility of the donor, if he chooses to pay zakat directly to a needy person rather than through some organization, to determine the recipient's eligibility. The donor must also ensure that the zakat recipient is not taunted or made to lose self-respect.

During the earlier periods of Islamic rule, the state used to collect zakat and deposit it in a zakat fund, like the social security trust fund, which was used to help support the poor and needy. In the modern world, few Islamic governments

collect zakat. Therefore, with some exceptions, zakat distribution has become a personal responsibility. Typically, zakat donations are made to individuals and various collection centers such as mosques, Islamic centers, and social organizations.

Optional alms-giving

The minimum zakat obligation is 2.5%. However, an individual can contribute more than that amount. Besides the mandatory zakat, Islam encourages the giving of voluntary charity. Such charity, known as “Sadaqa,” can be paid in kind or cash and can be distributed at any time.

PILLAR #4: FASTING (SAWM)

Requirement and objective

The fourth pillar of Islam is fasting during the month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. In Arabic, it is called “Sawm.” Ramadan is considered a holy month by Muslims for two reasons: because the Koran was first revealed to Muhammad^P in Ramadan, and because it has been designated as the month of fasting.

Fasting is mandatory for all Muslims, who are able-bodied adults in good health, for the full month of Ramadan. Children are expected to begin fasting when they attain puberty. Fasting is more than a physical exercise. It is a form of worship and a fasting Muslim, throughout the day, remembers God for whom the fast is undertaken. Fasting teaches self-control and patience. Like prayer, it is a way for Muslims to turn to God in sincere worship.

The objectives of Ramadan fasting are to:

- Worship God and obey His command
- Seek closeness to God
- Show gratitude to God
- Perform self-purification
- Learn self-restraint and control material desires
- Gain piety
- Remember the needy

What fasting involves

Fasting involves complete abstinence, from dawn until sunset, from eating or drinking. However, routine day-to-day activities must continue to be conducted while fasting. Sexual intercourse is prohibited so long as a fast is in effect. There is no restriction on eating and drinking from sunset to the following dawn. On the spiritual side, a fasting person must abstain from lying, anger, fighting or quarreling, gossiping, and other negative activities that Islam has prohibited.

Typically, a fast is started by having a heavy meal at dawn. The fast is ended at sunset, usually by eating a few dates and having a light snack, which is followed by the sunset prayer. After the prayer, a heavy meal is enjoyed which is followed by snacks until bed time. Usually, the breaking of a fast is converted into a social event. Friends and family members get together and collectively break the fast.

Benefits of fasting

There are many benefits of fasting including:

- Being rewarded on the Day of Judgment
- Being rewarded with God's love because He loves those who fast
- Increased awareness of God
- Reminding believers of dependence upon and relationship to God
- Enhanced spirituality
- Inner purification
- A benchmark is provided, once a year, against which Muslims can compare themselves
 - Elevated moral standards
 - Improved physical and spiritual health
 - Awareness of what hungry people undergo
 - Improved social consciousness and care for others
 - Improved discipline and self-restraint
 - Encouraging patience and reflection

Fasting exemptions

While fasting is mandatory, there are many exemptions that take into consideration various constraints and limitations of people that can be expected in any society. For example, old and sick people, pregnant and nursing women, menstruating women, and travelers are exempted from fasting. If physically able

to do so, they are required to make up the missed fasts later on during the year. If unable to fast, a Muslim has to feed at least one poor person for each missed fast.

Fasting calendar

The Islamic lunar-based calendar is shorter than the solar calendar by 11 days. Therefore, Ramadan starts 11 days earlier each year, which means that over an extended period of many years it will fall in every season. A believer, over his life span, will see Ramadan in the summer, when days are long and hot, as well as during winter when days are short and cold. The typical duration of a fast is 10-16 hours, depending on the length of the day at a particular location.

Difficulty in fasting

The general impression, among those who have not experienced it, is that fasting is very difficult physically. While fasting does test a person due to self-inflicted hunger, the physical test is easier than the non-physical test of controlling anger, being patient, ignoring aggravations, and avoiding other emotions and acts that displease God. For example, if the normal tendency of a person is to retaliate immediately, it is easier for such a person to be hungry than to avoid retaliation — which is expected of him during Ramadan.

Penalty for breaking a fast

A fast can be broken if there is danger to one's health. If a fast is broken unintentionally, or due to a medical condition, it can be made up later. If one breaks a fast intentionally, without a justifiable reason, the penalty imposed is fasting for 60 continuous days. However, in case one is unable to fast continuously for 60 days, the penalty is feeding 60 needy people or donating to charity an amount equal to the cost of feeding 60 people.

Extra activities during Ramadan

In addition to being a challenging month, Ramadan is also a very busy period for Muslims. During the month of Ramadan, there are additional religious as well as social activities. During Ramadan, Muslims are encouraged to:

- Read the whole Koran from cover to cover
- Show more generosity and give extra charity
- Participate in special congregational prayers of 8 or 20 rakats (units), called Taraweeh, which are held in mosques after the nightfall prayers

- During the course of the month, recite a complete Koran in the Taraweeh prayers
- Spend the night in worship at home or in a mosque on Lailat al-Qadr, which is the anniversary of the first revelation of the Koran

Celebrating the end of Ramadan

Eid al-Fitr is the day of celebration which follows the last day of Ramadan. Following a congregational prayer, Muslims visit friends and relatives. Friends and family members are greeted by a hug. People wear new clothes and children are given cash or gifts by their parents and relatives. On this day, Zakat al-Fitr, a type of donation, is given to the poor. After a month of self-control, people enjoy assorted foods and the mood is very festive. Muslim countries mark this day as an official holiday.

Non-Ramadan fasting

There are a number of other days, in non-Ramadan months, that are recommended for optional fasting. They include the first six days of the month of Shawwal, which follows Ramadan, as well as the 9th and 10th of Muharram. An optional fast can be kept on any day of the year, except on the two main festival days: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

PILLAR #5: PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA (HAJJ)

Requirement and objective

The fifth pillar of Islam is Hajj — the once in a lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca. Hajj falls in Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic calendar, and is mandatory only for those who can afford it and are physically able to perform it. Over two million Muslims from all over the world perform Hajj each year.

The purpose of the Hajj pilgrimage, which consists of a number of rituals and acts of worship, is to worship and please God. Its culmination is marked by commemorating the attempt by Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, when he was ordered to do so by God in order to test his loyalty and obedience.

Benefits of Hajj

The benefits that Muslims hope to achieve from Hajj include the:

- Ability to respond to God's commands
- Opportunity to thank God for His grace and the favors He has bestowed
 - Purification — to be cleansed of sins and start a new life
 - Patience, endurance, self-restraint, and piety
 - Breaking down of racial, economic, and social barriers
 - Meeting Muslims from all over the world and experiencing brotherhood

What performing the Hajj involves

Dress code

Hajj has to be performed in a state of "Ihram," which is achieved by wearing a special type of dress. All male pilgrims wear two unsewn white garments, which sweep away all distinctions of background, status, wealth, and culture. Women usually wear a modest white dress, though no specific clothing has been prescribed for them. During the state of Ihram, when the white pilgrim clothes are worn, a pilgrim cannot kill an insect or animal, cut any body hair, engage in a sexual act, commit violence, or become angry.

Rituals and activities

The rituals associated with Hajj can be traced back to Prophet Abraham. They start on the 8th day of Dhu al-Hijjah and include:

- Tawaf, which involves circling the Kaaba seven times in a counter-clockwise manner.
 - Touching the black stone of the Kaaba.
 - Drinking water from the Zam Zam spring.
 - Sa'i: walking briskly between Safa and Marwa, two small hills near the Kaaba, seven times to retrace the path Hagar took when searching for water for her son Ishmael.
- Camping at Mina when the Hajj begins formally on 8th Dhu al-Hijjah. Pilgrims stay at Mina extends from dawn on 8th Dhu al-Hijjah to after dawn on 9th Dhu al-Hijjah (when they proceed to Arafat).
 - Assembling at Arafat, a large empty plain outside Mecca, on 9th Dhu al-Hijjah. At this site, there is supplication to God and pilgrims pray for mercy and forgiveness. They listen to a sermon, during the afternoon prayers, in

commemoration of the final pilgrimage by Muhammad^P who delivered his farewell sermon from Arafat.

- Stay at Arafat on 9th Dhu al-Hijjah from after dawn to slightly after sunset (when pilgrims proceed to Muzdalfa).
- Stay at Muzdalfa from after sunset on 9th Dhu al-Hijjah to after dawn on 10th Dhu al-Hijjah.
- Proceed to Mina and throw seven pebbles at Jamrat-ul-Aqaba — symbols of Satan who attempted to make Abraham disobey God's command.
- Sacrifice an animal, to commemorate Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son, on 10th Dhu al-Hijjah — which is the Eid al-Adha festival day.
- Male pilgrims shave their head and change into everyday clothes.
- Proceed to Mecca and perform the Tawaf; this particular Tawaf is known as Tawaf al-Ifadah.
- Return to Mina, where the stay extends from 11-13th Dhu al-Hijjah, and stone three pillars — symbols of Satan.
- Return to Mecca to perform the farewell Tawaf — known as Tawaf al-Widaa.

Among the listed rituals, the only mandatory requirements of Hajj are:

- Presence at Arafat on 9th Dhu al-Hijjah
- Performing Tawaf al-Ifadah

Many pilgrims also visit Muhammad^P's grave in Medina either before or after Hajj.

Eid al-Adha and the sacrifice

The Eid al-Adha festival marks the end of Hajj. On that day, the 10th of Dhu al-Hijjah, which is a public holiday in Muslim countries, a congregational prayer is offered in the morning. Following the prayer, an animal is sacrificed to commemorate Abraham's readiness to obey God's command and sacrifice his son. On Eid al-Adha, in Muslim communities throughout the world, an animal is sacrificed and its meat distributed to relatives, neighbors, and the needy. The sacrifice, which can be performed by a Muslim himself or someone else on his behalf, is an obligation for those able to afford it financially. On Eid al-Adha, children are given cash or gifts and people wear new clothes.

CHAPTER 13: THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF GOD

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

Monotheism: Belief in one God

The most important concept in Islam is monotheism, or Tawheed, which is based upon the fundamental belief that there is only one God and that He has no partners or equals. According to Islam, if a person compromises that concept in any way, none of his acts of worship will be accepted by God.

Muslims are required to acknowledge, as part of their basic beliefs, that God alone must be worshipped. Worshipping anything else is a rejection of God. Also required from them is confirmation of His other names and attributes, which are listed in a subsequent section.

Monotheism: Three perspectives

The belief in monotheism has three distinct aspects. They are

- The Oneness of God
- Worship of only one God
- Uniqueness in the names and attributes of God

The Oneness of God

Muslims believe that God is one and only one. Their primary beliefs relating to the oneness of God include the following:

- God created everything and controls everything in the universe

- Everything happens according to His will
- God determines when life starts and ends
- God shares no power with any partners or equals
- Only God knows the future
- God can be reached directly; He does not require any intermediaries for humans to reach Him
- God neither begets nor is He begotten; He created Adam without parents and Jesus without a father

Worship of only one God

Islam teaches that only God must be worshipped, which is the purpose of man's creation. Muslims are taught to worship only the Creator and not His creations — the message delivered by every prophet sent by God. The objective of every prophet, always, was to lead his people back to monotheism from which they had deviated over time.

The concept of worshipping God is unique in Islam. It is not limited to ritual acts of worship. Instead, it encompasses all of life's activities that are carried out with the objective of pleasing God.

Uniqueness in the names and attributes of God

Islam teaches that God has very unique attributes that are not shared by anyone else. For example:

- He is perfect and unique
- He is the creator of everything
- He has no beginning or end and lives forever
- He never gets tired
- He is the sustainer and protector of everything
- He has unlimited knowledge about everything that has happened and what will happen

Shirk: The unpardonable sin

Islam makes a very clear distinction between God and His creations. It teaches that none of God's creations must be worshipped either directly or indirectly. Any failure to differentiate between the Creator and His creations is considered a very serious sin. The most serious and unpardonable sin in Islam is *Shirk*, which refers to the worship of any creation and associating partners with God. It includes:

- Polytheism
- The concept of the Trinity

QUALITIES, ATTRIBUTES AND EXPECTATIONS

Qualities and characteristics

In addition to the basic and fundamental Islamic beliefs about God, there are other aspects that define what He means to Muslims. These include, but are not limited to, the following qualities and characteristics of God:

- He is all-powerful.
- He is absolutely just and merciful.
- He is compassionate and forgiving.
- He is most gracious.
- He is supreme and sovereign.
- He is all-seeing and all-hearing.
- He has no defects.
- He is the true guide.
- He is the provider.
- He is free from weariness and weakness.
- He is wise and knows what is best for us.
- He loves those who worship Him.
- He likes good deeds and dislikes what He has prohibited.
- He knows everything that we think and feel.
- He sent His prophets including the last one, Muhammad^P.
- He revealed the scriptures including the Koran.
- On the Day of Judgment, everyone will have to answer to Him.

God's 99 attributes

Muslims believe that God has 99 names and attributes, which are listed below along with their translated meanings in parentheses. These are close, but not always equal, translations from Arabic, which is a very rich language:

- 1>. Allah (God)
- 2>. Al-Rahman (The Compassionate, The Beneficent, The Gracious)
- 3>. Al-Rahim (The Merciful)
- 4>. Al-Malik (The King)
- 5>. Al-Quddus (The Most Holy)
- 6>. Al-Salam (The Source of Peace)
- 7>. Al-Mumin (Guardian of Faith)

- 8>. Al-Muhaymin (The Protector)
- 9>. Al-Aziz (The Mighty)
- 10>. Al-Jabbar (The Compeller)
- 11>. Al-Mutakabbir (The Majestic)
- 12>. Al-Khaliq (The Creator)
- 13>. Al-Bari (The Maker)
- 14>. Al-Musawwir (The Bestower of Form, The Shaper)
- 15>. Al-Ghaffar (The Forgiver)
- 16>. Al-Qahhar (The Subduer)
- 17>. Al-Wahhab (The Bestower)
- 18>. Al-Razzaq (The Provider, The Sustainer)
- 19>. Al-Fattah (The Opener, The Judge)
- 20>. Al-Alim (The All-Knowing)
- 21>. Al-Qabid (The Withholder)
- 22>. Al-Basit (The Expander)
- 23>. Al-Khafid (The Abaser)
- 24>. Al-Rafi (The Exalter)
- 25>. Al-Mu'izz (The Bestower of Honor)
- 26>. Al-Mudhill (The Humiliator)
- 27>. Al-Sami (The All-Hearing)
- 28>. Al-Basir (The All-Seeing)
- 29>. Al-Hakam (The Judge)
- 30>. Al-Adl (The Just, The Equitable)
- 31>. Al-Latif (The Gentle, The Subtle One)
- 32>. Al-Khabir (The All-Aware)
- 33>. Al-Halim (The Forbearing)
- 34>. Al-Azim (The Great One)
- 35>. Al-Ghafoor (The Forgiving)
- 36>. Ash-Shakoor (The Appreciative)
- 37>. Al-Aliyy (The Most High)
- 38>. Al-Kabir (The Great)
- 39>. Al-Hafiz (The Preserver)
- 40>. Al-Muqit (The Sustainer)
- 41>. Al-Hasib (The Reckoner)
- 42>. Al-Jalil (The Majestic, The Sublime)
- 43>. Al-Karim (The Generous)
- 44>. Al-Raqib (The Watchful)
- 45>. Al-Mujib (The Responsive)
- 46>. Al-Wasi (The All-Encompassing, The All-Embracing)
- 47>. Al-Hakim (The Wise)
- 48>. Al-Wadud (The Loving)
- 49>. Al-Majid (The Glorious)
- 50>. Al-Baith (The Resurrector)

- 51>. Al-Shahid (The Witness)
- 52>. Al-Haqq (The Truth)
- 53>. Al-Wakil (The Universal Trustee)
- 54>. Al-Qawiyy (The Strong)
- 55>. Al-Matin (The Firm)
- 56>. Al-Waliyy (The Protector)
- 57>. Al-Hamid (The Praiseworthy)
- 58>. Al-Muhsi (The Reckoner)
- 59>. Al-Mubdi (The Originator)
- 60>. Al-Muid (The Restorer)
- 61>. Al-Muhyi (The Giver of Life)
- 62>. Al-Mumit (The Taker of Life)
- 63>. Al-Hayy (The Ever-Living)
- 64>. Al-Qayyum (The Self-Existing)
- 65>. Al-Wajid (The Perceiver, The Finder)
- 66>. Al-Majid (The Glorious)
- 67>. Al-Wahid (The One)
- 68>. Al-Samad (The Eternally Besought)
- 69>. Al-Qadir (The Omnipotent, The Able)
- 70>. Al-Muqtadir (The Powerful)
- 71>. Al-Muqaddim (The Expeditor)
- 72>. Al-Mu'akhkhir (The Delayer)
- 73>. Al-Awwal (The First)
- 74>. Al-Akhir (The Last)
- 75>. Al-Zahir (The Manifest)
- 76>. Al-Batin (The Hidden)
- 77>. Al-Wali (The Governor)
- 78>. Al-Muta'ali (The Most Exalted)
- 79>. Al-Barr (The Source of All Goodness)
- 80>. Al-Tawwab (The Acceptor of Repentance)
- 81>. Al-Afuww (The Pardoner)
- 82>. Al-Muntaqim (The Avenger)
- 83>. Al-Rauf (The Clement)
- 84>. Malik ul-Mulk (The Owner of the Kingdom)
- 85>. Dhul Jalal wal-Ikram (The Lord of Majesty and Bounty)
- 86>. Al-Muqsit (The Equitable)
- 87>. Al-Jami (The Gatherer)
- 88>. Al-Ghaniyy (The Self-Sufficient)
- 89>. Al-Mughni (The Enricher)
- 90>. Al-Mani (The Preventer)
- 91>. Al-Nafi (The Benefiter)
- 92>. Al-Darr (The Afflicter)
- 93>. Al-Noor (The Light)

- 94>. Al-Hadi (The Guide)
- 95>. Al-Badi (The Incomparable)
- 96>. Al-Baqi (The Everlasting)
- 97>. Al-Warith (The Ultimate Inheritor)
- 98>. Al-Rashid (The Guide)
- 99>. Al-Sabur (The Patient One)

A Muslim is expected to have firm beliefs about God and all His attributes. He cannot believe in some attributes while disbelieving others.

What God expects from man

According to Islam, God created man so that he may worship Him. He generously bestowed many favors on mankind but does not need anything in return because He is independent and has no needs. However, what He requires is for believers to recognize His unique and exalted position, worship Him, obey His commands without question, and strive to lead a life that will ensure a place in heaven for them. He wants man to perform as many activities as possible with the pleasure of God in mind. By doing what is expected of him, man can expect to be fully rewarded in the hereafter.

What to expect from God

The Islamic view of God is that He is very just. Muslims are taught that they should expect to be rewarded or punished, depending on how they live their lives. For example:

- Sinners and evil doers will be punished
- Virtuous people will be rewarded with favors
- Oppressors will be punished
- Those who worship God's creations (such as humans, rulers, wealth, nature represented by objects such as the sun and moon, etc.), instead of the Creator, will not be forgiven

Muslims are also taught that they can expect pardon and forgiveness even for the most serious sins, if they are sincerely regretful and repentant, because God is forgiving. They can also expect from God that He:

- Listens to prayers
- Provides help
- Loves those who love Him

CONCEPT OF DIRECT RELATIONSHIP

Man has a direct relationship with God

Islam teaches that every human being has a direct one-on-one relationship with God. In order to communicate with Him, no intermediary is required. Therefore, one can pray to God anytime and anywhere. It is this concept that eliminates the need for clergy or priesthood for mainstream Muslims.

Role of clergy and scholars

In mainstream Islam, as represented by the Sunni sect, the concept of priesthood or clergy and ordainment does not exist because there is no need or requirement for someone to act as an intermediary between an individual Muslim and God.

Some knowledgeable Islamic experts, who have formal Islamic education and training, often serve as leaders of their community. They lead congregational prayers and issue rulings on various religious and social issues. However, they have no formal position sanctioned by Islam. An “Alim” is an Islamic scholar who has thoroughly studied the Koran, the teachings of Muhammad^P, and associated Islamic literature. Such scholars also have formal religious degrees from Islamic institutions and universities.

In practically every orthodox Muslim community, there is an imam — a community religious leader. The responsibilities of imams can vary tremendously. In small communities, especially in rural areas, they are responsible for leading congregational prayers, teaching Islam and Koran recitation, and performing marriage ceremonies. Their role and duties are, to a large extent, determined by their local community. In some communities, especially in more educated communities, they have additional responsibilities such as teaching Islam and Arabic, Islamic interpretation of social and other issues, issuing religious opinions (fatwa), and ensuring that politicians and local leaders do not violate Islamic principles.

The mainstream imams, who follow orthodox Islam and belong to the Sunni sect, should not be confused with Shia imams, who play a completely different role for their followers. (That is explained in the next section.)

Within Muslim communities, there is another group of scholars known as “Haafiz.” Typically, they are the products of Islamic seminaries where they obtain Islamic education and memorize the Koran from cover to cover. Since

memorizing the Koran has high rewards associated with it, many ordinary Muslims, even outside such seminaries, memorize the Koran and become Haafiz. The ranks of the Haafiz have included children, doctors, engineers, businessmen and people from all walks of life.

Imams and ayatollahs

In the Shia sect of Islam, a well-structured religious hierarchy is headed by imams and ayatollahs. The Shia sect structure and power hierarchy is somewhat similar to that of the Catholic Church. At the highest level in their hierarchy are the imams, who are the direct descendants of Muhammad^P. Shias believe that there have been 12 imams, starting with Muhammad^P's son-in-law Ali ibn Abu Talib, who have had supreme religious authority. In the absence of an imam, the authority is discharged by the ayatollahs, who are highly learned Shia scholars.

The Shias believe that while a prophet is a messenger of God, an imam is Prophet Muhammad^P's messenger. The difference is that while a prophet receives a revelation from God, an imam receives commands from the prophet through a special blessing. Imams are viewed as having Pope-like infallibility.

CHAPTER 14: KORAN, SUNNAH, SHARIA, AND GOVERNMENT

THE KORAN

What is the Koran

“Koran” means recitation; the Koran is the word of God that was revealed in Arabic to Muhammad^P through Angel Gabriel. The Koranic revelations which started in Mecca, and continued in Medina, were revealed from 610 through 632. The Koran is characterized by a unique style that makes it highly readable and easy to memorize. Another defining characteristic is that it has remained completely immune to any alterations in nearly 14 centuries, as promised by God in the Koranic verse, “We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption) (15:9).”

The Koran has been translated into every major language. Among the English translations, the most popular versions are by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin, and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall. Syed Abu-Ala' Maududi's *The Meaning of the Quran* is one of the best translations and includes a detailed commentary.

Importance of the Koran

The Koran is the primary source of Islamic teachings. It contains God's commands, specifies Islamic beliefs, describes how Muslims should practice their faith, and gives Islamic laws and regulations. It is the guide that teaches

Muslims how to live their lives in accordance with God's commandments and wishes. It makes mankind understand its role in this world.

What the Koran is about

The Koran covers a wide range of subjects including spiritual, moral, social as well as day-to-day issues. The following is a partial list of the topics that are addressed in the Koran:

- Oneness of God and His other attributes
- The relationship between God and man
- The purpose of man's existence
- God's commandments
- Life in the hereafter
- Rewards and punishments
- Acts of worship
- Prophethood
- Moral values
- History
- Social life and family issues
- Inheritance
- Duties and responsibilities
- Virtues, vices, and ethical codes
- Conduct and interaction
- Crimes and punishment
- Economics

How to understand the Koran

In order to properly understand the contents of the Koran, it is necessary to appreciate the background and historical context of the Koranic revelations. Many of the verses in the Koran were revealed to provide guidance, advice, and comfort to Muhammad^P and his followers. Such verses had direct relevance to the situation that the embattled or persecuted Muslims were encountering at that time. Therefore, one needs to be aware of the circumstances existing at the time a particular verse or chapter was revealed. Hence, it is always advisable, especially for beginners, to study the Koran that is accompanied by a detailed commentary.

Another point to keep in mind is that the Koran was revealed in Arabic — a very rich language. It is very easy to misinterpret the meaning of a word or verse because, in many cases, there is no equivalent expression in English or other languages. Ideally, the Koran should be studied in Arabic and, if that is not

possible, then one should use a translation that is accompanied by a commentary.

How the Koran was compiled

The Koran was revealed piecemeal over a period of more than two decades. Muhammad^P received the first revelation in the cave of Hira, at the Mountain of Light (Jabal e-Noor) located outside the city of Mecca. Muhammad^P and his companions, of whom there were thousands, memorized the Koranic verses as soon they were revealed. Scribes also recorded them in writing on palm leaves, parchment, and animal skins. Subsequently, such writings were cross-checked and verified by Muhammad^P himself. The writing of the Koran was completed, though not compiled, by the time Muhammad^P died.

After Muhammad^P's death, many Muslims who had memorized the Koran died in the battle of Yamama during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. Their loss triggered the fear that the Koran might be corrupted in the future just like the other scriptures. Therefore, Abu Bakr ordered the compilation of the Koran using both sources: written and living — from those who had memorized it. After its compilation, he took custody of the Koran. Later on, the third caliph, Uthman, made many copies and distributed them.

Koran's organization

The Koran consists of 114 chapters, known as surahs, and contains more than six thousand verses. It is divided into 30 equal parts. The chapters, which are not arranged in the order in which they were revealed, are organized according to Muhammad^P's instructions. The surahs are arranged with the longest chapter first and the shortest ones at the end. The longest chapter, al-Baqarah, consists of 286 verses while the shortest chapter, al-Kawthar, consists of only three verses. Typically, the place of revelation, Mecca or Medina, is indicated at the beginning of each chapter.

Withstanding the test of time

Despite the passage of nearly 14 centuries since the Koran was revealed, it has remained completely intact and unblemished by any changes to the original text. This contrasts with the other scriptures which were edited over the centuries and, consequently, lost their authenticity.

According to the Koran, God has promised to maintain the authenticity of the Koran. Consequently, it has been able to retain its original purity and content. The belief among Muslims is that God undertook that task because He sent Muhammad^P as the last prophet and, consequently, wanted the last scripture to remain free from blemishes. Memorizing the Koran is considered to be a deed that will be rewarded very highly in the hereafter. Consequently, there are literally tens of thousands of Muslims, perhaps even more, who have memorized the Koran — which helps to insulate it from changes creeping in.

TEACHINGS OF THE PROPHET: SUNNAH

What is the Sunnah

The term Sunnah literally means “way.” It implies paving the way so that, later on, it becomes a way for others. In Islam, Sunnah refers to the actions, sayings, and approvals of Muhammad^P. It is also referred to as the Hadith. The sayings and actions of Muhammad^P were meticulously preserved and recorded. For Muslims, it is required that they follow the Sunnah, whose importance is second only to the teachings of the Koran.

Role of the Sunnah

In the Koran, God has commanded Muslims, many times, that they should follow Muhammad^P. According to the Koran, “Indeed in the messenger of Allah you have a good example to follow, for him who hopes for (the meeting with) Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much (33:21).” It also equates obedience of the messenger with obedience of God, as is indicated in the verse, “He who obeys the messenger, obeys Allah (4:80).”

Muslims are expected to follow the example set by Muhammad^P in his daily life. Anything that he did or say during his lifetime, and can be implemented in one’s daily life, is expected to be emulated by Muslims because he is their recognized guide and role model. For example, while only two rakats, or units, are mandated for the dawn prayers, Muslims pray four rakats because Muhammad^P used to pray the additional two rakats. Similarly, when Muhammad^P used to put on his shoes, he always put on the right shoe first. Hence, when putting on his shoes, a Muslim will put on the right shoe first and then the left shoe.

The implementation of the Sunnah pertaining to worship acts such as prayers and fasting, called Sunnah Ibadīya, are considered more important compared to habits and routine acts. The Sunnah is complimentary with the Koran. At times, it clarifies the Koran or provides more details. Together, the Koran and Sunnah provide the basis for Sharia, or Islamic Law, which encompasses all aspects of an individual Muslim's life as well as issues of state and government.

Koran's elevated status compared to the Sunnah

The Koran is the word of God while the Sunnah are the sayings, actions, and traditions of Muhammad^P. Muslims hold Muhammad^P in the highest regard. However, they recognize that he was a human being and cannot be equated to God. Consequently, they recognize the Koran as the highest source of Islamic Law and commands. The Koran as the primary source has precedence over the Sunnah, which is the secondary source in every respect. The secondary source cannot be in contradiction with the primary source. If there is any inconsistency, which should not occur with a genuine Sunnah, then the Koran prevails.

Verification of Hadith

Some time after Muhammad^P's death, a number of scholars recorded and compiled the Hadith. They were very carefully checked and verified before being recorded. The verification process included an analysis of the chain of transmission to ensure that fake Hadiths that had crept in over the years, since the death of Muhammad^P, would be screened out. The most authentic, and the most widely used, collections are the ones compiled by the scholars Bukhari and Muslim. Other well known collections were compiled by An-Nasa'i, Abu Dawood, Tirmizi, and ibn-Majah.

Examples of Hadith

Many Hadith volumes have been compiled that contain extensive information about how Muhammad^P lived his life and what he said. The following are some examples of Muhammad^P's sayings:

- God has no mercy on one who has no mercy for others
- He who eats his fill while his neighbor goes without food is not a believer

- God does not judge according to your bodies and appearances but He scans your hearts and looks into your deeds
- There is a reward for kindness to every living thing
- It is obligatory upon a Muslim that he should listen to the ruler appointed over him and obey him whether he likes it or not, except when he is ordered to do a sinful thing. If he is ordered to do a sinful act, a Muslim should neither listen to him nor should he obey his orders.
- The one who looks after and works for a widow and for a poor person is like a warrior fighting for Allah's cause
- Allah will not be merciful to those who are not merciful to mankind

ISLAMIC LAW: SHARIA

Sources of Islamic religious authority

The basic principle of Islamic Law, also known as the Sharia, is that everything must be governed according to God's commands. There are two primary sources that comprise the Sharia: Koran and Sunnah. The Sharia, in a Muslim society, extends beyond interpreting simple religious issues and encompasses all aspects of life — individual and collective.

Additional Shia authority

In addition to the Koran and Sunnah, which are recognized by all Muslims, Shias recognize a third source of authority which is based upon the teachings of 12 imams. The imams are the descendants of Ali ibn Abu Talib — Muhammad^P's son-in-law and the fourth caliph. Shias believe that the teachings and examples of the 12 imams are as authoritative as the Koran and the Sunnah. At the lower level, religious authority is vested in the ayatollahs.

Role of the companions

The companions of Muhammad^P were principled men of high character who faced deep hostility when they converted to Islam. Muslims look to them as role models and, where possible, try to emulate their behavior in situations where a Sunnah is not available. For example, knowledgeable Muslims consider Umar, the second caliph, to be the role model who set an example of how the religious sites of other religions should be treated. After the Muslims conquered Jerusalem, he went to visit a Christian church there. While Umar was at the

church he refused to pray there, even though it was time for ritual prayers, because he did not want to create a precedent of praying there. Umar feared that, in the future, intolerant Muslims could use his precedent as a pretext to pray at the church and effectively take it over.

Sharia Law

In Islam, there is no separation of Church and State and, hence, Islamic Law or the Sharia extends to every sphere including government, legislature, civil, public, and personal. The Sharia, which interprets issues using Islamic principles, covers every aspect of life in a Muslim society — individual and collective.

The primary source used for the Sharia Law's guiding principles is the Koran. The basic interpretation principle is that nothing in the Koran can be overruled or bypassed. A Muslim society has the freedom to legislate any new law provided it is not in conflict with the Koran or the Sunnah. However, no one has the authority to allow anything that God has specifically prohibited or, conversely, prohibit anything that God has allowed. All Koranic laws are binding and not subject to any interpretation, unless there is some ambiguity.

Application of Sharia Law

The Sharia controls and regulates almost every facet of a Muslim's life. The subjects that it covers include, but are not limited, to the following:

- The basis for relations between God and man
- Relations between Muslims and non-Muslims
- The organization of a Muslim society
- Government
- Ethics
- Public and private behavior
- Individual behavior
- Relations and interaction with others
- Personal hygiene
- Civil and criminal issues
- Diet
- Rights of women
- Sexual conduct
- Rules for worship
- Resolution of conflicts

In addition to guiding an individual's personal behavior, Sharia Law can be applied in a broader context. It can be used to guide an individual's behavior with society as well as interactions between groups. The Sharia Law can also be used to settle disputes between nations, or within nations, as well as conflicts and wars. The Sharia does not exclude knowledge from other sources and is viewed by Muslims as a vehicle to solve diverse problems including personal, civil, criminal, and international.

Crime and punishment in Islam

According to Islam, while all crimes will be punished in the hereafter, some crimes also need to be punished in this world. According to Islamic Law, crimes can be categorized under three main groups.

- The most serious are called Had. They are against God's laws and include murder, apostasy, adultery, and theft.
- The least serious are called Tazir. They are crimes against society and are equivalent to minor felonies or misdemeanors.
- Revenge crimes and restitution are called Qesas.

If a specific crime has a specific punishment prescribed in the Koran, a lesser or greater sentence cannot be imposed according to Islamic Law. Many of the Had crimes have fixed punishments. In general, punishments for Had crimes are severe. For example, theft can be punished by amputating the hand, depending on how many times the crime was committed, or by imprisonment. However, Islam requires a very high level of proof, especially for the most serious crimes. For example, four witnesses are required to prove adultery.

In Islamic Law, except for Had crimes, a judge is not bound by precedents or earlier decisions. Often, the punishments are a reflection of local customs and how conservative, or liberal, the society is. The same crime, such as bribery or drinking alcohol, may be punished differently in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Indonesia — all Muslim countries.

The punishment for Qesas crimes, which is based upon retribution and retaliation, is specified in the Koran. If a Qesas crime has been committed, such as pre-meditated murder, then the victim's family has the right to seek either Qesas punishment or Diya — which is financial restitution. If murder was committed due to a mistake, then only Diya is allowed — not Qesas.

Interpretation of Sharia: Fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence

As Muslims faced new challenges after the death of Muhammad^P, the need developed to find solutions and answers to new problems and issues. This led to the development of a system of jurisprudence — the third source of law. Its objective was to simultaneously:

- Safeguard the foundations of Islamic Law embodied in the Koran and the Sunnah
- Provide flexibility so that potential new legal issues for Muslims could be addressed.

Such needs led to the development of “Fiqh,” meaning understanding or comprehension, that refers to the jurisprudence developed to interpret and implement the Sharia. It is based on four tools of jurisprudence:

- Koran
- Hadith
- Consensus (Ijma)
- Analogy (Qiyas)

To arrive at a solution for a problem, the first source to be tapped is the Koran. If an answer is not found there, the next source to be tapped is the Hadith. If there is no clear answer from the first two tools, consensus is used, which is based upon finding an agreement from other sources — such as Muhammad^P's companions and others who immediately followed them. If even Ijma provides no answer, then an analogy or something comparable is used as the basis for arriving at a decision.

There are four schools of Islamic jurisprudence which are named after their founders: Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali. Even though they use the same sources for making their judgments, the four schools have come up with different interpretations regarding various issues. However, it should be noted that on major and fundamental issues, there is agreement between all four schools. There also exists a fifth school, known as Jafari, that is followed by the Shia sect.

Status of Sharia in Muslim countries

There are many movements in Muslim countries whose objective is to discard their existing legal system and make Sharia the law of the country. However, they have not had much support and, in fact, have generated a lot of controversy. Opponents say that they cannot implement punishments, such as cutting off a hand, in an existing unjust society. Their argument is that such laws

were implemented in a just and generous society where there was no reason to steal. Therefore, unless such societies elevate themselves to a level where the incentive for crimes is gone, and hungry people are not forced to steal food, it does not make sense to implement such punishments.

At this time, most Muslim countries implement a hybrid of Sharia and civil laws. Typically, in such countries, the implementation of Sharia is restricted to personal and family matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

ISLAMIC GOVERNMENT

Objective of an Islamic state

An Islamic state has the following objectives:

- To establish, maintain, and develop virtues that God desires in man
- To prevent and eradicate evils that God dislikes

In view of these two basic principles, it becomes obvious that the primary duty of an Islamic state is to implement and uphold God's laws as stated in the Koran and clarified in the Sunnah. Such a state must be driven by the need to do everything as per God's commandments and the requirements of justice, rather than any expediency.

Basis of Islamic political system

An Islamic state's political system is based on three principles:

- Tawheed — the oneness of God
- Prophethood
- Caliphate

The principle of Tawheed dictates that only God can be the ruler and, consequently, His commands are the law which must be followed by society. In an Islamic state, it means that all its laws must be based upon, or conform to, God's commandments.

The principle of prophethood dictates that an Islamic state should follow the Sunnah because Muhammad^P provided an example and the model for implementing Islamic laws in everyday life. In combination with the primary source, the Koran, it means that the state must follow the Sharia.

The caliphate is just an instrument, chosen by the people, for the implementation of God's laws within prescribed limits. A ruler cannot exercise any authority that is in conflict with the Sharia.

The meaning of democracy In Islam

In an Islamic society, a government or ruling body can only be formed with the approval of its constituents — all of whom have the same rights. The head of the government can continue in office only until he retains the confidence of the people. Every citizen has the right to criticize the leader and/or his government. All citizens should have reasonable means available to them for the airing of their opinions.

Leadership

The administration of an Islamic state's government is the responsibility of its leader, who is called the caliph (khalifa) or amir. Such a position is not hereditary. An amir, who has to be elected by the people, is expected to have both religious and political responsibilities. He is accountable to his people and can retain power only so long as he enjoys their confidence. An amir is advised and assisted by the Shoora, an advisory council elected by the people. It is incumbent upon an amir to govern his country in accordance with the Shoora's advice.

Legislation

In an Islamic society, new laws can be legislated by legislative bodies so long as they do not conflict with the Sharia. The members of such bodies must be elected and represent the people, whose confidence they must retain in order to remain in office.

CHAPTER 15: ISLAMIC MORALS SYSTEM AND MUSLIM CHARACTERISTICS

WHAT THE ISLAMIC SYSTEM IS BASED UPON

Morals system

According to Islam, the objective of man's life is to worship God and to please Him. Such an objective can only be achieved by a high standard of morality, whose importance was underlined by Muhammad^P who said, "Best among you is who is best in his character."

Islam attempts to inculcate in man the love as well as fear of God. The expectation is that once a person is fully aware of God and what He desires, and can differentiate between good and bad, he will make a conscientious effort to achieve a high level of morality — which is pleasing to God.

The Islamic morals system is primarily based upon God's commandments and laws as described in the Koran. In conjunction with the Islamic legal system, it protects the broad ranging fundamental rights that it guarantees all human beings. Since the morals system is based upon the Koran, it is permanent and not subject to change based upon the perceived needs of the day. It is immune to any changes that a government or society may want to introduce. However, while its core principles cannot be tampered with, Islam is flexible enough to adapt and accommodate reasonable changes, when required.

What the Islamic system encompasses

The Islamic system is based upon traditional moral values that are universally accepted. However, it differs from other systems in that it covers all aspects of a man's life — from cradle to grave. It covers the personal, religious, social, legal, economic, political, individual, and collective aspects of his life. In the Islamic system, superiority is not based upon a person's wealth, power, nationality, status in society, physical attributes, etc. Instead, it is based upon righteousness — piety and good conduct.

How system is to be implemented

Islam aims to provide a practical and realistic moral system that can be implemented in the daily life of a human being throughout his life. It aims to promote virtues such as honesty, responsibility, fairness, justice, mercy, generosity, kindness, hard work, integrity, patience, steadfastness, modesty, control of passions, charity, and so on. It seeks to get rid of dishonesty, tyranny, injustice, irresponsibility, hatred, treachery, backbiting, selfishness as well as other vices. It seeks the promotion of a system that encourages good behavior and penalizes wrong deeds.

The Islamic moral standards and ethical codes are required to be implemented with sincerity and at all times. They cannot be altered, or suspended, to suit any personal or temporary expediency.

PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERISTICS

Spiritual

The objective of any act of worship in Islam, ritual or non-ritual, is to become conscious of God. A Muslim needs to have a mindset that always makes him aware that he is in the presence of God. Islam views God-consciousness as the state that will lead God to reward, in this world as well as in the hereafter, the person who exhibits that characteristic.

Since Islam covers all aspects of a person's life, God-consciousness is not limited to the ritual acts of worship. Instead, it extends to all spheres of life. Therefore, any act which is performed with the objective of pleasing God, if it does not conflict with His commandments, is considered to be an act of worship. The act can be as simple as holding the door open for someone or simply saying

thank you, provided it is performed with the intention of pleasing God who likes man to perform good and virtuous acts. Islam encourages its followers to remember God, and thank Him, at every opportunity, such as:

- Before starting to eat and after finishing eating
- When meeting someone
- When noticing a phenomenon such as sunrise or sunset
- When entering a mosque
- Before starting to drive a car

Islam seeks to strive for balance in man's life. It wants man to be fearful of God and also believe in His mercy. Such an attitude is based on the logic that if there is no fear, then evil will not be prevented and there will be too much sin. Fear is created by making man realize the horrible punishment of hell. On the other hand, if there is no forgiveness, then a sinner will despair if he realizes his mistakes. Therefore, God lays out the hope of forgiveness as stated in the Koran, "Despair not of the mercy of Allah: Verily, Allah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (39:53)."

Personal

The following sections describe some of the personal qualities that Muslims are expected to have or, when they are lacking, to strive for.

Self respect

A Muslim does not believe that he has to be subservient to anyone except God. Such belief ensures in him a strong sense of self-respect and lack of fear of human beings. His honor and dignity are shaped by his view of where he stands in God's eyes, rather than what a fellow human thinks of him. Consequently, he will not do anything in life that will lower his own self-respect or cause him to fall from God's grace.

Purity and chastity

Muslim men and women are required to be chaste, modest, and self-respecting. Such characteristics apply to their behavior, dress, speech and appearance. Muslims are expected to abhor anything impure or degrading and to:

- Stay away from drunkenness, adultery, homosexuality, and lack of chastity

- Keep away from lewdness — both in public and in private
- Avoid displaying their bodies
- Avoid overt sexual behavior
- Stress the dignity and honor of women
- Avoid free and casual social mixing of the sexes
- Show reserve and modesty in the company of the opposite sex
- Practice chastity before and after marriage

Cleanliness

There is significant emphasis on cleanliness in Islam — physical and spiritual. According to the Koran, “Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean (2:222).” On the physical side, Muslims are required to keep their body, clothes, home, and community in a clean condition. According to the Hadith, “Cleanliness is half of the faith.” A constant state of purity is encouraged. A ritual prayer cannot be performed unless the body is clean. To prepare for each of the five daily ritual prayers, a Muslim is required to wash his face, hands, arms, and feet.

Social

Social responsibility

Two aspects of the teachings of Islam refer to social responsibility:

- The rights of God: this includes God’s claims on man as well as his duties and obligations to God
- The rights of men: this includes rights on each other as well as corresponding obligations and social responsibilities

Islam teaches social responsibility that is based on kindness and consideration for others. Such responsibility covers a wide circle and encompasses:

- Family members
- Relatives
- Neighbors
- Friends and acquaintances
- Needy people such as orphans and widows
- The community
- The environment, animals, etc.

If a person infringes on the rights of someone else, and makes no amends in this life, then the wrong-doer will have to repay the wronged person on the Day

of Judgment. On that day, good deeds from the wrong-doer will be given to the wronged person or the bad deeds from the wronged person will be transferred to the wrong-doer.

Charity

Islam stresses the giving of charity to those in society who are needy and disadvantaged. It expects Muslims to pay zakat, which is mandatory for those who meet the eligibility requirements, as well as sadaqa, which is optional. It encourages helping the less fortunate as much as possible. Charity, as viewed by Islam, means more than just making a donation in cash or in kind. It considers acts that do good for others, such as removing a road hazard, as being equivalent to charity.

Brotherliness

Islam inculcates a feeling of brotherhood among Muslims by making them consider themselves as part of a united Muslim brotherhood or Ummah. A Muslim is expected to wish and desire the same for other Muslims as he would for himself. He is expected to share their joy as well as grief.

A helping nature

A Muslim is expected to be helpful to all human beings around him without any consideration for their religion, culture, ethnicity, social standing or other factors.

Relationship between old and young

Islam enjoins its followers to be affectionate to those who are younger. On the other hand, those who are younger are expected to be respectful to those who are older. According to the Hadith, "Whoever does not be merciful to his younger or whoever does not respect his elder, he is not among us."

Family

Importance of family

The family is the most important social unit of every society. A weak family system is the root cause of many ills that are plaguing modern society. Islam

clearly recognized that, centuries ago, and defined the rights of family members with the aim of making it society's foundation. It promotes behavior that is based on love, mutual respect, unselfish behavior, consideration, and generosity. A Muslim is expected to recognize and respect the importance and role of the family in creating and maintaining an Islamic environment.

Relationship between parents and children

Islam views the relationship between parents and children as being very important. Therefore, it has clearly specified the responsibilities and duties of both parents and children. Parents are required to provide an upbringing that gives their children a solid foundation in the Islamic way of life. They have to teach them Islamic characteristics, values, morals, behavior, and attitude.

Islam also emphasizes that children should respect and obey their parents. Muslims are enjoined to be kind to their parents and to honor them. Islam teaches that children should take care of their parents when they are old. Taking care of elderly parents is considered morally and spiritually uplifting by Muslims.

Relationship with other relatives

Islam enjoins Muslims to discharge the due rights of their relatives. They are expected to take care of, or help, needy and old relatives and be kind to them. They are also expected to treat their grandparents just like their own parents.

Intellectual

Knowledge

Knowledge is the quality that placed man above the angels and, therefore, its enhancement is encouraged by Islam. The first verse of the Koran revealed to Muhammad^P was, "Read in the name of your Lord Who created (96-1)," which implies reading, learning, researching, and observing. Islam urges its followers to read, write, and seek knowledge from wherever they can get it. A Muslim is expected to seek religious knowledge, which will guide him in performing deeds that will help on the Day of Judgment, as well as secular knowledge which will help him in this world.

Throughout the Koran, man is encouraged to observe and appreciate God's creations — sun, moon, night, day, etc. He is encouraged to use his reasoning and

research to arrive at conclusions. In the Koran, God enjoins Muslims to pray to Him for knowledge, "O my Lord! increase me in knowledge (20:114)." The following Hadith also stress knowledge, in sayings that include:

- Acquisition of knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim man and woman
- Seek knowledge even if it means going to China
- Knowledge or wisdom is the lost wealth of the believers (so whenever you find it, take it)

No limits are specified

Contrary to some misconceptions, Islam encourages education in science and technology. Muslims of the Golden Age excelled in many fields including medicine, chemistry, physics, astronomy, and mathematics. The Muslims' decline in education and, especially in various scientific fields, can be traced to the decline of the Islamic empires in the last millennium.

There is no limit to the knowledge that a Muslim can gain so long as it conforms to the doctrine of God's oneness. Certain controversial fields such as abortion and human cloning, which are against the basic principles of Islam, are considered taboo areas for Muslims.

Economic

Work

Muslims are expected to earn their living through honest and hard work. Any type of physical or intellectual work is permissible, and honorable, so long as it is lawful and in harmony with Islamic goals and values. Any work connected with prohibited activities such as gambling, prostitution, producing or distributing alcohol are considered illegal. A Muslim is not permitted to live off charity by avoiding working in order to devote his life to worship. Islam recognizes the:

- Right to work
- Right to the product of that work

Property

Islam recognizes the following rights:

- Right to private property

- Right of inheritance

Muslims are allowed to engage in business and trade. Islam permits the ownership of private property so long as it is acquired by honest and legal means. Private property can be used in any way so long as it is lawful and not detrimental to the community or society. It is expected that a Muslim will not use personal property exclusively for personal use and benefit. Where possible, it is recommended that personal property be used for providing benefit to the needy and the community.

Wealth

Islam permits the acquiring of wealth. However, pride in one's wealth, miserliness, and greed are considered sins. According to the Islamic perspective, the more wealth that a person has, greater is his responsibility to use it in the best possible way. A Muslim is viewed as only a temporary custodian of any wealth that he accumulates, which actually belongs to God as per Islamic belief. Islam reminds man that he has to return to God, ultimately, with nothing except his deeds. Therefore, what is important is how he earned his wealth, rather than the amount that he earned. According to Islam, this principle, if followed, will ensure the development of a just society.

Business principles

Islam mandates that businesses be run on the same moral principles as individual lives. In other words, they must be based on high moral principles. Islam prohibits dishonesty, fraud, deceit or misrepresentation in business. It encourages the concept of free enterprise and socially responsible capitalism. However, it also stresses social responsibility and concern for employees.

Islam prohibits the selling of goods and services that are illegal, called "haram" in Arabic. It prohibits gambling, lotteries, and businesses associated with the sale and distribution of alcohol. Any activities that promote, and encourage people to do something that is considered haram are also considered illegal. Among prohibited activities are:

- Hoarding and price gouging by artificially reducing supply, especially of food
- Price manipulation
- Interference in the free market
- Government price control except in exceptional circumstances
- Buying stolen property

- Raising pigs or cultivating plants such as poppy and hashish

Islam permits profits so long as they are halal (legal) and not haram (illegal). Interest is a form of profit and most Islamic scholars consider it to be prohibited. However, some scholars differentiate between interest and usury. According to them, only usury is prohibited.

A Muslim is required to honor his obligations and pay his debts. He is expected to keep his word, and act in accordance with Islamic principles and morals, when dealing with business and economic issues. He cannot separate ethics and religion from his day-to-day life either in the personal or business sphere. Despite such high moral expectations from Muslims, Islam recommends that, wherever possible, agreements and contracts should be documented in writing.

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Sincerity

A Muslim is required to be sincere to God as well as to fellow human beings. Unless a person is sincere towards God, his relationship with Him cannot exist. There is no purpose in pretending to be worshipping God, and going through the motions of worship, unless one is honest and sincere. Sincerity is also required in one's relationship with other human beings. Islam enjoins one to be free of hypocrisy, envy, selfishness and other traits that prevent a person from being straightforward with others.

Equality

Islam considers all humans as being equal. In the eyes of God, everyone is equal — men, women, black, white, royalty, ordinary citizens, Arabs and non-Arabs. The only criterion for differentiation is their righteousness. Each and every human being has direct and equal access to God. Therefore, based on the simple principle that God treats everyone equally, it becomes incumbent upon Muslims to act in the same way towards other human beings.

Individual responsibility

A true Muslim accepts God and his commandments. With that acceptance comes individual responsibility for each and every action that he takes

throughout his life. If a person does not accept individual responsibility, in any sphere of life, he cannot expect to be successful. Islam expects every Muslim to act responsibly because he, and no one else, will be held accountable for his actions in this world. This characteristic, of individual responsibility, is one of the most important that a Muslim is required to have.

Honesty

Muslims are expected to have very high moral standards and be very honest in all their dealings. A Muslim will not:

- Offer or take a bribe
- Cheat or steal
- Break an oath, pledge or a promise
- Break a trust
- Take a false oath
- Give false evidence

Truthfulness

Muhammad^P taught his followers to always be truthful and to avoid hypocrisy. According to him, the big jihad is to speak the truth before the tyrant king. He taught Muslims to speak out if they see freedom, truth, and justice being compromised. He preached that if they see something wrong they must, depending on what they can do as a minimum, act in one of the following ways:

- Rectify the situation through some action, deed or conduct
- Oppose it verbally
- Disapprove silently through an expression
- Disapprove it in the heart

In the view of Islam, there are two categories of hypocrisy:

- Hypocrisy in belief
- Hypocrisy in deeds and actions

The following are some attributes of a hypocrite that Islam considers sinful:

- Lying
- Breaking promises
- Betraying
- Treachery
- False excuses
- Outward behavior that contradicts what is in the heart
- Causing mischief while claiming to establish peace

- Finding fault with God's decree
- Saying prayers hastily or being lazy in worship
- Concern for the outward appearance and neglect of the inner condition

Justice

A Muslim is expected to resist injustice with all available means. By the same token, a Muslim must never be unjust. When retaliating, which is considered justifiable, one cannot exceed limits. In other words, the retaliation must not exceed the injustice that was originally perpetrated.

Courtesy

A Muslim is expected to treat others as he would like to be treated himself. Therefore, he must be courteous and polite to others. Whenever he meets someone, he should greet that person. If he is returning a greeting, he must be equally courteous — if not more so.

Forgiveness

Muslims are taught that God is very forgiving and merciful because He realizes that human beings make mistakes all the time. Therefore, if they repent sincerely, they can expect God to forgive any sin with the exception of the gravest sin — shirk. Hence, Muslims are also encouraged to be forgiving of the wrongs that others commit against them.

Speech

A Muslim is expected to control his tongue and always be careful about what he says. He is not allowed to use foul language and profanity, be bad tempered, or engage in gossip and slander. A Muslim is expected to be polite when speaking, even when aggravated and angry.

Preaching

Muslims are not expected to limit the practice of Islam to their personal lives. They are expected to spread the word of Islam through preaching, which can be accomplished in many ways. It can include explaining Islam to friends and acquaintances, inviting non-Muslims to special religious events, even

accompanying missionary groups. Muslims are encouraged to model good conduct and virtue that will gain the respect and attention of non-Muslims.

Avoiding waste

A good Muslim will not waste his wealth by extravagant spending because Islam recommends moderation. It also encourages giving to charity. However, if a donor donates too much, leaving himself nothing for the necessities of life, it is considered equivalent to the wasting of wealth. A Muslim is expected to strike a balance between too much spending (squandering) and too little spending (greed and miserliness).

Other virtues

There are a number of additional good characteristics and deeds that are expected of Muslims. They include patience, contentment, humility, gratefulness, generosity, mercy, and hospitality. The characteristics that Muslims must avoid include lying, backbiting, slandering, flattery, cheating, deceiving, selfishness, hard heartedness, and revenge. They are also expected to avoid being vain, malicious, and disrespectful.

CHAPTER 16: BAD DEEDS, DAY-TO-DAY LIVING, AND COMMON ISSUES

RECOGNIZING RIGHT AND WRONG

How actions are judged

The fundamental principles governing morals and behavior in Islam are that:

- Actions are judged by reference, in sequence, to the Koran, Sunnah, and Muhammad^P's companions. If no precedent is found in these three sources, then one is free to judge using the logic of benefit (or harm) and by determining whether it is natural (or unnatural)

- Anything beneficial to man's spiritual well-being is permitted
- Anything harmful to man is prohibited including acts that lower a man's dignity, degrade him, damage his body or soul, or harm the society

In Islam, actions are judged based on the following categories:

- Mandatory
- Recommended
- Neutral
- Disapproved
- Forbidden

Violation of the mandatory requirements, such as the five daily obligatory prayers and fasting during Ramadan, are considered to be serious sins. In such cases, according to Islam, violators will be punished by God. They can also be punished by the Islamic state. However, at this time, implementation of Islamic laws and punishments varies from country to country. Typically, local laws and

the strictness in implementing Islamic Law, with its associated punishments, reflect local attitudes and the area's conservative or liberal leanings.

Failure to perform recommended or neutral acts is not penalized. Forbidden acts such as murder, adultery, and drinking alcohol are required to be punished according to Islamic Law. However, if they are not punished, then a violation of Islamic principles takes place by those in authority who choose to ignore such violations.

Recognizing polytheism

Acts that are forbidden according to Islam are specified in the Koran. Additional forbidden acts are listed in the Sunnah. The degree of sin associated with those acts varies considerably, with polytheism being considered the worst. The worship of any creation and ascribing partners to God is unforgivable in Islam. Polytheism can take various forms and includes:

- Shirk by association: that includes association with gods, spirits, saints, humans, etc.
- Shirk by negation: the denial of God — as in atheism
- Shirk by humanization: giving God the attributes of human beings and animals, as is done by Hindus and Buddhists; also refers to those who view Jesus as God incarnate
- Shirk by deification: assigning God's names or attributes to His creations
 - Major shirk: praying to someone other than God; this is the worst type of sin and is unforgivable
 - Minor shirk: performing an act of worship, such as charitable giving or performing a prayer, to show off or gain fame rather than to please God
 - Inconspicuous shirk: being dissatisfied with God's ordained conditions

SINS AND REPENTANCE

A Muslim is required to keep himself free from every kind of evil, wickedness, and sin. He is also expected to share his knowledge with others. Therefore, Muslims are encouraged to preach to others, Muslims and non-Muslims, that they should abstain from all activities that are considered sinful by Islam.

Sins among the worst

Various Islamic scholars have compiled a list of the 70 sins that Islam considers the worst. The following is a partial list of sins extracted from that master list:

- Ascribing partners to God
- Forging statements concerning God or His messenger
- Denying God's decree
- Believing in fortune-tellers and astrologers
- Murder
- Suicide
- Fornication and adultery
- Homosexuality
- Usury
- Drinking alcohol
- Gambling
- Stealing and robbery
- Being a habitual liar
- Eating carrion, blood or pork
- Devouring the wealth of orphans
- Not praying
- Not paying zakat
- Not fasting during Ramadan without a valid reason
- Not performing Hajj, while being able to do so
- Continuously missing Friday prayers without a valid excuse
- Disobeying parents
- Cutting off ties with relatives
- Harming neighbors or Muslims
- Practicing witchcraft and magic
- Giving false testimony
- Consuming wealth acquired unlawfully
- Bribery
- Betrayal of trust and backstabbing
- Not fulfilling one's promises
- Being arrogant, boastful, and vain
- Cursing others
- Arguing or quarreling for show and not seeking the truth
- Being deceitful or deceptive
- Eavesdropping
- Backbiting and spreading harmful stories
- Slandering chaste women
- Being rebellious to one's husband
- Wrongdoing, deception or oppression by a ruler

- Committing injustice
- Committing oppression
- Being overbearing or taking advantage of one's wife and those who are weak
- Levying illegal taxes
- Acquiring knowledge only for worldly gain
- Concealing knowledge
- Reminding people of one's kindness

Additional sins

The following list includes sins that have been prohibited in the Koran and are described as the "deeds of the people of hell":

- Disbelieving in His messengers
- Inconsistency between what is in one's heart and what one shows to people (hypocrisy)
- Despairing of the mercy of Allah
- Fearing a creation instead of the Creator
- Going against the Koran and Sunnah in word or deed
- Obeying a creation in an act of disobedience to the Creator
- To do or aid any kind of dishonest, unethical or immoral act
- Malicious envy
- Treachery
- Miserliness

Repentance and atonement

Muslims view God as very merciful because He has promised to forgive if a sinner turns to Him for repentance. According to Islam, a person's sins are forgiven provided the following conditions are met:

- Sins are acknowledged
- There is sincere regret for the committed sins
- There is sincere resolve that the sins will not be repeated
- If a sin harmed someone, an attempt will be made to rectify the harm that was done

DAY-TO-DAY LIVING

Drinking and eating regulations

The basic principle in Islam is that any food can be eaten unless it has been specifically prohibited. The prohibited items are few and they include the following:

- Alcohol and its by-products
- Pork and its by-products
- Narcotic and addictive drugs
- Meat of dead and carnivorous animals
- Blood
- Birds of prey such as eagles and vultures
- Any animal that is slaughtered without invoking God's name; Muslims can only eat halal (kosher) meat, which is the meat of an animal that has been slaughtered while invoking God's name

Islam teaches that one should be thankful to God for providing food. Wasting food is considered a sin. As part of the Islamic tradition, Muslims remember God before and after eating anything. Before eating, a Muslim says "Bismillah (in the name of Allah)". A typical supplication after a meal is, "All praise is for Allah who gave us this food and drink and who made us Muslims."

Modesty and dress code

The Islamic dress code emphasizes modesty. Men are mandated to cover their bodies from the knees to the navel. Women are required to wear clothes that are not too tight or transparent and to cover all parts of their body except the hands and face.

The primary objective of the dress code is to prevent women from becoming the object of enticement or desire. The dress code inside the home, or in the company of relatives, is more liberal and women can dress more casually and also keep their heads uncovered. A woman can also wear jewelry as well as expensive and fancy clothes. However, they are only to be displayed to the husband or relatives — not other men.

In many Muslim countries, women cover their faces with some sort of a veil. The style of this covering varies from country to country. In Afghanistan, the burqa is of the shroud type, while two different veil styles are used in the Indian subcontinent and the United Arab Emirates. There is disagreement among Islamic scholars in the interpretation of some Koranic verses, particularly

33:59 and 24:31, regarding the subject of covering the face. The liberal interpretation is that they do not require the face to be covered.

Relations between men and women

Islam prohibits any sex except between married couples. With the objective of preventing pre-marital and extra-marital sex, and limiting the opportunities for temptation, it tries to limit the intimate mixing of males and females. As part of its effort, Islam provides specific as well as general rules and guidelines. For example, it prohibits free and casual social gatherings between men and women. It also restricts private meetings that allow a man and a woman to be alone together unless they are married or related.

There is, however, no restriction on women working in an environment that includes males. It may be pertinent to point out that before he became a prophet, Muhammad^P was employed by a woman who, later on, became his wife. After Muhammad^P was initiated into prophethood, no restrictions were imposed on women being able to work.

Halal and haram

The halal (legal) and haram (illegal) restrictions are based upon specific God's commandments which cannot be legislated upon by any human being. In Islam, some clear guidelines have been issued regarding what is halal and what is haram. The basic principle is that if something has not been prohibited, it is permissible. It should be pointed out that very few items have been prohibited. A secondary principle is that if something is illegal or haram, anything that might lead to it is also considered haram and prohibited. For example, drinking alcohol is prohibited, and Islam also prohibits all activities that are associated with the production, storage, and transportation of alcohol.

Another principle is that the intention of the doer, which may be very noble, cannot override the illegality of a prohibited action and, hence, such an action remains illegal. For example, charitable giving using illegally gained wealth does not negate the sins accumulated due to the illegal accumulation of that wealth. This is in contrast with the good intentions of a person that converts a permissible action into an act of worship.

According to the doctrine of necessity, a prohibited item can be used if there is dire necessity — such as the need to save one from death. For example, a man dying of hunger in the desert can eat a pig if his life depends upon it. In the

case of a medicine that contains alcohol, it may be taken provided there is no available medicine that can be used as a substitute.

Doing more than the basic requirements

A good Muslim is expected to go beyond the basic Islamic requirements and do whatever he can to please God. The following are some of the ways in which additional acts can be undertaken by Muslims for earning more rewards:

- Performing more than the mandatory five daily prayers
- Giving charity in excess of the mandatory zakat
- Fasting additional days over the course of the year
- Performing as many good deeds as possible
- Performing social work
- Performing Daawah — inviting others to Islam

MODERN-DAY ISSUES

Abortion

According to Islam, the killing of unborn as well as born children is prohibited. The destruction of any life or an embryo at any stage of its development is not allowed. Thus, Islam does not permit abortion, which it equates to murder. An exception is permitted in the case where a mother's life is in danger due to continuation of the pregnancy. Also prohibited are abortion pills like the RU-486.

Artificial insemination

The artificial insemination procedure is considered acceptable in Islam only if the sperm donor is the recipient's husband. However, if the donor is anyone else, it is strictly prohibited. Artificial insemination is permitted while a valid marriage contract exists between the donor and the recipient. It is prohibited if a divorce has taken place or the donor is deceased. Artificial insemination by anyone other than the husband is considered to be a major sin equivalent to adultery.

Surrogate motherhood

Surrogate motherhood can be described as “renting the womb.” In this procedure, a surrogate mother bears a child for the benefit of another woman who is unable to do so. Typically, though not always, it is done in return for financial and material benefits. Since such a pregnancy takes place outside a marriage contract, it is considered illegitimate, degrading, and unacceptable. Surrogate motherhood is viewed as a serious sin since it takes place in a scenario developed outside marriage, which is equivalent to adultery.

Suicide

Suicide is viewed as a very serious sin by Islam because it considers all life to be sacred. According to Islam, no one has the right to take any life and, therefore, suicide is viewed as a crime equivalent to murder. According to a Hadith, Muhammad^P said, “He who throws himself down from a rock and commits suicide will be throwing himself into the fire of hell; he who drinks poison and kills himself will have the poison in his hand, drinking it forever in the fire of hell and he who kills himself with a weapon will have that weapon in his hand, stabbing himself forever in the fire of hell.”

Muslims are taught to be resolute and be prepared for the hardships and tests that God sends their way from time to time. Instead of running away from their problems, at such times, they are encouraged to pray to God to provide them strength, and His help, in dealing with their issues.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia is the practice of ending a life when it becomes unbearable due to some terminal illness such as cancer. In Islam, patience and endurance are qualities that are highly regarded and rewarded. Islam prohibits the practice of euthanasia as it maintains that no man has the right to take his own or anyone else’s life. Euthanasia is considered equivalent to suicide; it is prohibited and is considered an unforgivable sin. The person ending his life, as well as those aiding and enabling euthanasia, are considered sinners.

Organ donation

According to many Muslim scholars, donating an organ is permissible provided it is done with the intention of saving someone’s life. Even though

violating a human body, living or dead, is impermissible, organ donation is considered permissible due to two rules:

- Necessity overrules prohibition
- A choice must be made of the lesser of two evils, if they are unavoidable (saving life versus preserving the body)

The organ donation procedure should not pose any risk to the life of the donor. The donor must also donate his organ willingly and without being placed under any pressure. The practice of selling organs, in order to meet financial needs, is considered sinful and prohibited.

Homosexuality

Islam prohibits any sex outside of marriage including adultery, fornication, and homosexuality. It is very clear and unambiguous in characterizing homosexuality as a devious and serious sin. Homosexuality is considered to be a perverted corrupt act and a moral disorder. It is viewed as being a moral disease, unhealthy and unnatural. References against homosexuality, which will be severely punished by God, are to be found in the Koran as well as the Sunnah.

Cloning

Cloning is a relatively new issue about which Muslim scholars have not yet issued definitive rulings. Two factors that will affect the way Islamic scholars view cloning are the process by which it is achieved and the objective for which it is being carried out. Based on the few known facts, some scholars currently view cloning as impermissible. It is expected that there will be revisions to any known opinions as more facts and intentions become known.

Stem cell research

The Islamic view on stem cells conforms with the Christian Church view that stem cell research in itself is not wrong. However, creating and/or destroying human life in order to mine stem cells is wrong. An American panel of experts, convened by the Islamic Institute, has supported stem cell research on spare embryos from in-vitro fertilization. According to them, research on stem cells taken from adults should be encouraged and no in-vitro may be performed for the purpose of supplying stem cells for research.

According to the panel, whenever in-vitro is needed to deal with the problem of infertility, the sperm and ovum must be taken from a lawfully wed

couple. It also concluded that, “as fertility clinics are forced to fertilize more than one ovum so as to increase the chances of success, unused (embryos) may be used for research instead of destroying them, provided that it is done in the first few days after fertilization and provided further that the unused embryos are donated without any financial return.” The Institute also noted, when issuing its ruling, that its opinion is subject to further enhancements based on presently unknown scientific developments.

CHAPTER 17: RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

RIGHTS OF GOD AND THE PROPHET

Importance of respecting rights

A casual study of the world today will reveal that there is conflict at every level between individuals, groups, societies, and nations. A closer look will reveal that the basis for the overwhelming majority of conflicts is the denial of various rights: political, social, individual, legal, economic, and religious. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that for peace and harmonious living, and for societies to prosper, there must be universal fairness and respect for the rights of others.

A basic principle that Islam teaches Muslims is to respect and honor the rights of others and to discharge their corresponding obligations. For those who respect the rights of others, God has promised a reward in the hereafter. Islam specifies various rights that every man is entitled to, depending on his position. Those rights, which cannot be abrogated by anyone, are identified in the following sections.

God's rights

According to Islam, the most important rights are the rights of God who created everything and also provided everything that every creation has. The only demands that God makes on man are to:

- Believe in the oneness of God.
- Worship Him and no one else.

- Surrender to Him completely.
- Obey His commandments.
- Thank Him for His blessings and show gratitude.

The Prophet's rights

Muslims consider Muhammad^P to be a great blessing whom God sent to guide man onto the right path that leads to heaven. They are expected to honor the following rights of Prophet Muhammad^P:

- Obey his instructions and commands.
- Emulate the way he led his life.
- Love him and send their blessings.

OTHERS' RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

Children's rights and parents' obligations

The family is considered to be a very important element in the overall structure of society. For each of its members, Islam has defined specific rights and obligations. The obligations of parents, which correspond to the rights of children, include:

- Providing a religious upbringing
- Teaching high values
- Providing good education, especially Islamic
- Showing examples of Islamic behavior, manners, and morals
- Being kind to daughters
- Providing all children the same treatment
- Saying the call to prayer in the child's ear when it is born
- Celebrating aqeeqah when a child is born; it involves shaving off the hair on the new-born baby's head and sacrificing a goat; this is a recommended — not a mandatory — practice
- Giving the child a good name
- Marrying the child well, if they can afford it financially

Parents' rights and children's obligations

In Islam, the rights of children are balanced by their obligations to their parents. Their obligations include:

- Honor
- Respect
- Obedience

- Kindness
- Humility
- Service
- Care during old age
- Prayers for their parents' forgiveness and salvation after they die

According to Islam, God is pleased if one works towards the pleasure of one's parents. However, it is a major sin if parents are disobeyed, harmed, abused or insulted. In comparison to the father, the rights of the mother are considered to be greater. Even non-Muslim parents must be shown kindness, well treated, and obeyed unless they ask for something to be done that violates God's commands.

Rights of other relatives

Islam also emphasizes the rights of other relatives, which include:

- Good treatment
- Love
- Sympathy
- Kindness
- Consideration

According to a Hadith, Muhammad^P said that, "Whoever violates the rights of relatives shall not go to Paradise." He enjoined Muslims to continue to fulfill their obligations in spite of how their relatives may be behaving towards them.

Rights of husband and wife

Both the husband and wife have rights and corresponding duties that they are expected to discharge during their married life.

The husband's duties include:

- As head of the family, being responsible for all its financial needs
- Protecting his wife
- Considering his wife a blessing
- Providing love and esteem to his wife
- Showing kindness to his wife
- Providing for his wife's comfort
- Being patient when his wife makes a mistake

The wife's duties include:

- Regarding her husband above all others
- Being faithful
- Being obedient and loyal

- Being devoted
- Trying her best to please her husband

Neighbors' rights

Muslim as well as non-Muslim neighbors have rights on Muslims according to the teachings of Islam. According to Muhammad^P's sayings, "He is not a believer who eats his fill when his neighbor beside him is hungry." Some of the obligations to neighbors that have been specified include:

- Visiting them when they are sick
- Offering condolences and congratulations, depending on the occasion
- Not looking at their women with desire
- Ignoring their mistakes
- Covering their faults
- Helping them financially
- Providing guidance and imparting knowledge
- Not treating them badly
- Attending their funerals and participating in burial arrangements

Rights of the disadvantaged

Islam has also specified the rights of those in society who are needy and disadvantaged. They include widows, orphans, the weak, poor, destitute, and the downtrodden. Taking care of their needs is considered to be highly virtuous. Mistreating an orphan is viewed very negatively. Helping a widow or someone needy or distressed has been equated to doing jihad as per the Hadith. Muslims are also enjoined to visit needy people who are sick, arrange for their treatment, and feed those who are hungry.

Rights of other Muslims

Islam very strongly emphasizes the concept of brotherhood among Muslims. It specifies the rights that Muslims have over each other as well as their mutual responsibilities. Due to the high standards that have been laid down, a Muslim cannot expect the following from another Muslim:

- Backbiting
- Hate
- Breaking of ties
- Lack of mercy and compassion
- Blood feuding

A Muslim can expect the following from a fellow Muslim:

- Personal aid
- Mutual love
- Help during distress
- Defense of honor and dignity
- Forgiveness of mistakes and failings as well as help in overcome shortcomings
- Prayers for the brother (just as one would for himself)
- Loyalty and sincerity
- Greetings when they meet
- Acceptance if an invitation is given
- Mutual advice
- Visiting when he is sick
- Accompanying his dead body to the cemetery

Rights of others

Islam also specifies the rights of those who do not fall in the various categories listed in the previous sections. This includes all mankind, irrespective of which community one may belong to, and all His creations, including animals, and encompasses such rights as sympathy, kindness, and compassion. According to a Hadith, “There is a reward for kindness to every living animal or human.”

ISLAMIC VIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Objective

Islam views all humans equally so far as the application of God’s laws and justice are concerned. It does not favor a nation, tribe, country, race, ethnic group or gender. It emphasizes dignity and justice for all human beings. It recognizes the fact that if justice and human rights are denied in a society, it will live in conflict with God’s commandments. Therefore, in such an environment, where basic fundamental rights guaranteed by God are abused or denied, Islam cannot flourish.

Human rights are sanctioned by God

Islam specifies fundamental rights that must be respected, under all circumstances, in every country. Those rights have been granted by God and cannot be abrogated or changed by any human being. A person’s country of

residence, or its Islamic status, has no bearing on the human rights that must be honored based on God's laws which have universal applicability. Some fundamental rights recognized by Islam are:

- The right to life and property
- The right to freedom
- The right to avoid human blood without strong justification
- The right to avoid torture or oppression
- Protection of honor
- Inviolable honor; insulting or making fun of others is not allowed
- The right to food and treatment when hungry or sick, even if the person belongs to the enemy
- The right to equality; racism is not allowed
- The right to justice, even for those who are hated
- The right to a basic standard of life
- The right to one's own religion, without insult or abuse: "Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance (6:108)."

BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS SANCTIONED BY ISLAM

Right to life

The right to live is man's first basic right. According to Islam, the life of every person is to be considered sacred. It prohibits the taking of any life except in the pursuit of justice. According to the Koran, the killing of an innocent person is equivalent to the killing of all mankind (and saving a life is considered equivalent to saving the life of all mankind). There is no exception for non-Muslims. According to Muhammad^P, "One who kills a man under covenant (non-Muslim citizen of an Islamic state), will not even smell the fragrance of paradise."

Right to sanctity of property

Islam recognizes the right to private property and seeks to protect it. On the moral level, it makes stealing un-Islamic while also imposing deterrent punishments for the crime. Irrespective of whether a person is a Muslim or a non-Muslim, the life and property of all citizens in an Islamic state are considered sacred.

Right to protection of honor

According to Islam, no person's honor should be abused. Therefore, it recognizes the right to protection from slander and ridicule. It seeks the avoidance of sarcasm, insults, name calling, backbiting, and defamation. Those who engage in spreading malicious stories or casting aspersions upon a woman's honor and chastity, which must be respected under all circumstances, are warned of punishment in both worlds.

Right to privacy and security

The sanctity and security of private life is recognized in Islam, which specifies rules to protect life in the home from interference. The Koran has specified that one should not enter any house unless the occupant's consent has been obtained. It also mandates that one should not spy on others.

Right of freedom

According to Islam, no one besides God can limit human freedom which includes freedom of religion and worship for both believers and non-believers. Since it is a God given right, no ruler or legislative body has the right to take away the right to freedom.

Islam does not allow anyone to be imprisoned unless guilt has been proved. An accused, who has the right to defend himself, is guaranteed a fair and impartial trial. Since each individual person is responsible for his own actions, a person cannot be arrested for a crime that someone else may have committed.

The right to protest against tyranny

A citizen of an Islamic state has the right to protest against tyranny by the ruler or government. This right cannot be taken away through legislation or by an executive order. The first caliph, Abu Bakr, is reported to have said, "Cooperate with me when I am right but correct me when I commit error; obey me so long as I follow the commandments of Allah and His prophet; but turn away from me when I deviate."

The right to freedom of thought and expression

Islam recognizes the right of freedom of thought and expression. However, there is one condition that it imposes on this particular right. It cannot be used to propagate any vice or evil that is considered harmful for society.

Islam is very clear about freedom of conscience and conviction. If a Muslim disagrees with a law being implemented, he has the right to protest. If he believes the law is un-Islamic, he can even refuse to comply with it. Islam also allows a person the freedom to choose without being subject to coercion. This right is guaranteed in the Koran, which states that there can be no compulsion in religion.

The right to justice

According to the Koran, “The most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you.” Righteousness consists of both beliefs and actions that are just. The Koran makes clear that righteousness determines merit — not factors such as social status, wealth, power or gender. It highlights both the right to seek justice and the duty to do justice. According to Islam, justice cannot be denied even to those who are hated. Committing injustice is considered to be one of the worst sins in Islam.

The right to life's basic necessities

Islam recognizes that there are some people in every society who are disadvantaged, destitute, and needy. Therefore, it has provided such people the right to be helped by those who are more fortunate. Hence, it encourages the giving of charity and also made mandatory zakat a pillar of Islam.

The right to equality

According to Islamic law, all citizens are equal in every respect and no one is above the law. There should be absolutely no difference in the way an ordinary Muslim citizen, a non-Muslim citizen, or the ruler should be treated. A society that fails to provide equal justice flouts the basic Islamic concept of equality.

Political rights

Every citizen is granted political rights which includes the right to participate in the affairs of the state. Citizens need to be consulted regarding

how the government is run. Even Muhammad^P was commanded to seek counsel from his companions, “Consult with them upon the conduct of affairs (3:159).” Members of the legislature and Shoora must be elected by the citizens. They can stay in power only so long as they retain the confidence of the electorate.

Minority rights

Islam recognizes the rights of non-Muslims living in an Islamic state and grants them protection. Their life, property, and honor are to be respected and protected just like Muslims. Additionally, non-Muslims are provided complete freedom of conscience and belief. In civil and criminal matters, Islam does not distinguish between a Muslim and a non-Muslim.

The right to respect

According to Islam, man is considered to be God’s vicegerent on earth. He has been provided with intelligence and the ability to exercise freedom of choice. Also, among all the creatures that God created, man was given the highest status and, with it, the right to be respected.

The right to work

The right to work is a fundamental right that is guaranteed by Islam. According to the Koran, every person has the right to work and enjoy the fruits of his labor. Islam encourages one to work and earn a living to take care of one’s own self, wife, children, parents, siblings, and the disadvantaged. Depending on others, for those who are able to work, is highly discouraged.

CHAPTER 18: WOMEN

BACKGROUND

Status of Arab women before Islam

The condition of women in Arabia was wretched before Muhammad^P started preaching Islam in 610. The following are some aspects of their condition at that time:

- Women had practically no independent rights
- The birth of a girl was considered a misfortune and a threat to family honor
- New-born girls were buried alive
- A woman could be traded like a commodity

The Role played by women in Islam

Muhammad^P's first convert was his first wife, Khadijah. She provided the initial moral support, when he received his first revelation, and continued providing it during the difficult period of persecution from the people of Mecca until she died in 619. Ayesha, also Muhammad^P's wife, became a scholar and is one of the best Hadith sources. Over 2,200 Hadith have been attributed to her. Only two other sources have been credited with more Hadith than Ayesha.

Ayesha was considered to be a fountain of knowledge and an expert in religious affairs and politics. She was highly respected and Muslims eagerly sought her advice. Ayesha took an active part in politics, including pressuring Caliph Ali to take action against the murderers of his predecessor, Caliph

Uthman. Muhammad's daughter Fatima played an important role in propagating Islam. Rabia Basri has been known as a great scholar in Islamic history.

There have been female Muslim rulers, of which these are the most well-known:

- Shajar al-Durr, an Egyptian Mamluk who was wife of Salahuddin's nephew, repelled the crusader attack led by Louis IX of France.
- Abish, the last ruler of the "House of Salghar," ruled the province of Fars during the Mongol period.
- Razia Sultana of India, a brave warrior and capable administrator, ruled India for almost four years.

Many other Muslim women have left their mark on art and literature, as well as politics, including Noorjehan and Zaib-un-Nisa.

Recent deterioration in treatment

With the decline of the Islamic civilization, the status and condition of women also started to deteriorate. In the past two centuries, the condition of Muslims deteriorated considerably and hit a new low in comparison to the rest of the world. In tandem with that decline, the status of women suffered considerably and so did the implementation of their rights. They also became victims of the "culturalization of Islam." This resulted in women being poorly treated according to local and tribal traditions (rather than according to the real tenets of Islam), many of which were discriminatory against women. In many societies, which were predominantly Muslim, local and tribal traditions came to be incorrectly associated with Islam even though, in many cases, such traditions were either un-Islamic or not required by Islam. Examples of such customs include:

- Female circumcision — a tribal custom in Africa (practiced by Muslims and non-Muslims including Christians)
- Reverse dowry — whereby men are paid cash in order to marry girls, who are considered a burden due to their gender
- Lighting of lamps at shrines and graves — a pagan and Hindu tradition in India
- Burqa — in Afghanistan and parts of the Indian subcontinent

Since there is so much fiction intertwined with facts, widespread misperception exists about the status and rights that Islam has granted women — not just in the West but even in Islamic countries.

WHAT ISLAM PROVIDED WOMEN

Removed stigma and false notions

Islam clarified some wrong notions about women dating back to the time that Adam disobeyed God. According to Islam, Adam was tempted by Satan — not by Eve. Since both Adam and Eve disobeyed God, women cannot be considered the source of evil. Islam holds women in high respect and this is reflected in the high status and rights that have been bestowed upon them. Islam accords great respect for women such as Eve, Mary (the mother of Jesus) and Hagar (the wife of Abraham). The importance of Mary (Maryam) can be gauged from the fact that an important chapter of the Koran is named after her.

Rights women had been denied

The introduction of Islam in Arabia marked a sudden change in the status of women. They were elevated to a prestigious position where they were considered to be spiritually and intellectually equal to men. They were provided the same rights as were enjoyed by men. They were also provided with the status of individuals in their own right. Due to Islam, women also obtained the right to:

- Own and dispose of property and earnings
- Choose a husband
- Be supported by the husband — even if the wife is wealthy
- Be supported by a male relative, if required
- Inherit property from parents, husband, son, brother or even grandson
- Keep their wealth after marriage
- Spend their own money as desired
- Retain their maiden names
- Divorce
- Remarry
- Participate in political affairs and vote
- Receive an education
- Be protected against defamation

Along with their rights, women also have the same obligations as men. They have to obey the same commandments regarding prayers, fasting, Hajj, etc., with some minor exceptions. However, in return for their additional responsibilities, men have been given the leadership at home while women have been designated as the guardians of the household. Though men are assigned the

leadership at home, they have also been instructed to treat women with kindness and love — and not to dominate them.

Recognition as an independent identity

A woman in Islam is considered to be an independent identity. She will be judged by God, just like any man, based on her individual performance in this world. Her beliefs, actions and conduct will determine her ultimate success or failure on the Day of Judgment. According to Islam, righteousness will determine every human's fate — not the gender.

Recognition as a legal entity

In Islam, a woman is recognized as an independent legal entity. She can:

- Own individual property
- Inherit property
- Dispose of property
- Run a business

Equality with men

In Islam, men and women are considered to be equal. They have the same rights and obligations such as prayers, fasting, zakat, and Hajj. Both men and women are expected to perform good deeds and avoid evil. They are also judged by the same moral yardstick. The same rewards and punishments apply to men and women. On the Day of Judgment, both will be judged only according to their deeds and righteousness.

While providing equality, Islam also divides responsibilities between men and women based on their differences. For example, women are responsible for developing a God-conscious and righteous atmosphere at home, while men are responsible for the financial needs of the family. A woman can work outside the home and contribute to the family income. However, the ultimate financial responsibility has been assigned to the husband.

Consideration and provision for differences

While Islam considers men and women equal, and they will be judged as such, it does make provision for their differences. The following are some examples:

- A man inherits double that which a woman inherits; however, he is financially responsible for his family and any female relatives who might fall on bad times

- Both men and women are required to dress modestly; however, women have a more restrictive dress code due to their greater ability to attract; Islam tries to avoid creating the conditions that can lead to any impermissible act

- Women get exclusive custody over children until they reach puberty

- Women are exempted from daily prayers and fasting during menstrual periods, pregnancy, and when nursing an infant; however, they can make up the missed fasts at a later time

- Friday congregational prayer is mandatory for men but not for women

The position of women, in terms of status, can be gauged from two Hadith. A man asked Muhammad^P, “Who is most entitled to be treated with the best companionship with me?” He responded, “Your mother.” The man again asked, “Who is next?” Muhammad^P repeated his answer, “Your mother.” When the man repeated his question, the Prophet also repeated his response, “Your mother.” When the man again repeated the question, “Who is next?,” Muhammad^P answered, “Your father.” On another occasion, Muhammad^P is reported to have told a man, “Stay with her (mother), for paradise is at her feet.”

Same relationship with God

The Koran, on numerous occasions, speaks of both men and women in the same tone, such as “for believing men and women who give charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity.” In Islam, there is no difference between men and women in their relationship with God. Both men and women are instructed to follow the same commands. They are promised the same rewards and punishments which, for both, will be based on the same criteria.

WOMEN AND FAMILY LIFE

Status of marriage in Islam

In Islam, marriage is very strongly encouraged. Besides its primary objective, of establishing a family, it also helps keep away evils such as promiscuity and fornication. Muhammad^P is reported to have said, “Marriage is my Sunnah” and “Whosoever keeps away from it is not from me.”

Divorce

An Islamic marriage is not a sacrament. Rather, it is a contract, recommended to be in writing, which can be terminated by either party. Despite that permission, divorces are not common among Muslims, though they have started to increase in recent years. According to the Hadith, while divorce is allowed by Islam, it is also viewed as most hated among the permissions that have been given to Muslims by God. It is also believed to be Satan's most loved action.

Prerequisites for marriage

For marriage to take place, the consent of both the man and woman are required. Marriage is deemed to be mandatory for a healthy man who has:

- The means to pay mahr or dowry
- The ability to support a wife and children

Mahr is the dowry, or gift, that a man is required to give his wife when the marriage takes place. The amount is mutually agreed upon before marriage and, if the wife wants to, it can be forgiven. The amount, which is influenced by the social status and earning ability of the bridegroom, as well as local traditions, can vary from under a hundred dollar to tens of thousands of dollars.

According to some schools of thought, marriage becomes mandatory if a man thinks that he cannot avoid fornication. It also becomes compulsory for a woman who fears that she may fall into sin unless she marries.

Roles and responsibilities of husband and wife

The rules and regulations governing family life for Muslims are defined by the Sharia. The man is responsible, as the leader of the family, to provide for its financial needs while the woman is responsible for household affairs and the children's upbringing. A woman is expected to obey her husband unless she is asked to disobey God. In such a case, she can refuse to obey.

A man, for his part, must be considerate and caring. He must respect and honor his wife. According to the Hadith, "The best among you is he who is the most kind to his wife and I am the kindest amongst you to my wives." Since Muhammad^P is the example and role model who must be followed by Muslims, this Hadith indicates the importance of being kind to one's wife.

Both husband and wife are required to be diligent about their responsibilities to each other and be faithful to each other. However, despite their differ-

ent roles and responsibilities, men and women are considered equal in the eyes of God.

Marriage ceremony

There are no elaborate rituals associated with a Muslim marriage ceremony. Anyone can perform the ceremony, though it is usually done by a religious scholar or an imam in the presence of two witnesses. The ceremony involves confirming the consent of the bride and groom, stating the simple marriage vows, short sermon and recitation of a few verses of the Koran by the imam and, finally, prayers for a happy and successful marriage.

Marriage with non-Muslims

A Muslim man is allowed to marry a Christian or Jewish woman. However, he cannot marry an unbelieving woman. A Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim man. There are a few reasons for this prohibition, given the possibility that such differences can cause conflict after marriage:

- Islam guarantees freedom of religion to the non-Muslim wife of a Muslim man. However, other religions do not provide the same freedom. Hence, a Muslim woman runs the risk of being denied permission to practice her religion if she marries a non-Muslim.
- Historically, children have followed their father's religion. Therefore, a Muslim woman marrying into a non-Muslim family will see her children being raised as non-Muslims.
- A Christian or Jewish woman marrying a Muslim man comes into a home where her prophet is revered and respected. However, such a situation does not exist when a Muslim woman marries a non-Muslim man who does not believe in, or respect, Muhammad^P and Islam.

MUSLIM WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE MODERN WORLD

Women's rights are paid lip service

There is a big disconnect between how Islam perceives women and how they are actually treated in Muslim societies. On paper, Muslim women have many rights that they have been granted by Islam. However, in practical terms, due to the way Muslim societies are organized and run, the overwhelming majority of women hardly ever get the opportunity of exercising many of their

rights. For example, in matters of inheritance, they often get short changed. Neither do they have much freedom to choose their spouses. Also, education is not deemed necessary for them in many societies.

In many communities where women are shabbily treated and their rights are denied, ignorance and local customs can be blamed. In many countries, such as Afghanistan, people sincerely but incorrectly believe that their customs, especially pertaining to women, are sanctioned by Islam. Also, in many male-dominated Muslim societies, even though there is awareness of women's rights under Islam and they are superficially acknowledged, such rights are not implemented for a variety of reasons.

Ignorance and lack of education

Lack of education is a problem that is pervasive among Muslims — both men and women. However, the problem is far more widespread and serious for women than it is for men. For the overwhelming majority in most Islamic societies, even knowledge of Islam is limited to the basic acts of worship. Lack of education has bred ignorance, which has been inherited for many generations now. The consequences of a lack of education are apparent everywhere, especially in the way women are treated in the name of Islam. A prime example is Afghanistan, where the Taliban prohibited girls from attending schools. The Taliban were supposed to be well-versed in Islam, and yet they implemented a policy that is very much at odds with the teachings of Islam. The first word in the Koran, whose instructions Muslims are expected to implement, is “Read!” There is no sentence or verse in the Koran which indicates that reading, and what it implies, should be restricted to men.

Mistreatment

Even a cursory study of the Koran, or the Hadith, will reveal that women are given a very high status in Islam. Again and again, men are exhorted to treat their women well and to be kind to them. However, despite such instructions, women in many Islamic societies are oppressed or mistreated even by those who are perceived to be “religious.” Partial implementation of Islam, which suits such people, clouds but does not change the fact that Islam has provided wide-ranging rights to women and that it does not, in any way, condone their mistreatment.

Forced arranged marriages

Islam requires that the consent of the woman, who has been given the authority to choose a husband of her choice, be obtained for her marriage. However, in some Islamic communities, the environment is such that it is difficult for a girl to say no to a match proposed by her parents. Refusal to agree to a marriage proposal put forward by the family can, in some communities, lead to serious consequences that are driven by cultural rather than Islamic considerations. They can range from verbal abuse to outright honor killing of the girl — as happens in some tribal areas. Such extreme actions, in regions where such acts are carried out, are typically characteristic among the adherents of all religions and not restricted to Muslims.

Misuse of the right to polygamy

During the early years of Islam, Muslims had to fight many wars in which they were heavily outnumbered. Many young fighters were killed, which was one of the primary reasons why men were allowed to have more than one wife. Such permission prevented many widows from being forced into prostitution which, prior to Islam, would have been their only option since other income producing opportunities for women were unavailable during those times. It provided protection and benefits for the widow's children, and accelerated the rate at which the decimated population could be renewed.

Islam allows a man to have four wives. However, there are conditions attached to the permission for polygamy. The man has to treat all his wives fairly, equally, and with perfect justice. If he buys a house for one, he has to buy a house for each wife. According to the Koran, "You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire...(4:129)." In other words, there is discouragement in that verse as it indicates that man may fall into sin by not being just. However, many Muslims who do practice polygamy conveniently ignore the attached conditions of equal treatment and fairness.

Female genital mutilation

This is a pre-Islamic tribal practice common in some African countries and is not based on any Islamic teaching. Some African tribes are practicing this barbaric cultural practice even after their conversion to Islam.

Common misconceptions

There are many misconceptions and myths about the status and role of women in Islam, especially among non-Muslims. In too many cases, cultural practices are believed to be Islamic practices, which they are not. Contrary to the myths and misconceptions,

- Women are not prohibited from working outside the home
- Polygamy is not recommended
- Men do not have a higher status than women
- Women are allowed to have an education
- Women can take part in political affairs
- Women can divorce their husbands
- Women are not forbidden to drive
- Honor killing of women is not allowed

CHAPTER 19: SECTARIAN AND EXTERNAL DIFFERENCE

SECTARIAN DIVISIONS AND JURISPRUDENCE

Diversity and splits in Islam

The followers of Islam, estimated to be about 1.2 billion, are dispersed throughout the world. They are anything but homogeneous and are split into two major sects — Sunni and Shia. These, in turn, contain sub-sects and overall, by some counts, there are 72 sects. The Sunnis account for about 90% of Muslims, while Shias account for the remaining ten percent. Most of the Shias are concentrated in Iran, Iraq, and the Indian subcontinent.

Sunni

The Sunnis derive their name from the word “Sunnah,” which means following the sayings and actions of Muhammad^P. Sunnis are the mainstream orthodox Muslims who follow traditional Islam. Their beliefs are the ones that have been described in this book.

Sunnis believe that they should be governed by consensus and, consequently, ruled by a ruler whose election must be based on democratic principles. They do not believe that an individual needs or requires any clergy, or other intermediaries, to establish a relationship with God.

Shia

The Shia Muslims split from mainstream Islam over an emotional dispute concerning Muhammad^P's successor. They believe that Ali ibn Abu Talib should have been made the caliph after his death. However, the community successively selected three others as caliph — Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman — before Ali was ultimately selected as the fourth caliph. The key event defining the Shia-Sunni split occurred when Hussein, who was the younger son of Ali and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad^P, and his family were massacred by the Ummayyad army of Yezid at Karbala in Iraq.

The Shias believe that the leader of Islam should be a descendant of Ali. They believe that religious and political authority resides in the 12 imams or leaders who, starting with Ali, have led them since then. The imams are believed to be without sin and privy to knowledge that others do not have. The Shias believe that the last imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, was born around 868 but never died. Instead, he went into hiding from human view and will appear at an opportune time.

The Shias are split into two main sects — “Twelvers” and “Ismailis.” The former believe that there were a total of 12 imams, including the last one who went into hiding. They expect him to come back as the Messiah. The Twelvers have a clergy system that is organized in a hierarchy, with the ayatollah being at the highest level. The Ismailis have many sub-sects including the “Seveners,” who believe that there were only seven imams and that the last one went into hiding.

The Shias have five fundamental religious beliefs. They are monotheism, prophethood, vicegerency (imamate), justice, and Day of Judgment. Shias believe that their clergy is empowered to interpret God's will. Their theology is characterized by its glorification of Ali and his son, Hussein. In Shiaism, there is a strong theme of martyrdom and suffering.

Reform and other movements

There are a number of sects, or sub-sects, and reform movements that have originated from mainstream Islam. The most prominent among them include the Wahhabis and the Sufis.

Wahhabis

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who died in 1792, was a religious scholar and reformer in Arabia. The objective of his movement was to establish Islamic practice as it existed during the time of Prophet Muhammad^P. He wanted to purge local practices, many of which were un-Islamic, that had crept into the practice of Islam. (Such practices included visiting shrines, asking saints to intercede with God, and so on.) He preached against the introduction of any innovations and adherence to the original Islamic teachings. He focused on the principle of the oneness of God and reiterated that God did not share His powers with any imam or saint.

In 1744, Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud, a political leader, decided to join forces to establish a state based on Islamic principles. The religious and political combination proved a potent one. It led to the ultimate establishment, throughout Arabia, of Wahhabism and the rule of the Saud family. At this time, the Wahhabis dominate the Arabian Peninsula.

Kharajites

The Kharajites, who account for less than one percent of all Muslims, trace their origin to the followers of Ali. When Muawiyah challenged Ali's election as the caliph, it led to war between them. When they stopped fighting and appointed an arbitrator, part of Ali's army rejected the compromise attempt and left him in 657. The ones who left were known as the "Kharajis" or "the ones who leave." Ali was subsequently murdered by a Kharajite in 661. The Kharajites continued to oppose the next caliph, Muawiyah, when he succeeded Ali.

The Kharajites follow the Koran and Sunnah very strictly. They believe that profession of faith must be accompanied by righteousness and good deeds. The Kharajites are characterized by a fanatical belief in equality, idealistic views of justice, and piety. They have had a very strong tendency to punish those who deviate from Prophet Muhammad^P's teachings.

Sufism

Sufism, which developed in the tenth century, is not strictly a sect or a school of thought. It is a spiritual way of removing desires such as jealousy, envy, pride, etc. Sufis can be found among both Shias and Sunnis. Sufism emphasizes personal piety and mysticism. Its mystical traditions seek inner knowledge directly from God through meditation and rituals. Typically, Sufis emphasize

spirituality, engage in prayers, and repeat phrases glorifying God. They believe, along with some other non-Sufi scholars, that the Koran can be interpreted in many ways. The Sufis, who believe in the hidden and mystical interpretation of the Koran, refer to them as “wisdom,” “indication” or “hints.” For many Sufis, their ascetic life is characterized by deprivation and meditation. Many Sufis played a missionary role in converting people to Islam, in newer lands, and helping them integrate their beliefs and practices into it.

Other fringe movements

There are a number of splinter groups that have spun off from Islam. The Bahai, who are concentrated in Iran, initially attempted to integrate the world’s religions but, later on, developed a new religion. The Ahmadiyya movement in India believes that its founder was a Messiah and that Muhammad^P was not the last prophet sent by God. Mainstream followers of Islam consider their beliefs blasphemous and, therefore, do not consider Ahmadiyyas to be Muslims.

The Nation of Islam Black Muslim movement started in America as an anti-white movement. It teaches that blacks are superior to whites. It also taught that Elijah Muhammad^P was a prophet of God and Wallace Fard was God incarnate. Hence, even though they use the name Islam, the Nation of Islam is un-Islamic and cannot be associated with orthodox Islam. Malcolm X was a Nation of Islam leader who reversed his racist anti-white beliefs after performing Hajj. He rejected the Nation of Islam beliefs, once he realized what Islam really taught, and joined mainstream orthodox Islam.

Schools of Thought (Jurisprudence)

As Islam expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula, it faced unique and complex issues, many of which did not have explicit answers in the Koran and the Hadith. Therefore, a need arose for the practical application of Islamic laws in an environment that had changed considerably since the days of Muhammad^P. That requirement led to the development of various schools of thought that interpreted and applied Islamic principles to issues in virtually all aspects of life.

Sunni Jurisprudence

The Sunnis have four major schools of thought named after their founders, who were eminent scholars. The schools are:

- Hanafi — named after Abu Hanifa

- Maliki — named after Malik ibn Anas
- Shafi'i — named after Muhammad ibn Idris Shafi'i
- Hanbali — named after Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal

A Sunni can follow any one of these four schools of thought. However, the generally accepted principle is to follow a single school. The other schools are used in the search for an answer only if the school being followed fails to provide an answer.

Shia Jurisprudence

The Shias follow the Jafri school of thought. Even though there are differences, the Sunnis and the Shias:

- Have the same basic beliefs
- Follow the Koran and Prophet Muhammad^P
- Believe in the five pillars of Islam

The major differences between the Shias and Sunnis lie in their leadership and in the interpretation of the Koran. The Shias believe that the sayings of Ali ibn Abu Talib should be as authoritative as the Sunnah. However, Sunnis do not agree with that belief.

The Sunnis believe in implementing the letter of the Koran. However, the Shias look to the spirit (hidden) rather than the letter (apparent) of the Koran. It is due to that reason that the Shia religious leadership plays a significant role in the interpretation of the Koran and, also, how it is viewed by the Shia rank and file.

BELIEFS ABOUT JESUS

Birth and crucifixion

Islam teaches that Jesus was born to Mary, who was a virgin. The creation of Jesus, who had no father, is compared in the Koran to the creation of Adam, who had neither mother nor father.

Muslims do not believe that Jesus was crucified. They believe that God saved, and raised, him and that someone else was crucified in his place. They also believe that Jesus will return before the Day of Judgment. However, he will not come back as a prophet with a new message. Instead, he will follow the religion

Islam, taught by Muhammad^P. His mission will be to destroy evil and kill the false Messiah — the anti-Christ.

Jesus is only a prophet

According to Islam, Jesus is only a prophet. The message that he taught was the same that was delivered by the prophets and messengers who came before him: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others. His message, of monotheism and the oneness of God, was subsequently delivered by Muhammad^P.

Muslims believe that Jesus had the power of miracles and that he was the promised Messiah of the Jews, who rejected him. According to Islam, the Christian belief that he is the son of God is equivalent to polytheism and a rejection of what Jesus had taught his own followers. Muslims firmly reject the concept of Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Highest regard for Jesus

Islam respects and honors all prophets and messengers sent by God, including Jesus. He is held in high regard by Muslims and is considered to be one of the most important prophets. Whenever Muslims speak the name of Jesus, they respectfully add the phrase, “Peace be upon him.”

New Testament

Muslims believe that the Gospel is the scripture that contains God's revelations to Jesus. However, the scripture available at this time is not authentic due to additions and deletions that took place over time and, hence, it cannot be used as a guide by Muslims.

COMPARING BELIEFS WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

The Evolution of Islam

According to its followers, Islam started with the first prophet, Adam. The Islamic lesson of “surrender to God,” which was first preached by Adam, continued to be taught by subsequent prophets including Moses and Jesus. However, while their teachings were appropriate at the time that they preached, they needed to be updated with the passage of time. God took care of that need by sending more prophets who brought modified messages that were

appropriate for their times. The final message was sent through Muhammad^P, who finalized the religion of Islam for all times to come. Therefore, Judaism and Christianity are viewed as incomplete versions of Islam that were replaced by the final version introduced by Muhammad^P.

Monotheism

The fundamental differences between Islam and Judaism and Christianity, as perceived by its followers, are that:

- Judaism has compromised monotheism by elevating the opinions and interpretations of rabbis to the level of God
- Christianity has compromised monotheism by viewing Jesus as the son of God

Belief in prophets and scriptures

Islam is the only religion that teaches its followers that they must believe in the earlier prophets, messengers, and scriptures. Without this fundamental belief, they cannot be considered Muslims. However, Christianity and Judaism followers do not believe in Islam or Muhammad^P, despite signs given to them of the coming of Muhammad^P.

Concept of a chosen people

Islam firmly rejects the concept of a chosen race or people. Muslims are taught very clearly that all human beings are equal. According to Islam, there can be no superiority based upon color, race, gender, nationality, tribe or any other criteria except righteousness.

Original sin

Islam does not believe in original sin. According to it, all humans are born innocent and free of sin. Adam committed a sin but he repented and was forgiven. Islam does not believe that someone else has to pay for a sin, especially when the very person who committed it, Adam, was forgiven. According to Islam, every person is accountable for his or her own actions. Therefore, there is no need to be saved from the “inherent” sin.

Salvation

According to Islam, salvation is acquired by performing good deeds, not through the mediation of a savior. Salvation will be the reward for those who believe in one God and follow His commandments. Muslims consider the following to be incorrect beliefs and practices and do not believe that salvation is dependent upon them:

- Resurrection of Jesus
- Believing that Jesus was the son of God
- Confessing sins to a priest

Ultimate admittance to heaven or hell

Muslims believe that on the Day of Judgment, all the good and bad deeds of a person will be weighed. According to the Koran, “He who has done an atom’s weight of good shall see it (99:7).” It also states, “He who has done an atom’s weight of evil shall see it (99:8).” Based upon the preponderance of good or bad deeds, a person will be sent to heaven or hell. In Islam, there is no concept of purgatory.

Church and State

Christianity is a religion that limits itself to religious practice. Islam is a way of life that encompasses all facets of a man’s life including personal, social, political, and religious. Islam regulates the complete life of a society and, therefore, it does not recognize the separation of church and state.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

View of other religions and their followers

Islam classifies other religions into two groups:

- The people of the Book
- Other religions

Christians as well as Jews are viewed as “People of the Book,” with whom Muslims share the most important common belief, monotheism, as well as many others. Muslims view the prophets of the Jews and Christians, Moses and Jesus,

as among the greatest prophets. A Muslim has to consider them prophets as part of his fundamental beliefs.

Many Muslims consider that those who believe in the concept of Trinity are not Christians and, therefore, should be classified as non-believers. Their reasoning is that such followers are in denial of Jesus' fundamental message — the oneness of God. Such people, according to Muslims, fall in the second category (other religions).

In Islamic societies, Jews and Christians are allowed full religious freedom. Since they are considered “People of the Book,” a Muslim man can marry a Christian or a Jewish woman.

Attitude towards followers of other religions

The Koran commands Muslims not to use force to convert anyone. It enjoins complete religious freedom to non-Muslims. There are clear and unambiguous commandments for Muslims to protect non-Muslim citizens in an Islamic society. Non-Muslims have been guaranteed freedom of worship as well as protection of life, property, and religious sites by Islam. Islam also teaches that Jews and Christians should be respected — as they are believers (People of the Book). There should be complete justice for them, even as minorities.

Though there have been wars and animosity between Muslims and both Christians and Jews, Muslims are often reminded of the high point in their relationship with them. It occurred when Umar, the second caliph, captured Jerusalem but allowed complete religious freedom for Christians. He also permitted Jews, who had previously been denied entry by the Christians, to re-enter Jerusalem.

The relationship between Jews and Muslims was good in Palestine, where they had lived side by side for centuries, until the creation of Israel. In recent times, almost all the Jews in the Middle East countries migrated to Israel. Therefore, there is practically no daily interaction between Muslims and Jews except in Occupied Palestine, where there is considerable animosity between them for reasons explained earlier.

AFTERWORD

The future

Outside the Middle East, except in a few isolated areas and despite lingering historical distrust due to the Crusades and colonial wars, relations between Muslims and Christians have been relatively good in recent decades.

It is imperative that Americans understand the real issues driving anti-Americanism and the frustration with America that is manifest in so many trouble spots in the world. They must be patient, willing to listen, and impartial. The US must give top priority to justice: denial of justice by nations or rulers should be opposed equally, regardless of whether the nation or ruler is considered a friend or foe of the United States. Contrary to what many short-sighted policy makers may think, failure to be just will only ensure that the current situation will continue indefinitely.

In many countries, Muslims and Christians are natural partners on various issues. They can build on their common values rather than political differences. This requires that all parties make a determined effort to move beyond the past and to work from an understanding of the broader issues rather than reacting with emotions that are swayed by one event or another. If they focus on being fair and just, and reaching out to each other, then the future will be far better than the past.

APPENDIX: CHRONOLOGY OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

570	Prophet Muhammad ^P is born
610	Muhammad ^P receives first revelation
622	Muhammad ^P flees to Medina from Mecca; start of Islamic State and Society
630	Conquest of Mecca
632	Muhammad ^P dies
632 - 661	Rule of four caliphs
661 - 750	Umayyad Dynasty
710	Muslims forces land in Spain
732	Battle of Tours in France
750 - 1258	Abbasid Dynasty
750 - 950	Golden Age of Islam
756	Umayyad Dynasty restarts in Spain
813 - 833	Reign of al-Mamun Abbasid
909 - 1171	Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt
1055-1243	Rule of the Seljuks
1095	First Crusade
1099	Crusaders take Jerusalem
1171	Salahuddin ends Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt and founds the Ayyubid Dynasty
1187	Salahuddin retakes Jerusalem
1258	Mongol invaders under Halagu Khan attack Baghdad and execute the Abbasid caliph

1299-1922	Ottoman Empire
1453	Turkish Ottomans conquer Constantinople and rename it Istanbul
1492	Christians under Isabella capture Granada—the last Muslim kingdom in Spain
1501-1722	Safavid Empire in Persia
1526	Mughal Empire established in India
1529	First Ottoman siege of Vienna
1683	Second Ottoman siege of Vienna
1830	France occupies Algeria
1857	Last Mughal ruler in India deposed by British
1882	Egypt is occupied by Britain
1902	Saud dynasty established in Arabia
1917	Balfour Declaration
1922	Turkish Sultanate abolished; Egypt becomes nominally independent from Britain
1924	Caliphate abolished in Turkey
1946	Jordan, Lebanon and Syria became independent
1947	India freed by Britain and partitioned into India and Pakistan
1948	Israel is created
1949	Indonesia becomes independent
1953	Mossadegh is overthrown in Iran
1956	Second Arab-Israeli war; Suez Canal crisis
1967	Six-day Arab-Israeli war
1973	Fourth Arab-Israeli war; Arab oil embargo
1979	Iranian Revolution; Bhutto is hanged in Pakistan
1979-1989	Afghanistan war following Soviet invasion
1980-1988	Iran-Iraq war
1982	Israeli invasion of Lebanon
1989	Armed revolt starts against Indian occupation in Kashmir; breakup of Soviet Union
1990	Iraq invades Kuwait
1998	Pakistan conducts nuclear tests
2001	9/11 terrorist attack on America; American forces attack al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and overthrow the Taliban government
2002	Israel invades West Bank
2003	America invades Iraq and ends Saddam Hussein's regime

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