



بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

## The Light

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### International Organ of the Centre for the Worldwide Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam

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We welcome all scholarly contributions to The Light.



**Imam Muhammad Anwar Shaheed,  
Imam of the Lahore Ahmadiyya  
Jamaat UK (d. April 1986)**

**Who gave his life so that we may be  
free to believe.**

## **The Call of the Messiah**

**by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam  
Ahmad**

**The Promised Messiah and Mahdi**



(Editor's note: Any quotations from the Quran are translated from the author's explanations and are not literal translations of the verse quoted. This extract is from the English translation of a lecture he delivered in 1904 in Lahore, now in Pakistan, taken from the Lahore Ahmadiyya publication 'Essence of Islam,' p. 84 – 86 where the Promised Messiah puts forward arguments and signs about his claim.)

### **Signs of the Latter Age**

When vanquished in every point, the opponents, as a last resource, bring forward the slender objection, that out of thousands of my prophecies one or two have not been fulfilled.

This is untrue. Besides, the prophecies so objected to will be seen to relate to the punishment of certain individuals. And the Divine law is, as appears from the Holy Books of God, that a prophecy relating to punishment is always conditional, whether the condition is expressed in it or not, and the punishment can be averted by repentance or deeds of charity or by manifesting a fear of God.

The prophecy of the prophet Jonah is an example of this. There was no express condition in that prophecy. But still, the punishment was averted on the people's repentance. If therefore, the law established above were not true, the prophethood of Jonah would be seriously in question. God's intention to punish a people cannot be questioned if it is suspended or averted on their repentance. What is prophecy but a manifestation of that intention through a prophet? If such intention can be suspended or averted when it is not disclosed to any person, there can be no objection to its being suspended or averted when it has been revealed through a prophet.

Now the essence of the prophecy relating to the death of Atham, which is objected to in my case, was that of the two, Atham and myself, the one in error would be brought to destruction before the eyes of the other. The death of Atham has sealed the truth of this prophecy, and it is quite unreasonable to object to it on the ground that he did not die within the stated time, for the limit of time had with it a condition in express words. Atham showed fearfulness and was granted a respite according to the express condition of the prophecy, but when he concealed the truth, he was soon seized by God and died by the prophecy. Even if the condition had not been expressly stated, he could have taken the benefit of it according to the Divine law about the prophecies of punishment. Besides this, all the details are not always contained in prophecies, and such details are only manifested after their fulfillment. It also happens that an error sometimes occurs in the interpretation of a prophecy, for after all prophets are mortals. For instance, Jesus had prophesied that his twelve apostles would sit on twelve thrones, whereas one of them became the devil's follower in his

*I Shall Love All Mankind.*

lifetime. He had also prophesied that the men of his time would be still living when he would come back. This also remained unfulfilled on account of error in the interpretation of the words of revelation. Some other prophecies of Jesus too met a similar fate. As to my prophecies, thousands of them have been fulfilled in all their details and to ignore all of these, while selecting one or two for objection, is nothing but intentionally rejecting the truth. I fully hope and am certain that if anyone were to live in my company for forty days consecutively, he would witness a heavenly sign. Here I finish this lecture and think that what I have said is sufficient for a seeker after truth. And peace be upon him who follows truth and guidance. ([Return to contents](#))

## Do men have the exclusive right to interpret the Qur'an?<sup>1</sup>

by

**ASMA BARLAS**



(From <https://www.opendemocracy.net/north-africa-west-asia/asma-barlas/do-men-have-exclusive-right-to-interpret-quran>)

In the millennium and a half since Islam's advent, only men, and only Arab, or Arabic-speaking men, have interpreted its religious texts, at least publicly.

Several years ago, Muslim students of the Avicenna Society of Rotterdam organised a debate between Tariq Ramadan and me about the status of Muslims in the West. In speaking about the discrimination and violence Muslim women

have suffered in the name of Islam, I pointed out that the Qur'an affirms their equality with men. It does so by teaching that God created both from the same self (*nafs*), made them vicegerents (*khalifa*) on earth and appointed them one another's guides and guardians (*awliya*) with the mutual obligation to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. There is no trace of these verses in dominant interpretations of the Qur'an or Muslim law. Instead, both law and exegesis foreground a handful of verses/lines (less than six out of more than 6,000 verses) that they take as advocating male supremacy over women.

My larger point was to question why Muslims invest only men with the authority to interpret the Qur'an and why they are averse to interpreting it differently than they do. I have read it as an egalitarian and anti-patriarchal text in *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. At the end of the debate, several women in the audience asked Ramadan what he thought about women's readings of the Qur'an. Women, he eventually said, had to achieve a certain mastery to be able to comment on it knowledgeably. All these years later, I can still recall the incensed face of a young woman in a *hijab* who was repeatedly pushing him to clarify just how many more centuries he felt women had to wait before men would regard them as being knowledgeable. He didn't say.

The truth is that the Qur'an doesn't authorise only men or a scholarly community to interpret it and nor is there an ordained clergy or church in Islam. Nor does the Qur'an say it came only for the literate. To the contrary, it says it is also meant for the "unlettered" Bedouins in the deserts of Arabia. In a remarkably post-Reformation vein, it insists that believers should have a direct relationship with God and should rely on our reason and intelligence to decipher its verses (*ayat*, or "signs" of God).

In the millennium and a half since Islam's

<sup>1</sup> Debate between Asma Barlas and Tariq Ramadan organised by the Avicenna Society of

Rotterdam. Courtesy of the author.

advent, only men, and only Arab, or Arabic-speaking men, have interpreted its religious texts, at least publicly. Even among liberal and progressive Muslims today, men remain the locus of authority as Ramadan's comment made very clear. Arguably, on this score, Muslims may be no different from Jews and Christians and adherents of other faiths whose religious texts were also revealed or authored in patriarchies. Patriarchy, a form of institutionalised male supremacy, is older than Islam and its history is rather sordid when it comes to women's welfare. It is this overlapping trajectory of religion and patriarchy that has prompted some feminists to dub Islam religious patriarchy and to declare that patriarchy has "God on its side" (Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*; 1970).

I don't doubt that when religious traditions represent and misrepresent God as male, they empower men. But what if a Scripture refutes the idea that God is a male or, indeed, comparable to any created being? What if—as the Qur'an asserts—God is beyond the "highest evolved thought" of human beings, utterly unique, utterly unlike anything that exists? Would such an unsexed/ungendered God have an investment in propping up the authority of human males? Why on earth?

Given such descriptions of God in the Qur'an, I can't understand why Muslims treat God as a male. True, the Qur'an calls God "He" but we can see this as a function of Arabic, the language in which it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in seventh-century Arabia. The Qur'an itself states that it is in Arabic because God wished to address the Arabs in their language. And, while most Muslims have come to view Arabic itself as a sacred language, the Qur'an doesn't intimate that it is.

The reason such seemingly esoteric issues are important to a discussion of women's rights is because, if God is not a male, there is no reason for men to claim a special affinity with God as a way to then exercise totalizing authority over women. Positing such an affinity and claiming this kind of authority borders on shirk, a derogation of divine sovereignty. The argu-

ment is simple enough: in Islam, we have an absolute God whose oneness and sovereignty are indivisible, meaning no one can participate in or partake of God's encompassing dominion over everyone and everything. In many Muslim societies, men posture as "earthly gods" over women, all in the name of following Islam.

To be clear, I'm not opposed to men interpreting the Qur'an. Far from it. My understanding of it has been shaped solely by men's interpretations and translations. The most compelling to me is by Muhammad Asad, who was born a Jew in Austria-Hungary at the turn of the twentieth century and converted to Islam when he was twenty-six. Another favoured translation is by the noted Shi'a scholar, Abdullah Yusuf Ali. I also don't think, like many feminists do, that we need communities of women readers to generate liberatory interpretations of texts. Hundreds of years of women's following in men's footsteps, voluntarily or not, should dispel this illusion.

Having said this, though, I believe that the questions women and men bring into our reading of sacred texts are likely to differ. Women, who have a stake in challenging the deification of men, could very well ask whether the Qur'an endorses patriarchy, which is what I do at the start of my reading. And, I define patriarchy as both rule by the father/husband and as a politics of sexual differentiation that privileges men because they are male. To my surprise—and relief—I find that the Qur'an doesn't endorse either mode of patriarchy and, to the contrary, criticises the mindless rush to follow the "ways of the fathers" who were (are) devoid of knowledge.

In the years since the debate with Ramadan, I've shared my reading with many young Muslims who are looking to encounter the divine. To them, what matters isn't whether someone has the authority to interpret the Qur'an or not but what they have to say about it. At such times I'm reminded that, when we treat the Qur'an as simply a manifesto for claiming rights or for meting out punishments, we forget that, before anything else, it is a way for us to know the Creator we are called on to worship.

Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an by Asma Barlas is published by Saqi Books, February 2019 ([Return to contents](#))

## How the Chishti Sufi order indigenised Islam in South Asia by reinterpreting Hindu traditions

**Qawwali is a prime example.**

*By Haroon Khalid<sup>1</sup>*

(<https://scroll.in/article/913543/how-the-chishti-sufi-order-indigenised-islam-in-south-asia-by-reinterpreting-hindu-traditions>)



The shrine of Baba Farid Ganjshakar in Pakpattan. | Wikimedia

We were driving on a lonely road that appeared to be going nowhere. It was not quite late, but it was pitch-dark. I watched the lights of Chishtian town recede in the rear-view mirror until they disappeared altogether. We had passed the town on our way to Old Chishtian, now an abandoned ruin.

Named after one of the most popular Sufi orders of South Asia, the ruined town was said to have been established by Tajuddin Chishti, grandson of Baba Farid Ganjshakar, then head of the order who had settled on an old mound about 100 km from here, next to the Sutlej river. In this place, he had set up a modest Sufi madrasa where one of his students happened to be Nizamuddin Auliya, the storied Sufi saint

of Delhi.

After Baba Farid Ganj Shakar's death around 1266, a shrine was built over his grave which soon became a major pilgrimage centre. A town started to develop around it that came to be called Pakpattan, or the pure ford.

The syncretic Chishti order originated in Chishti, Afghanistan, in the 10th century, and was introduced to South Asia in the 12th century by Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti. In many ways, the Chishti order played the starring role in proselytising Islam and, crucially, indigenising it, challenging the misconception that the religion spread in India through the sword.

Breaking a taboo sanctioned by no less than the Delhi Sultanate, the Chishti *pirs* asserted that not only was music allowed in Islam but if practised with the right intention and in the right manner, could be a potent way to submerge in the existence of God, the ultimate expression of love. Qawwali became an essential feature of the Chishti order. Sung in the vernacular, it allowed people from across religions and classes to partake in the devotional experience. Though a certain decorum had to be maintained listening to the music, devotees would sometimes be overcome by ecstasy, losing all self-control. They would tear off their clothes, mad in love with the Divine. The legend goes that it was in this rapture that Khwaja Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiyar, head of the order after Moinuddin Chishti and before Baba Farid Ganjshakar, lost his life.

For a predominantly Hindu audience accustomed to expressing religious devotion through music, the qawwali offered an easy transition to Islam.

That it was sung in the vernacular also helped. It expressed Islam in the language of the people, instead of the highbrow Persian or Arabic. Baba Farid Ganjshakar is believed to be the first literary Punjabi poet, whose poems made

<sup>1</sup> Author of four books, including *Imagining Lahore* and *Walking with Nanak*.

Also read: [This Pakistani shrine received offerings of phallic symbols for ages. But now they are deemed](#)

[vulgar](#)

[Women not allowed: How patriarchy rules Pakistan's Sufi shrines that also celebrate the feminine](#)

the new religion accessible to the masses, laying the foundation of a tradition which was continued by Shah Hussain, Bulleh Shah, Mian Muhammad Baksh, and Ghulam Farid.

Union with the Divine was a central feature of the Sufi order's belief system as opposed to the more traditional view that argued God was distinct from the human soul, making any union impossible. In this regard, the Chishtis' belief echoed the Advaita Vedanta school of thought in Hinduism which held the human soul and the Divine to be the same.



Tajuddin Chishti's shrine at Chishtian. Photo credit: Wikipedia

### **Mingling of traditions**

Over centuries of interaction between the Chishtis and diverse religious traditions of South Asia, there was sharing and borrowing. For one, the Chishtis are said to have borrowed many meditative and spiritual traditions from the yogic ascetic tradition of Hinduism. There's a popular story about Baba Farid Ganjshakar hanging himself in a well for 40 days as part of his "chilla", a tradition that borrows from yogic practices.

Similarly, the yogic tradition of reciting a mantra while controlling the breath was reinterpreted as dhikr. This borrowing was not one-sided though. There are examples of yogis appropriating Muslim holy figures and spaces, referring to them as yogis and Shiva shrines. Similarly, the criticism of elaborate rituals and idol worship that marked the Bhakti tradition could be traced back to such Sufi orders.

As the graves of Sufis and spaces associated with them became sites of religious pilgrimage, they played a key role in "contextualising" Islam in South Asian geography, providing an immediate connection with the landscape. Ajmer Sharif, Pakpattan and Delhi became Muslim sacred spaces, allowing the new religion to be absorbed into a new environment.

Chishtian, local lore suggests, too developed around a Sufi sacred space. In the forests where the town later emerged, Baba Farid Ganjshakar had spent time engaged in chilla. Since that had made it a scared space, his grandson, Tajuddin Chishti, moved here, laying the foundation of the town that took its name from their Sufi order. Tajuddin Chishti was buried just outside the town, and a shrine was built over his grave which became a pilgrimage spot in its own right.

As we drove deep into the darkness, I could see a few lights hanging in the sky. This was the shrine of Tajuddin Chishti, set in a massive graveyard far from the new city. We had come over 300 km from Lahore to witness a unique tradition at the shrine.

Scattered around the shrine lay tombs of the Sufi's relatives and notable members of the local community who had chosen this scared space for their final resting place.

On the wall of one tomb facing the shrine of Tajuddin Chishti was a heart made out of tiles. All around it was scribbled in oil and charcoal names of couples with hearts drawn around them.

Young couples who want to get married but face resistance from their families or the society come to the shrine and write their names on this sacred wall. For doing so, it is believed, removes all obstacles from their path. It is a similar tradition to that at the shrine of Heer-Ranjha in Jhang, named after the main characters of the iconic Punjabi folk love story. No one around Tajuddin Chishti's shrine knew when or why exactly the tradition had started, just that it existed.

It is no surprise that such a tradition developed around a Chishti shrine, a Sufi order that revolves around the concept of love – a devotee’s love for God, a disciple’s love for the guide. Sometimes, this love runs wild, in the form of “haal”, as when a devotee listening to Qawwali loses self-control. It is an overwhelming love that demands total commitment. It was this love that, as the legend says, consumed Khwaja Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiyar. [\(Return to contents\)](#)

## My love for the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement

By *Iain Dixon*



(Editor’s Note: We are saddened and pleased by Mr Dixon’s words. Saddened because his words show how far Muslims have drifted away from the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). When he heard that Negus the King of Abyssinia had died, the Holy Prophet (s) announced the news with the words “Our brother has passed away.” Negus was a Christian but the Holy Prophet (s) considered Negus to be a brother because of Negus’ kindness towards Muslims. When there was a fight between a Muslim and a Jew because the Muslim said that the Holy Prophet (s) was superior to Moses, the Holy Prophet forbade Muslims from comparing him to other prophets because it leads to disharmony in the community. Yet Mr Dixon’s description of what he faced belies our beloved Prophet’s actions. We are pleased by his comments about our Jamaat but we have a hard struggle in front of us to attain the qualities expected of us.)

As a follower of Jesus, my experience with professing Muslims over the years has been many and varied. It has included being spat at, death threats, abusive language and also intimidation. I have also had plenty of mockery and sarcasm shown towards my beliefs. I remember once being driven to a big Eid gathering in a park, and the Muslim who invited me said just

before the Eid prayer: “Ha ha ha . . . Your God is so weak that after spending six days creating the heavens and the earth. He had to take a day off because he was tired”!

### Classic misunderstanding

This was a comment on the Bible’s reference in Genesis 2:1-2. I had to correct his misunderstanding and point out that the same Bible scriptures tell us that God “ neither slumbers nor sleeps.”- Psalm 121:4 and “ Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth faints not, neither is he weary . . . He gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increases strength.”- Isaiah 40:28-29. Genesis 2:2 indeed says God rested, but the word ‘rest’ in the Hebrew language here is ‘Shabbat’ which in this context means ‘to cease from labour.’ God was merely ceasing from this particular phase of his creative activity. He wasn’t tired. Sarcasm never triumphs over God’s Word. It is like throwing tiny pebbles against a battleship.

### Looking for peaceful Islam

I was invited to a special talk at a mosque one afternoon, and the visiting Imam informed me that all those not living an Islamic lifestyle should be put to death. I decided not to stay behind for refreshments afterward! But as I later traveled home on the bus, I reflected on his words, and wondered if anyone was truly living an Islamic lifestyle 100% of the time? Maybe he was putting HIMSELF under a death sentence? Just like a shopping trolley with a faulty front wheel makes it hard to keep pushing the trolley in a straight line, don’t we all struggle to be ‘perfect,’ to keep our lives straight all the time? I notice that if you bake a loaf of bread in a dented tin, the bread will always come out with a dent in it! Do we not all have dents in our lives?

### Discovering a different kind of Islam

A few years ago I came across the Lahore Ahmadiyya movement. What initially started as watching an online talk, developed into a wonderful friendship. Over the years I have had the opportunity of getting to know these amazing

*I Shall Love All Mankind.*

people. They are characterised by humility, hospitality, great kindness, and a real desire to pursue God and his ways. I have had the privilege not only of visiting their mosque, but sharing in family gatherings and spending time as a guest in their homes. Rather than intimidation and death threats, they have always welcomed me with kindness and courtesy. The only threat to my health from the Lahore Ahmadiyya folk is overeating their wonderful food!

### Real honesty

Are the Lahore Ahmadiyyas perfect people? By no means. But they are honest in their struggles and are quick to point out their faults. Rather than proudly professing an elitist attitude towards themselves, they acknowledge the good in others and seek to make the world a better place. I can honestly say, that when I spend time with these people, I feel like I am part of their family. I pray for these folks regularly, praying and asking for God's blessing to be showered upon them. I seek to encourage them and pray for their needs.

### My invitation to you

Please get to know the Lahore Ahmadiyyas! Attend their meetings, go to their mosque open days! Read their publications! What you will find is a group of people who are not like spiritual woodpeckers trying to aggressively 'peck at you' with horrible words and actions. Instead, you will find a stunning spiritual peacock, a community full of beautiful people, displaying its colourful 'feathers' of kindness, warmth and a hunger for God. **(Return to contents)**

### REVENGE

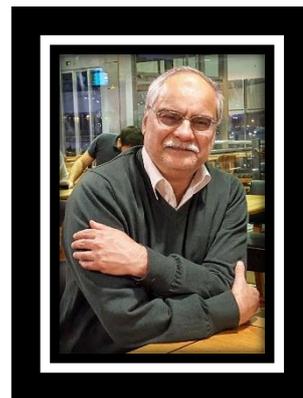
PRAYER FOR THE ABUSER,  
DO GOOD TO PERSECUTOR,  
FACE WITH ARROGANCE,  
BE HUMBLE.

(Extract from a poem by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad)

## Blasphemy in Islam

### A Forgivable Sin or a Crime Punishable by Death?

By *Ebrahim Mohamed*



### President Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore (South Africa branch)

It is with great relief that a Pakistani Appellate Court acquitted a Christian lady, Asia Bibi of blasphemy after she had spent eight years on death row for allegedly insulting the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). The frantic calls for her execution by ultra-conservative 'mullah-led' factions have attracted worldwide attention that resulted in protestations from human rights groups across the world. In conclusion, the Appeal Court Judge said:

"Blasphemy is a serious offence, but the insult of the appellant's (Asia Bibi's) religion and religious sensibilities by the complainant party and then mixing truth with falsehood in the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) was also not short of being blasphemous. It is ironical that in the Arabic language the appellant's name Asia means 'sinful,' but in the circumstances of the present case she appears to be a person, in the words of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, **"more sinned against than sinning."**"<sup>2</sup>

Even after this acquittal, the hardliners from among the mullahs and their fanatical followers vowed not to give up and wants her sentence reviewed, threatening violent protests.

This incident has thus once again brought into focus the questionable legitimacy of the controversial Pakistani 'blasphemy' law that, by the way, finds its origin in British colonialism and not in Islamic tradition. There is nothing in

<sup>1</sup> Muslim Theologian from Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup> Pakistan Criminal Appeal No. 39-L of Judgement dd 8.10.2018, page 55

the Holy Quran or in the *Sunna*<sup>1</sup> that suggest corporal punishment, let alone the death penalty, for blasphemy.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, all indications are that as far as Islam is concerned, it is a matter of conscience to be dealt with by Almighty Allah and not by human agencies. Of course, a country could always make legislative provision to address such an offence using civil suits in the same way as acts of 'defamation' or 'hate speech' are treated in most countries across the world. But to treat 'blasphemy' as a 'criminal offence punishable by death' and then desperately try to justify its legitimacy based on Islamic tradition **is completely off the mark** – and this is what this article will set out to prove with reference to the Holy Quran and the teachings and practical example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s).

Such extreme behaviour as we have witnessed in this instance by Muslims be they Pakistani, Indian, Arabic or any other nationality, it is now common knowledge, are generally driven by blind patriotism, culture, and ethnicity that are more often than not incompatible with the broader cosmopolitan values and teachings of Islam. These days, it is regrettable to see an increasing gap between being 'Muslim' in the true sense of the word and 'Islam.' And we will prove this point concerning the Asia Bibi case by showing that the common theme in the Holy Quran and *Sunna*, on which Islamic values are based, strongly advocate '**patience, tolerance and forgiveness**' as the primary and only responses expected of a Muslim when dealing with specific instances of blasphemy.

### **The British not the Muslims Criminalized Blasphemy in India**

In a BBC program entitled "*What are Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws?*"<sup>3</sup> some interesting observations about the origin and evolution of the blasphemy law in Pakistan are recorded, and I quote (emphases are mine):

'The offenses relating to religion were first codified by India's British rulers in 1860 and **were expanded in 1927. Pakistan inherited these laws when it came into existence after the partition of India in 1947.**'

'Between 1980 and 1986, several clauses were added to the laws by the military government of General Zia-ul Haq. He wanted to "Islamicise" them and also legally to separate the Ahmadi community, declared non-Muslim in 1973, from the main body of Pakistan's overwhelmingly Muslim population.'

'In 1982, another clause prescribed life imprisonment for "willful" desecration of the Koran, the Muslim holy book. In 1986, a separate clause was inserted to punish blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad and the penalty recommended was "death, or imprisonment for life.'

Of notable interest is the fact that in England and Wales a law dealing with blasphemy was only abolished in July 2008 and Ireland steps towards its abolition are still in progress.

### **'Death' for blasphemers in the Bible not Quran**

There is no theological premise for the execution of blasphemers to be found in the Holy Quran, but we do find such a provision in Mosaic Law in the **Bible**.

#### **The Bible:**

Anyone who **blasphemes** the name of the Lord **is to be put to death**. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native-born, when they blaspheme the Name, they are to be put to death. – Leviticus 24:16

Then Moses spoke to the Israelites, and they took the **blasphemer** outside the camp and

<sup>1</sup> Teachings and practical example of the Prophet Muhammad (s)

<sup>2</sup> The action or offence of speaking sacrilegiously about God or sacred things; profane talk – Online Dictionary

<sup>3</sup> *What are Pakistan's blasphemy Laws?* 6 Nov. 2014 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-southasia-12621225>

stoned him. The Israelites did as the LORD commanded Moses. –Leviticus 24:23

Ironically, Jesus, much like Asia Bibi, a follower of his, was also wrongly convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death according to **Mosaic Law**:

You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think? They all condemned him (Jesus) **as worthy of death**. – Mark 14:64

We are not stoning you (Jesus) for any good work, they replied, but for **blasphemy**, because you, a mere man, claim to be God. – John 10:33

If we now probe Islamic sources (i.e., the Holy Quran and *Sunna*), we will find that the Pakistani<sup>1</sup> blasphemy law as amended in the '80s to include the death penalty, is closely linked to the **Jewish Mosaic Law**, without any basis whatsoever in Islamic tradition.

## The Holy Quran

The language of the Holy Quran and the utterances of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) with regard to the expected response of a Muslim to blasphemous offenses are the total opposite of the harsh, punitive measures we come across in the Bible and which the Pakistanis under the dictator Zia ul Haqq had adopted in the '80s.

**The Holy Quran** gives the following instructions to the Muslims (all emphases that of the author):

You will certainly **hear much abuse** from the **followers of previous books** and the idol-worshipping people. And if **you are patient and keep your duty** – this is surely a matter of great resolution. -3:186

The action of Pakistani authorities and the behaviour of the ultra-conservative 'Mullahs' and their fanatical followers towards Asia Bibi, **a follower of a previous book**, fly directly in the

face of this crystal clear Quranic injunction that calls on Muslims to **keep their duty to Allah by being 'patient'** when seeking a **resolution** to matters involving abusive utterances. There is nothing in the Quranic injunction here calling for the execution or even jailing of the offenders, and one may well argue that for any Muslim claiming to be a devoted follower of Muhammad (s) to defy the clear commandments from Almighty Allah would be tantamount to blasphemy itself. As hinted above by the judge in this case, the accusers it would seem are more culpable of blasphemy than the accused. This verse alone should have settled once and for all the 'blasphemy punishment' debate plaguing Pakistani and other Muslim law-makers.

This reminds me what Jesus (on whom be peace) said about the Pharisee law-makers of his time:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law— **justice, mercy, and faithfulness**. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." –Matthew 23:23.24

"How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take **the speck** out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see **the plank** in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take **the plank** out of your eye, and **then** you will see clearly to remove **the speck** from your brother's eye." – Luke 6:42

This is indeed the age of the Muslim Messiah because we now see the same behaviours of 'pettiness, hypocrisy, and injustice in the name of faith' among Muslim law-makers and theologians, that were so rife among the Jewish 'teachers of the law and the Pharisees' lambasted by the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary.

The Holy Quran, in a similar vein, further

<sup>1</sup> As well as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen etc. that have a similar law

states:

**Obey not the disbelievers and the hypocrites and disregard their hurtful talk** -33:48

Note the toned down mood and character of the Quranic command '**disregard their hurtful talk**' as compared to the vicious tone of the Pakistani authorities' '**arrest, convict, and kill**' on hearing '**hurtful talk**,' the alleged sin Asia Bibi was wrongly sentenced to death.

The question Muslims across the world should ask themselves is: Who should be followed? Should we yield to the dictates of imperfect, mortal law-makers or heed the commandments of our Lord, God Almighty, Who is free of all errors?

The Holy Quran continues and teaches an even greater degree of tolerance when it says:

And when you hear Allah's messages **disbelieved in and mocked at, do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse** – 4:140

And **bear patiently** what they say and **for-sake them with a becoming withdrawal (i.e., in a manner that is decent and polite)** – 73:10

All these passages deal with cases where the religion is **abused and mocked** as opposed to facing mere criticisms. But here again, there is no call for the death penalty as we find in the Mosaic and Pakistani Laws. On the contrary, a Muslim, even in these 'painful' circumstances, is required to simply withdraw very politely from such abusive company '**until they (the offenders) enter into some other discourse.**' This tells us that the Holy Quran does not demand of us that we resort to any kind of hostile retaliation but encourages the offended parties to carry on social relations with the perpetrators when they are not engaged in such abusive discussions. Most notable is the emphasis on decent, polite behaviour even in these displeasing circumstances.

What better guidance is out there than this,

we may well ask ourselves, particularly in diverse societies where social interdependence is the order of the day; and what better way to arrest the increasing menace of misplaced Islamophobia?

It is indeed sad to see how far removed the explosive, near the maniacal response of some Pakistanis to the acquittal of Asia Bibi, is from the sublime Quranic guidance calling for tolerance and patience such as:

'... **hasten to forgiveness**' 3:133 and to

'**restrain anger and pardon men**' - 3:134.

Surely this is what those Pakistani mullahs should be teaching their followers if they wish them to honour the legacy of Muhammad (s). Do they not read the same Quran?

### **The Sunna - Practice and Teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s)**

About the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s), Almighty God says:

'And We have sent thee (Muhammad) **as a mercy to the nations.**' - 21:107.

This begs the question, if Muhammad (s) came as a '**mercy**' to the nations, most of who are not Muslim, would he have condoned behaviours that are contrary to the teachings of the Holy Quran as highlighted above? Nay! For it would indeed be tantamount to blasphemy even to think that the noble Messenger of Allah (s) would have done so because we know that he lived religiously by the Holy Quran. Besides, his closest companion, his wife Aisha, testifying to this fact, it is also confirmed in the Holy Quran thus:

'Say: I follow only that which is revealed to me from my Lord' – 7:203

Now if we consider that for years the Holy Prophet (s) suffered the most offensive verbal abuse and physical threats to his life by the Quraish; yet at the conquest of Makkah he took hold of the two sides of the gate of the Kaaba and said to the Quraish: 'How do you think I

should treat you?' They said: 'We hope for good, a noble brother and the son of a noble brother.' Then he said: 'I say as my brother Joseph said: **"No reproof be against you this day."**<sup>1</sup> The much revered Prophet and Messenger of Almighty Allah did not line up his opponents to be executed when he was in a position of power to do so. On the contrary, it is reported about him that:

The Messenger of Allah and his Companions **used to forgive the idolaters and the followers of previous books, as Allah had commanded them, and they used to show patience on hearing hurtful words.**<sup>2</sup>

And, it is reported that the Holy Prophet (s) said:

The Muslim who mixes with the people and **bears their hurtful words patiently is better** than one who does not mix with people and does not show patience under their abuse.<sup>3</sup>

Another incident of note depicting the Holy Prophet's forgiving and merciful nature was that involving Suhayl ibn Amr, an inveterate enemy from the Quraish tribe. Suhayl was a skillful orator, a talent he repeatedly used to malign the Holy Prophet (s) verbally. When he was captured at the Battle of Badr, Hazrat Umar sought permission from the Holy Prophet (s) to pull out his front teeth so he would not be able to use his oratory skills against the Prophet any-more. The Holy Prophet immediately responded:

"Certainly not! I will not mutilate anyone, for Allah would mutilate me even though I am

His Prophet."<sup>4</sup>

Once some Jews greeted the Prophet *as-samu alaikum* meaning 'death be upon you' instead of *assalamu alaikum* 'peace be upon you.' Aisha, his wife, on hearing this, replied:

'And upon you be death and curse.' The Holy Prophet told her:

Be calm, Aisha. You should be kind and lenient and beware of using harsh and bad language.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

The overwhelming evidence from the Holy Quran and *Sunna*, presented above, is sufficient to conclude beyond any reasonable doubt that acts of blasphemy, mockery, hurtful or abusive speeches, although a serious sin punishable by Almighty Allah as He alone pleases. They are certainly NOT punishable by death by human authorities as we have painfully witnessed in the case of Asia Bibi of Pakistan.

In fact, the best way for a Muslim to respond to any form of abusive language, besides bearing the provocation with patience and **'over-looking' and 'forgiving'**, would be to refute all allegations by presenting the true picture of Islam to the world with solid arguments and excellent examples of good manners and behaviours as called for in the Holy Quran:

**Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the best manner - 16:125**

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## Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore (UK)

Founders of the first Islamic Mission in the UK - established 1913 as the Woking Muslim Mission.

Dar-us-Salaam, 15 Stanley Avenue, Wembley, UK, HA0 4JQ

Centre: 020 3637 8159 · President: 01793 740670 · Secretary: 07737 240777 · Treasurer: 01932 348283

E-mail: [info@aaiil.uk](mailto:info@aaiil.uk)

Websites: [www.aaiil.org/uk](http://www.aaiil.org/uk) | [www.ahmadiyya.org](http://www.ahmadiyya.org) | [www.virtualmosque.co.uk](http://www.virtualmosque.co.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> *Al Tafsir al Kabir* (Commentary of the Holy Quran) – by Imam Fakhr al Din Razi ( re: *Sura Yusuf* Chapter 12: Verse 92)

<sup>2</sup> Bukhari, *'Book of Commentary on the Quran'* chapter 16 under *sura 3*. Muhsin Khan translation

<sup>3</sup> Mishkat ul Masabih, *'Book on Good Manners'*, chapter

'Gentleness, modesty and good behaviour', reported from Tirmidhi and Ibn Maja.

<sup>4</sup> Haykal, MH: *The Life of Muhammad*

<sup>5</sup> Bukhari, *Book of Good Manners*