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We welcome all scholarly contributions to The Light.

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 book *Nuzul-ul-Masih*, taken from the Lahore Ahmadiyya publication 'Essence of Islam', p. 106 – 108 where the Promised Messiah puts forward arguments and signs about his claim.)

A complete transformation beyond mere human power is worked in the person who is favoured with the word of God. His love for God is so extraordinary that he is out of his mind with love for Him, and his constancy and faithfulness in God's path knows no bounds. The certainty that reigns in such a person's heart makes him independent of all. He is an infallible guide and sits on the throne of sufficiency. Such is my condition but the world knows nothing of it.

Before I witnessed any miracle or obtained any heavenly assistance, I was drawn to Allah by the mighty magnetism of His word in a manner for which I cannot account. Sharp words cannot cut the tie asunder, and burning fire cannot frighten me. The magnetism which has worked upon my soul is beyond comprehension, above every description, and outside the grasp of the intellect. In the beginning was the Word (Divine revelation) and the Word wrought the wonderful transformation that has been worked in me. The invisible God first revealed Himself to me through His Word, and opened the door through which I listened to His sweet voice. His words acted like a magnet on my soul and was the cause of my attraction to the One God.

Oh that I had words to describe and give a notion to others of the deep impression that these words made upon my heart, the heights to which they made me soar, the transformation which they wrought in me! The extraordinary favour and grace with which He approached me,

none knows but I, and the unique place on which I stand in His love and devotion, none knows but He. But I say with truth that the initiation of this spiritual advancement and union with God lie only in His sweet word, whose sudden attraction transported me to quite unknown regions. A mighty hand took me up with such an irresistible force as a whirlwind drives a straw before it, and throws it in some distant place.

To speak to me of the possibility of my revelations only being a delusion is akin to telling a person that his seeing with his eyes, hearing with his ears, or speaking with his tongue, is not a fact, but a delusion. Is it possible that the person who knows that the closing of the eyes or the blocking of ears, or the cutting of the tongue shall deprive him of the powers of seeing, hearing or speaking shall, when these faculties are denied, entertain the least doubt about the existence of these faculties? Such is my condition with regard to the Divine revelation. The Word of God with which I was and am favoured is my spiritual mother from which I took my birth. It gave me a new life which I did not possess before and it breathed into me a soul which I had not before. I grew up in its bosom like a child. It took tender care of me, supporting me when I would have stumbled, and holding me up when my foot was about to slip. It went before me like a light until I reached my goal.

My heart cannot conceive a greater villainy than that I should entertain the least doubt as to the Divine origin of this revelation. I believe it to be the Word of God in the same manner as I believe that I speak with my tongue and hear with my ears. What! Should I deny it while it brought me to God, made me drink of the sweet fountain of knowledge and refreshed me with a cool and fresh breeze in times of suffocation? It came upon me in languages quite unknown to me, as English, Sanskrit and Hebrew. It proved itself to be the Word of God by majestic prophecies and grand heavenly signs. It laid open before me a treasure of fine truths and carried me to regions of knowledge which were unknown to me and my people. I flew on its wings until I reached the goal. It was revealed to me sometimes in words

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which were quite unknown to me, whether belonging to Arabic, English, or other languages. Do these shining proofs still leave the matter in doubt? Is it fair to evade these important points? ([Return to contents](#))

Eid-ul-Fitr Khutbah

Perform Good Deeds Being Sincere to Almighty Allah

Delivered at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Centre, South Africa

By Mr Ebrahim Mohamed



'He is the Living, there is no God but He; so call on Him, being sincere to Him in obedience. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds!' - 40:65

'The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion.' - 2:185

All praise is due to Allah, the Beneficent, the Most Merciful. We thank Him for having blessed us with the holy month of Ramadan. A month of reflection; of introspection; of quenching our spiritual thirst through fasting and prayers; of quickening the dormant feelings of empathy for the poor and indigent; of sharing and giving in charity seeking thereby the pleasure of Almighty Allah. Even in a world beset with materialism, Ramadan brings a heavenly atmosphere that touches the soul in many ways. This is what happens when humankind collectively strive to gain nearness to Allah; not individually like the single-minded hermit in the jungle but rather as one unit - a synergy of human souls - following the same pattern of fasting, prayers and charity across mother earth to taste the sweet spiritual blessings and joys of the Holy Month. Ramadan teaches us that human weaknesses prompted by our low desires that impede our spirituality can be brought under control and mastered through fasting, intensified prayers, charity, listening to the melodious recitals of the Holy Quran that resonate with the calls to prayer that fill the air of cities all over

the world where Muslims reside; but most importantly of seeking understanding, inspiration and guidance from the Holy Quran, the ultimate Criterion of all wisdom and guidance man would ever need for his success in this life and the next.

In the month of Ramadan, the devil that targets our base desires has been fettered with the chains of enhanced faith that marked the believers' resolve to transform their lives for the better. Thus, Ramadan taught us how to say NO to the promptings of the slinking devil and YES to the promptings of the angels that descend to inspire us and strengthen our will to do good and forbid evil. This is the ideal inspirational and transformative effect Ramadan is meant to have.

However, the one thing the Holy Quran repeatedly teaches us is to conduct our *ibadat* (all acts of worship) with sincerity of heart and purpose; as beautifully stated in the Holy Quran: *Mukhlisina lahudeena*, 'Being sincere to Him in obedience'. This is the overriding theme of this year's *khutba* and pray you will find it beneficial and useful.

Almighty Allah does not love superficiality and hypocrisy. Put simply, it is not about the quantity of your deeds but the quality. We have seen so many prayers surfacing and being circulated on social media during the holy days. These prayers whilst good by itself should not be made into a sort of ritualistic 'life or death must do or else' with the risk of being deprived of Allah's Mercy especially if you do not observe it on a particular night. The Holy Quran teaches us that Almighty Allah listens to prayers all the time when we appeal to Him with sincerity of heart. In fact, in the verse following the verse on fasting, Almighty Allah tells us - 'And when My servants ask thee concerning Me, surely I am near - I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me - so they should hear My call - and believe in Me - that they may walk in the right way' - (2:186). Almighty Allah, indeed, is near to us all the time and He answers our prayers but because we are so obsessed with worldly things, are weak of faith and often do not 'walk in the right way', we distance ourselves from Allah and therefore are unable to hear His call. At

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least in the month of Ramadan some of the veils of materialism were lifted as a result of our fasting and prayers and therefore during this time our supplications have added efficacy. And therefore, it is important that we make our best efforts to remain firm in our belief in Allah's Mercy and firm in our resolve to 'walk in the right way' and NOT deviate from the straight path if we are hopeful of our prayers being answered. And this should be our position not only in Ramadan but throughout our lives. Another thing to remember is that our prayers should not be made to obtain momentary relief from an immediate crisis without showing gratitude after being saved from distress. The Holy Quran warns us of such hypocrisy so common in human society. For example, in chapter 41 verses 50 and 51 we read:

'And if We make him taste mercy from Us after distress has touched him, he says: This is due to me, and I think not that the Hour will come to pass; and if I am sent back to my Lord, I shall have sure good with Him... - 41:50

'And when We show favour to man, he turns away and withdraws himself; but when evil touches him, he is full of *duah-i-arithin* - lengthy supplications.' - 41:51

Therefore, it is not the 'lengthy supplications' (*duahs*) that we make; nor the additional prayers; nor the amount of days we fast; nor the amount of money we give away in charity, by itself that are of importance to Almighty Allah, it is the **sincerity that accompanies such noble acts of worship** that is of paramount importance. If such acts are devoid of sincerity without constant reminders that we are nothing without the Beneficence of Almighty Allah, it loses its value in the sight of Almighty Allah. A 'high and mighty' attitude without humility and gratitude is condemned in the Holy Quran. Thus we are warned:

'So woe to the praying ones,' - 107:4

'Woe' means 'despair' 'unhappiness' 'wretchedness' 'despondency' etc. it is likened to 'distress'. Muslims may argue that their lengthy supplications and extra prayers ought to bring them happiness and success and not

despair. Indeed it should! So who are the Holy Quran referring to when it says 'woe' to the *mussalin* the 'praying ones?' The Holy Quran answers and says it is those:

'Who are **unmindful** of their prayer!' - 107:5

'**Unmindful**' means 'not to be conscious of or aware of'; also means 'paying no heed to'; or to be 'careless, reckless, etc.' So the 'praying ones' who are 'unmindful of their prayers' are the people who are not conscious of the fact that prayer is meant to be a communion with Almighty Allah; meant to build a connectivity between mortal man and the Almighty, Lord of the Universe. The Holy Quran is thus warning us that prayer should not be treated as a mere ritual to be rushed through aimlessly, merely to placate the conscience. Neither should it be driven by an over-blown ego zealous to impress others with a pretentious display of piety often confined to nothing more than superficial flowing gowns and neatly trimmed beards. These are the ones, the Holy Quran says, are those:

'Who do (good) to be seen,' 107:6

There are many who give in charity; who are present in the mosque five times a day; who give gilded speeches and sermons on social media; on television; on the radio. These are all very good, but of little use if done for mere show, '**doing good to be seen**' - rather than to serve Almighty Allah. These 'egotists' you will find are often the ones whose hearts are not tempered with kindness and empathy. Their attitudes are often marred by an indifference to the plights of the poor and the orphans and thus the Quran says of them:

'And (they) refrain from acts of kindness!' - 107:7

Ma'un 'acts of kindness' can be anything from removing a banana peel out of the way where people walk, a smile to a neighbour, giving an ear to the elderly, visiting the sick, feeding the beggar and the wayfarer. It is these humble acts of kindness done with love, empathy and sincerity without show or for worldly recognition and reward that the Holy Quran is drawing our attention to as being of value in the

sight of Almighty Allah.

The same attitude of 'unmindfulness' in prayers and condescendingly showing off our deeds, both of which are condemned in the Holy Quran, applies to giving in charity as well. The Holy Quran makes this quite clear in no uncertain terms when it says:

'A kind word with forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury.

'And Allah is Self-sufficient, Forbearing.' - 2:263

'O you who believe, make not your charity **worthless** by reproach and injury, like him who spends his wealth **to be seen of men** and believes not in Allah and the Last Day.' -2:264

It is clear from these verses that it is extremely hateful in the sight of Almighty Allah to injure by condescending and belittling those who you gave your charity to or even reminding them of such charity. If you do this your charity becomes 'worthless' in the sight of Allah. Your charity should be made in the same spirit of empathy and dignity as when you utter a kind word tempered with forgiveness.

We can see now from these lessons in the Holy Quran how important the adoption of the right 'attitude' of sincerity is in whatever we do; whether it is our fasts; our prayers; giving in charity; our relationships with family and friends etc.

It will benefit the whole community much if our attitudes to life should follow the guidance of the Holy Quran and not the dictates of our egos. Indeed, the Holy Quran calls on us to adopt an attitude that will ensure that we are of those:

23:2 Who are humble in their prayers,
23:3 And who shun what is vain,
23:4 And who act for the sake of purity,

Remember brothers and sister, the 1st of Shawaal beckons the timing of the propagation of the Holy Quran. To do this effectively much work is required and many sacrifices financially and physically are required. The Holy Quran as we all know was revealed in Arabic, the mother

tongue of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw). Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad *Mujaddid* of the Age, did a deep research on the Arabic language and proved with solid arguments that Arabic was indeed the 'mother of all languages' and thus the ideal medium for the expression of the final prophetic Word of Almighty Allah meant for the benefit of the entire world. There is no other language that has the capacity to express subtle and fine religious and secular truths, especially the lofty descriptions of the attributes of the Divine Being, as does the classical Quranic Arabic.

But the Holy Quran was meant for the entire world and not just for the Arabs and this brought to fore the necessity of translating the Holy Quran into different languages of the world. But the translation of the Holy Quran is not the work of just anyone, it requires, as the Holy Quran says in chapter 3 verse 7, pure minded, rightly guided persons, deeply rooted in knowledge and understanding, who are free of perverse tendencies and biases.

Let's look at the English translation which became a necessity of paramount importance with the establishment of the British Empire that dominated most of the world in the late 18th early 19th centuries. The first English translations were by Christians of British descent. These translations, well intended as it were, suffered in purity because of obvious Christian evangelical bias, which in many instances cast the Holy Prophet and in particular Islam in a bad light.

At that time Islam had suffered serious setbacks because of the infiltration and dominance of perverted ideologies and thinking of the *ulema* of the time. One or two Muslims attempted to translate the Quran into English but their attempts were localised to its place of origin in India and besides it was fragmentary, lacked insightful commentary that adequately addressed the negative issues facing Islam at the time. It thus had no far-reaching impact. A scholarly translation brought about under Divine guidance and inspiration that met the challenges Islam was facing at the time was indeed needed. This was indeed the task of a *Mujaddid*

raised by Almighty Allah and not just any ordinary scholar. It was Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad who said he was that Mujaddid. His works in defence of Islam and revivalist teachings proved his claim beyond a shadow of a doubt. Whilst the Muslim world was in a state of slumber and sheer apathy to the needs of Islam, he was the one who addressed the false doctrines and errors that had crept into Islam via misguided *ulema* under the influence of perverse Christian and Jewish thinking in particular such anti-Quranic teachings such as '*Calling Muslims Kafir; the doctrine of abrogation of verses of the Holy Quran; Jihad as an aggressive war and a means of forcing people to accept Islam; treating the Holy Quran secondary to the opinions of jurists; acceptance of hadith that contradicts the Holy Quran; the belief that Jesus ascended into heaven with his physical body; that saintly revelations and ijihad (rational thinking) had stopped; that apostates and adulterers should be executed; abuse of polygamy and women in general; the keeping of sex-slaves; the identity of Gog and Magog and 'the Beast from the Earth'; etc.* Besides this he rebutted Christian, Jewish and Hindu propaganda against Islam by writing profusely against it in defence of Islam. As mentioned, he did it at a time when Muslims were apathetic to the needs of Islam wasting their time away by fighting amongst each other much like they still doing today. He was thus quite rightly given the task by Almighty Allah to bring into existence not only an English translation of the Holy Quran but one with adequate commentary addressing all those false, un-Quranic perversities outlined above. It was in this context that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, saw in a true dream, that this noble task should be assigned to Maulana Muhammad Ali, a righteous, extremely dedicated and sincere follower adept in the English language. Anyone who has read, nay! studied the English translation by Maulana Muhammad Ali with commentary first released in 1917, more than a century ago, will testify that this is the only English translation that addresses all the discrepancies outlined above and thus you will understand why it is of such precious value to us. I challenge anyone still cynical towards and sceptical of the reformative work of this *Mujaddid* to go and interview the Taliban, ISIS, Al Qaeda, the Mullas of Pakistan and India and even here in South Africa about their understanding of the above-mentioned

discrepancies especially the problems with their twisted interpretations of *jihad* and their expectation of the return of a militant messiah, Jesus Christ himself; then visit the millions of victims, the widows, the orphans, the maimed in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia who have suffered as a result of the violence carried out by these fanatics in the name of Islam and try and work out for yourselves just why they, besides serving as proxies for Zionist Jews and the West, are behaving in this disgusting manner. The ideologies motivating those who kill in the name of Islam are based on those false interpretations of the Holy Quran and Hadith which the *Mujaddid* came to address as mentioned above; but were ignored.

We must, however, bear in mind that no translation can ever be entirely perfect. And as time progresses and as new learnings unfold, who knows Almighty Allah may raise another rightly guided servant of His to bring forward even more in depth and enlightening interpretations in the future.

For now, this translation is the touchstone of all translations and it is our task to ensure that it reaches the far corners of the world. There is no greater work in the sight of Almighty Allah than to propagate the message of the Holy Quran as best as you are able to. Remember our prayers, our fasts, our charities, our pilgrimage are for ourselves. It does not benefit Almighty Allah Who is Self-Sufficient but it benefits His mortal servants. The Holy Quran says: 'And Allah is Self-Sufficient and you are needy.'

What the Almighty requires from us is to deliver His message to the furthest corners of the world so that others who have not received it may benefit from it. The Holy Quran encourages:

'And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful.' - 3:104

Our organization was started on the broad principle of the injunction contained in this verse i.e. spreading goodness in the way of Allah

by means of the Holy Quran. We are proud pioneers of this work in the West. Our organization has seen to the translation of the Holy Quran into over 20 different languages as well as seen to the dissemination of hundreds of thousands of it since 1917 across the world and is ongoing.

Unfortunately, like the historians of the West that tend to suppress the real truths by not mentioning the great contributions Muslims made to the advancement of civilization, so our own Muslim brothers aping these *Dajjal*-type Westerners, deliberately ignore the great contributions made by the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam to the spread of the truth of Islam in the world.

When Maulana Muhammad Ali's English translation came out in 1917 it was revolutionary in that it made a huge impact on Western thinking and their opinions of Islam. A great admirer, Maulana Yaqub Khan, puts it very well and I quote:

'Maulana Muhammad Ali's Translation marks a definite epoch in the understanding of Islam. Among the Muslim intelligentsia it positively arrested the creeping decay of faith as a result of Western materialistic influences, and the sceptical trends of Western philosophic thought.'

'In the realm of Western scholarship, the impact of this Translation is noticeable in the changed outlook on Islam and the changed tone of literature about Islam that has since appeared. The very first indications of such wholesome change are met with in the writings of a man of no less scholarly stature than H.G. Wells. In 1920, when his work *The Outline of History*, appeared, it carried the whole section 16 of Chapter 3 as rendered in this Translation, describing it as an example of the Quran's "majestic utterances from the recent orthodox translation by the Maulvi Muhammad Ali."

Interpreting the Word of God calls for great gifts of scholarship, no doubt, but it requires something much more, which no scholarship can confer – the gift of inner purity. Maulana Muhammad Ali wielded a scholar's pen with a saint's hand, and that is where lay the secret of

this Translation becoming a real spiritual force and a beacon of light for seekers-after-truth.' – Unquote.

Indeed, this is what distinguishes Muhammad Ali from the host of all other translators.

We are therefore appealing to all to support this cause of making available this translation of the Holy Quran to as many of those who yearn for this light; even if you purchase just one Quran and donate it to a deserving family member, friend or stranger. In the broader scheme of things, you will soon realise that it is more rewarding than just handing out food to sustain the body and neglect to provide food for the soul. Therefore, as we say farewell to Ramadan, may we become as passionate about the spiritual needs of humankind as well. ([Return to contents](#))

Madrasa Reform

Is the Creation of a Progressive Islamic The-

ology Possible with Ulema

Steeped in the Dars-e-Nizami

Curriculum?

By Ghulam Rasool Dehlvi,

New Age Islam



Progressive Islamic Theology

A progressive Islamic theology based on the rationalist as well as traditionalist foundations has long been emphasised. It is conceived in order to enable the Islamic scholars to creatively rethink their positions on the issues of contemporary relevance. Those glorified as ulema - the graduates of the traditional Islamic seminaries (madrasas) - are still looked up as thought leaders and instructors in the daily practical life of Muslims the world over. But regrettably, they are no longer intellectually capable to tackle the baffling issues and challenges posed to the Ummah or global Muslim community. As a matter of fact, today's ulema are not well-equipped with the modern scholastic abilities to guide the global Muslim society in the rapidly changing and dynamically emerging issues of modern life.

Sorry State of Affairs

But deplorably, the present-day ulema and muftis boast of their thoughts deeply steeped in an unreformed madrasa curriculum – the Dars-e-Nizami. Often, they issue such irrelevant religious decrees or *fatwas* that make a mockery of the daily affairs of Muslim life. This is precisely the reason behind the stereotyped image of Muslims in the wider world. Fatwas based on the misconstrued and 'out-of-context' texts put the Muslims to collective shame and cynicism. One wonders if they are stuck in the pre-historic age and are completely out of touch with the scientific truths.

As the world Muslims grapple with an increasing number of religious and geopolitical issues, the ulema and Islamic thought leaders miserably fail to accomplish their duty. Rather, their regressive pronouncements only enhance the perception that Muslims are not open to progressive thoughts or fresh ideas.

This is actually an inevitable result of the clergy's failure in developing a canonical Islamic worldview incorporating the progressive Qura'nic traditions in full harmony with the established scientific trends. At a time when the world has ushered in an enlightened era of scientific ideas, Muslim theologians are in a dire need for a gradual logical progression in their socio-religious thoughts. This should be the urgent task of the Madrasas which enable their students to grasp the past Islamic tradition with efficiency but fail to help them understand modern humanities and sciences.

Madrasa Discourses

In view of this pressing necessity, an experimental project of Madrasa reformation is conducted by faculty at the US-based University of Notre Dame, as part of its "Contending Modernities" initiative. It was launched in January 2017 as a 3-year online program for the Madrasa students across the world to enhance their literacy, intellectual capacity and academic engagement. The university's website has plainly put the objective of this initiative as follows:

"The ulema provide crucial religious guidance in values and everyday practice to Muslims around the world. They are the custodians of traditional learning in Muslim societies and particularly in South Asia, helping shape the social and cultural outlook of their communities. Upgrading the capacity of these theologians could have a multiplier effect on millions. A transformative impact on the ulema, and by extension, on Muslim societies beyond South Asia, is a long-term goal of this project".

Entitled as "Madrasa Discourses", this extensive program is primarily focused on the conciliation of traditional Islamic theology with contemporary scientific notions. The three-year course primarily consists of four introductory parts: *Ilmul Kalam* (Islamic scholastic theology), Islamic jurisprudence (*Ilm-ul-Fiqh*), Muslim history (*al-Tarikh al-Islami*) and an objective study of different branches of the classical and modern Islamic theology. In addition, the English and Arabic language abilities are also imparted to the madrasa students enrolled in this course. They are recommended to hone their English language skills through the BBC English learning program.

A group of eminent Islamic scholars who are well-versed in classical Islamic sciences and well-trained in the modern universities—are the lead faculties of this long-term course. Most notable among them are: (1) Dr. Ebrahim Moosa, a Professor of Islamic Studies at the university of Notre Dame who is trained in both traditional (orthodox) Islamic institutions in India and in the modern academy specializing in the study of religion at the University of Cape Town. (2) Dr. Mahan Mirza, a Professor at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, who has spent several years working with religious groups around issues of social justice. (3) Dr. Waris Mazhari, a graduate of Darul Uloom Deoband, who presently serves as a lecturer at the Department of Islamic Studies in Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia. (4) Maulana Ammar K. Nasr of the Shariah Academy at International Islamic University in Pakistan

An Innovative Islamic Curriculum

The Madrasa Discourse program has put

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forward an innovative Islamic curriculum with potentially transformative experience for the Ulema, imams and other madrasa graduates. It offers rich intellectual resources to reshape their thoughts in spirit with the intellectual Islamic traditions and in full synergy with the moral trajectories of peaceful coexistence in the modern interreligious and multicultural society.

Professor Ebrahim Moosa, the director of the Madrasa Discourse, expounds that this project is aimed to achieve the "conciliation between traditional Islamic thought and contemporary scientific and philosophical world views". Talking to this writer, Prof. Moosa said that Madrasa graduates need to understand contemporary humanities, science and social science, not as experts but as part of their basic literacy. That will enable them to become able and relevant interpreters of Islam today.

But this cannot be accomplished without a reformed educational curriculum that could enable the ulema to update their age-old intellectual tradition by deepening their theological and scientific literacy. Given this, the Madrasa Discourse program could be seen as a step towards the Renaissance in the modern intellectual history of the ulema tradition.

When asked about the nature of madrasa education reform that this project intends to bring out in the Indian subcontinent, Prof. Moosa replied: "Even the best reforms of madrasa education in India and Pakistan today hardly meet the minimal standards of what is required in terms of reform. In this experimental Madrasa Discourses project, we have witnessed the transformative experiences many recent madrasa graduates have gained. They are challenged intellectually, and they have shown to be most capable in acquiring the skills necessary for them to become thought leaders in their communities."

Prof. Moosa strongly advocates radical reform in madrasa education. "It is required in order to create a dynamic Muslim religious leadership who can both preserve the best of tradition and construct a modern Muslim theology for the twenty first century", he believes.

Unquestionably, today's ulema and Islamic theologians find themselves incapable to provide incisive guidance in modern societies, because their medieval interpretations of the Islamic theology are patently out of date. Without understanding how history changes society and persons, how can the ulema be the thought leaders in their community?

I raised this question to Professor Mahan Mirza too. He commented that if madrasa students are given a chance to engage with the contemporary intellectual currents, they will develop syntheses that will make both the tradition and its bearers--the ulema--once again relevant, if not central, in the lifeblood of Muslim societies as guides and peacemakers. "I think the Madrasa education system needs to expose students to different conceptual universes that science and philosophy have opened up for us today. This does not mean that Madrasa students are to be converted to ways of thinking that are alien to the classical scholarly tradition of Islam. Instead, renewal in Islamic thought will take place organically as a result of genuine encounters with new knowledge and modern experiences", Mirza said.

Onsite Intensive Madrasa Program

Recently, as part of the Madrasa Discourse, an onsite intensive program was held in the ongoing summer. In 4-hour sessions held every day jointly via Zoom and participated by both Indian and Pakistani Madrasa graduates, an array of interesting topics were lively discussed and independently rethought and debated between the madrasa students and their instructors. In New Delhi's Don Bosco Provincial School, while Dr. Waris Mazhari discussed theoretical conceptions of *Ilm ul Kalam* (Islamic philosophy) in light of Imam Ghazali's writings, Prof. Mahan Mirza analyzed the key readings from *Sophie's World*, an interesting novel which explores the myriad notions of the Western philosophical thought. On the other hand in Pakistan, Maulana Ammar K. Nasr, speaking via Zoom, dwelt on Ibn Khaldun and his principles of historiography with a critical appreciation.

On April 7, the Madrasa Discourse's onsite intensive program was organised in JNU's School Of Language, Literature and Culture

Studies. Presiding over the session, Prof. Altaf Ahmad Azmi, former head of Centre for History of Medicine & Science (Faculty of Islamic Studies & Social Sciences, Hamdard University) discussed the key issues and debates in the Islamic philosophy (*Ilm ul-Kalam*). In this event, a considerable number of students from different departments of JNU also participated and interacted with the Madrasa Discourse faculty. Noted historian, Professor A.K. Ramakrishna of JNU addressed the students on the philosophy of history, particularly reflecting on the prominent Muslim thinkers.

At the end of this onsite intensive program of the Madrasa Discourse, a two-day field trip was arranged for the students to visit India's reputed Muslim educational institution, Aligarh Muslim University. They interacted with the noted Islamic historian, Prof. Yaseen Mazhar Siddiqui (formerly associated with AMU's Department of Islamic Sciences), among others. Professor Siddiqui, who is esteemed as an authoritative Islamic historiographer, addressed questions ranging from the principles of Islamic historiography, texts and contexts of the Hadith and Sirah literature to modern critical subjects related to the Islamic jurisprudence or Fiqh.

Interestingly, Professor Siddiqui who is himself a Hanafi practitioner noted that the history of Sunni-Hanafi jurisprudence is replete with many instances of various practices which were strictly followed earlier by the Hanafi Muslims, but later on, were abolished by the Sunni-Hanafi imams and ulema due to changes in the socio-political contexts. "Today's social conditions require the Hanafi clergy to incorporate the essential reforms in the Sharia laws including the Triple Talaq. Islamic jurisprudential framework has adequate scope for reform in the divorce laws, contrary to what some traditionalist and non-rationalist Muslims might think", he stated it in his response to a question raised by a female participant of the Madrasa Discourse.

Adding his reflection to this debate, Maulana Waris Mazhari opined that Hanafi scholars will do best to take the reformation initiative by themselves. Most Hanafi Muslims, he said, are in misconception that any reform originating from

outside the Hanafi-Sunni jurisprudence is abhorrent and unlawful. "This is why they oppose the argument for the triple Talaqs in one sitting to be just one, not three. In fact, this concept has no authentic foundation in the Islamic jurisprudence", he added. ([Return to contents](#))

Muhammad (SAS) was unlettered, Not Illiterate

By Sara Manar

(Editor's note: The Holy Quran refers to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) and to his people as *ummi*. This is generally taken to mean that, in the case of the Holy Prophet (s), he could not read or write. Some time ago, we published in *The Light* an alternative explanation for the application of this word to the Holy Prophet and his people. This showed that the Holy Prophet (s) could read and write. A student, Sara Manar, in reply to the same question has come up with a further explanation of what *ummi* might have meant as applied to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s). We share her thoughts with our readers.)

To understand this subtlety, a consideration of Arab culture is needed. Muhammad (SAS) was a member of the Quraysh. This had been the Arab elite tribe par excellence. The pedigree of its members reached all the way back to Abraham (AS). Put alternately, there is no purer aristocracy in the Arab world.

Many Quraysh clans had been very affluent, too. Their members were Arab patrician merchants. Theirs was a refined culture of utmost sophistication. Eloquence and poetry comprised the civilisational core. Debates, discourses, politics, propaganda were carried out in poetic styles. The better the eloquence, the profounder the poetry, the higher the status.

Muhammad (SAS) lived in this hyper-aristocratic and ultra-elitist environment. His clan was comparatively humble. No riches, no dazzling poets, no power, no sterling scholars. Just good and honest folks.

Abu Bakr (RA) by comparison was the paragon Quraysh member. Affluent, cultured,

I Shall Love All Mankind.

educated, influential, powerful, refined and sophisticated. In other words, an aristocrat, a patrician and a respected expert in poetry.

Gauged by Quraysh standards, Muhammad (SAS) was a regular man. Which is to say, that he didn't command eloquence and poetry.

His status changed with the Qur'anic text. The Qur'an is couched in the most superb Quraysh dialect imaginable. This was quite unexpected. The members of the Quraysh elite didn't reckon with this scintillating poetry. Least of all as declaimed by an unlettered Arab merchant.

As such Muhammad (SAS) couldn't have been illiterate. Basic reading and writing skills were required to enter business dealings.

In the Quraysh world of poetic eloquence and high culture he was misplaced. Until the divine Qur'anic Arabic dialect put him at the apex of the Meccan civilisation. ([Return to contents](#))

Faces of Muhammad

Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today

A Book By John Tolan

(**Note:** John Tolan works on the history of religious and cultural relations between the Arab and Latin worlds in the Middle Ages and on the history of religious interaction and conflict between Jews, Christians and Muslims. He received a BA in Classics from Yale, an MA and a PhD in History from the University of Chicago, and an Habilitation à diriger des recherches from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. He has taught and lectured in universities in North America, Europe, Africa and the Middle East and is currently Professor of History at the University of Nantes and co-director of the Institut du Pluralisme Religieux et de l'Athéisme (IPRA, www.ipra.eu), and member of the Academia Europaea. He is



author of numerous articles and books in medieval history and cultural studies, including *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers* (1993) *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (2002), *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (2008), *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (2009), and (with Gilles Veinstein and Henry Laurens) *Europe and the Islamic World* (2012). He has served as director of the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Ange Guépin* (2008-2011: <http://www.msh.univ-nantes.fr/>) and principal investigator of the ERC advanced grant program "RELMIN: The legal status of religious minorities in the Euro-Mediterranean world" (2010-2015: <http://relmin.univ-nantes.fr/>). He is Chairman of the ERC's SH6 panel "The Study of the Human Past" (for starting grants) for 2017.)

In European culture, Muhammad has been vilified as a heretic, an impostor, and a pagan idol. But these are not the only images of the Prophet of Islam that emerge from Western history. Commentators have also portrayed Muhammad as a visionary reformer and an inspirational leader, statesman, and lawgiver. In *Faces of Muhammad*, John Tolan provides a comprehensive history of these changing, complex, and contradictory visions. Starting from the earliest calls to the faithful to join the Crusades against the "Saracens," he traces the evolution of Western conceptions of Muhammad through the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and up to the present day.

Faces of Muhammad reveals a lengthy tradition of positive portrayals of Muhammad that many will find surprising. To Reformation polemicists, the spread of Islam attested to the corruption of the established Church and prompted them to depict Muhammad as a champion of reform. In revolutionary England, writers on both sides of the conflict drew parallels between Muhammad and Oliver Cromwell, asking whether the prophet was a rebel against legitimate authority or the bringer of a new and just order. Voltaire first saw Muhammad as an archetypal religious fanatic but later claimed him as an enemy of superstition. To Napoleon, he was simply a role model: a brilliant general,

orator, and leader.

The book shows that Muhammad wears so many faces in the West because he has always acted as a mirror for its writers, their portrayals revealing more about their own concerns than the historical realities of the founder of Islam.

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“The Quran addressed women directly”

By **Arita Sarkar**

(From: <https://bit.ly/2xytlbS>)

Authors of a new illustrated title on Islam explain why the history of the religion is incomplete without its women “The Quran addressed women directly”.

At a time when certain Islamic traditions are mired in controversy, the rich cultural heritage of the religion, which dates back to over 1,400 years, has gone unnoticed. A new book, *Islam: An Illustrated Journey*, authored by Dr Farhad Daftary and Prof Zulfikar Hirji, attempts to provide a window to understanding the religion better.

Replete with drawings, charts and maps, it introduces us to the various schools of thought, doctrines and interpretations of the religion. “Islam has many faces and voices. It is a testament to the willingness of Muslims to work with local, regional and global cultures to express themselves,” says Hirji.

While Hirji is a social historian of Muslim societies and cultures and is currently an associate professor of anthropology at York University in Toronto, his co-author, Daftary, is the co-director of the department of academic re-

search and publications at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London.

Apart from the descriptions of men who shaped the history of the religion, the book also mentions the contributions of several women who were key patrons and political leaders. “When you read the general histories of Islam, it tends to be written as a series of histories about men as rulers or religious clerics. But there were women, too. We made a very conscious effort to tell those stories and show the ways in which women were absolutely present in all societies and what they meant to the overall history of Islam,” Hirji says.

One example here is Khadija, the Prophet's wife; she was one of the first to embrace Islam and played an important role in comforting the Prophet. Citing another example, Hirji mentions the Sultanate of Women during the Ottoman empire. “Some of the men in the Ottoman court were weak rulers and it was the women who carried the dynasty forward by developing inter-

national relations, participating in state craft and patronising civic institutions. They were absolutely instrumental in ensuring the longevity of the Ottoman dynasty. **Writing a history without women would have been telling half the story,**” he says.

When asked why misogyny continues in certain Islamic countries, Hirji says this problem is not unique to Islam. He feels **the position of women is often based on the reading of texts from a male perspective and also societal norms and customs, which people find difficult to shed.**

Hirji says that the Quran, however, addresses Muslim men and women as equal and distinctive entities. “The Quran, in Arabic, says, ‘O believing men and believing women’. It actually addresses women directly and specifically in their own right.” ([Return to contents](#))

AUGUST ACTIVITIES

Sunday 11th August **EID UL ADHA**
Friday 16th to Sunday 18th **UK CONVENTION.**

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore (UK)

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