

# IS<sub>HALL</sub> LOVE ALL M<sub>ANKIND</sub>.



## The Light

November  
2019

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Do you shrink from sin and act righteously like one who shrinks from the use of poison? – The Promised Messiah

God Does not discriminate - it is not an attribute of God to discriminate, it is an attribute of Mankind – Mustaq Ali

A crucial aspect of achieving religious freedom . . . separate religious . . . and state authorities . . . so, both the ulema and dissenting religious groups enjoy . . . religious freedom. This will . . . improve individual religious freedom of Muslim and non-Muslim - Ahmet T Kuru

## 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. 118 -122, where the Promised Messiah puts forward arguments and signs about his claim.)

The Holy Quran is, no doubt, the Word of God and His most excellent word, but it is a sealed book to you, oh sleepers! Your eyes cannot see it, nor can your understanding comprehend it. It is placed in your hands, but you cannot get its blessings similar to the unbelieving among the Jews who had the books of the prophets in their hands. If you are honest, you shall bear witness that on account of the disappearance of the light of certainty from your eyes, you cannot avail yourselves of the Quran's sanctification. If the testimony of external facts has any weight, you can bear witness against your condition in this age, if you are to bear a true testimony. Tell me truthfully: do you shrink from sin and act righteously like one who shrinks from the use of poison? Can you honestly say you are walking firmly on the path of piety on which the Holy Quran has laid so much stress? Can you candidly say that your life shows you act from a place of deep conviction? Can you truly declare that you love God as ardently as His righteous servants do, and you can show the kind of constancy and firmness in his path which the sacred ones have shown?

Call Heaven as your witness: do you have an undisguised aversion to the rotten carcass of base motives and worldly desires? Are you soaring towards the true God with sincerity, zeal, and singleness of heart? Don't pretend or try to please others only like a vain braggart, for there is a God who sees everything you do and hears every word you utter, and know while you

speak that His wrath is a consuming fire whose flames devour every vanity and conceit in an instant. Tell me honestly, are not your feet so enchained that you cannot move out of worldly desires and worldly vanities, your hearts so bent upon selfish motives that you cannot aspire after anything higher, your necks so bowed down that you cannot raise your heads to heaven, and your hands so tied that you cannot do anything which is not of worldly benefit?

Had you a definite belief in God, you would have shunned the poison of sin. The whole world would have perished because of this poison, had it not been for the timely establishment of this heavenly movement by the Divine hand. But if you boast that you are faultless and free from the darkness of sin and attracted towards God by the powerful attraction of surety, I tell you plainly that you have told a lie and brought a false charge against the Maker of the heavens and the Earth. For this blatant falsehood, the curse of God could soon overtake you and disclose your misdeeds before you die.

Certainty does not come alone. It is attended with its light. No one can take you to heaven but he who comes from heaven. If you knew that the fresh and certain Word of God is the true remedy for your diseases, you would not have rejected him who came with this blessing. Woe to those who trifle, for no deed can rise to heaven until it proceeds out of certainty. Internal dross and impurities cannot be washed, nor spiritual diseases cured until the heart overflows with firm conviction. You boast of your Islam, but what you have is a lifeless routine of formal ceremonies, not the living organism, the essence of Islam.

True Islam works a manifest transformation. A light is kindled in the heart which burns the lower desires and worldly motives, and a new life is breathed into the Muslim, of which you are yet unaware. All this comes after certainty, after the sure Word of God, which comes from heaven. God is known through God, and not by any other means. Just as you know, those better who talk familiarly with you so does a person advance in the knowledge of God through His word. ([Return to contents](#))

*I Shall Love All Mankind.*

## Does God discriminate?

By **Mustaq Ali**

Secretary AAAIL (UK)



(Note: Based on a *khutba* delivered by Mr Ali at our Centre in London on 27 August 2019)

My *khutba* today is taken from ch. 99 v. 7 of the Holy Quran: “Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will also see it.”

There is a great misconception that the God of Islam or the God of the Muslims discriminates in favour of Muslims. What do I mean by this? Well, most Muslims try to stay on the straight and narrow on the premise that hell will be filled with the disbelievers, the rejectors of the faith.

To these people, I ask the question: What about those who came before the Holy Prophet Muhammad and before Abraham, what about those who have no faith?

Are human beings capable of performing acts of kindness and good deeds without having any faith?

A study of the Quran and other scriptures reveals some interesting points for discussion which I hope to elucidate in this short sermon today.

The meaning of the word discriminate is: “to make an unjust or prejudicial distinction in the treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, sex, or age”. For this sermon, I want to extend this definition to include the performance of deeds, places of worship and freedom to choose or not.

So let us investigate the dictates of the Quran to see if there is any truth in this statement that the God of Muslims discriminates when it comes to race, sex, age, the doing of deeds, favours mosques over other places of worship and forces one to accept a religion.

## Performance of deeds

The Quran says: “whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it and whosoever does an atom's weight of evil will also see it” (99:7-8). Nowhere does it say which religion you should profess or that you have to be a Muslim only to be rewarded for a good deed.

“O my son, even if it be the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, even though it be in a rock, or the heaven or the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Surely Allah is Knower of what you do, Aware” (31:16).

“We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgment so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least, and if there be (no more than) the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it (to account): and enough are We to take account” (21:47).

Commenting of these verses *Tafsir of Ibn Kathir* says: “Here we see no discrimination of the deed or the doer of deeds.”

“Our Lord, grant us what You promised us through Your messengers (all the biblical prophets) and do not disgrace us on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed, You do not fail in [Your] promise” (3:194).

Allah here uses the word *messengers*, and this includes the prophets of all religions, including Buddha - who is referred to in the Quran in 21:85 as *Dhul Kifl*.

So when it comes to good deeds and the performance of acts of kindness, Allah says that He knows, and He sees and he will bring it forth on the Day of Resurrection, irrespective of how small it may be whether it be the weight of a grain or a mustard seed or smaller such as the weight of an atom – you will not be dealt with unjustly.

## Protection of places of worship

“And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters and churches and synagogues

and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered would have been pulled down" (22:40).

So just as Allah protects places of worship, a Muslim must do the same for the followers of other religions.

### **Freedom of religion**

"There is no compulsion in religion; the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error" (2:256).

"And fight them until there is no more persecution, and all religions for Allah" (8:39).

"when you go forth (to fight) in Allah's way, make investigation, and say not to anyone who offers you salutation, Thou art not a believer, seeking the good of this world's life" (4: 94).

### **Gender**

"Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and guard their modesty. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is Aware of what they do.

And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and guard their modesty and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof" (24:30-31).

"Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember — Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward" (33:35).

No Gender discrimination here in the promise to men and women who believe and work to have a relationship with God.

### **Humanity is one brotherhood**

"O humanity, Surely We have created you from a male and a female and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware" (49:13).

Here Allah, the God of Adam and Eve, the God of Noah, Moses and Abraham, the God of Jesus, Buddha and Muhammad is addressing all of Mankind, and he states that the noblest of you is the most dutiful of you.

### **Does the concept of submission or who is a Muslim include followers of other faiths?**

The word *Muslim* means one who professes Islam, one who submits. It comes from the root word *aslama*, which means someone who has resigned himself.

To become a Muslim, one has to recite: "I bear witness that there is no God except Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah".

However, we see in the Quran that someone who submits himself to the will of God and believes in the last day, they are also Muslims. We read about Abraham-

"Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim; and he was not one of the polytheists.

The nearest of people to Abraham are surely those who follow him and their Prophet and those who believe. And Allah is the Friend of the believers" (3:67-68).

So the people who followed Abraham were Muslims by their conduct and righteousness.

The Quran tells us in 3:52 that the disciples of Jesus were submitting ones or Muslims

"But when Jesus perceived disbelief on their part, he said: Who will be my helpers in Allah's way? The disciples said: We are Allah's helpers:

we believe in Allah, and bear thou witness that we are submitting ones”.

“And Mary, the daughter of Amran, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into him Our inspiration, and she accepted, the truth of the words of her Lord and His Books, and *she was of the obedient ones*” (66:12). In other words, she was a Muslim.

“Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, they have their reward with their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve” (2:62).

So the concept of a Muslim existed before the Holy Prophet Muhammad because anyone who submits their free will to God and is a doer of good deeds is by definition, a Muslim.

### **Did God change the core of His message over time so he could favour the Muslims over other people?**

The Quran says: “Say he Allah is one. Allah is he on whom all depend. He begets not and nor is He begotten and there is none like Him.”

The Bible in Deuteronomy 6, verse 4: “Hear ye O Israel, the Lord thy God is one.”

Bible in 2 Samuel 7:22: “For this reason You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”

Psalm 83:18: “That they may know that You alone, whose name is the Lord, Are the Most High over all the earth.”

Psalm 86: “For You are great and do wondrous deeds; You alone are God.”

Isaiah 43:10: “You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me.”

Atharva gives a unique definition of god rejecting any form of polytheism:

“There is no second God, nor a third, nor is even a fourth spoken of

“There is no fifth God or a sixth, nor is even a seventh mentioned.

There is no eighth God, nor a ninth. Nothing is spoken about a tenth even.

This unique power is in itself. That Lord is only one, the only omnipresent. It is one and the only one.”

In the Yajurveda – chapter- 32: “It has been said that God Supreme or Supreme Spirit has no ‘Pratima’ (idol) or material shape. God cannot be seen directly by anyone. God pervades all beings and all directions.”

The opening verse of the Guru Granth Sahib, known as the Mool Mantra, signifies this in English: One Universal Creator God. The Name Is Truth.

### **Eating of Pork forbidden in previous scriptures**

The Bible in Leviticus 11:7-8 says: “And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.” In Judaism, pork is forbidden

The Quran says in 5:3: “Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine”.

### **Alcohol discouraged in previous scriptures**

“Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. **Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end, it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.** Your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind will imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. ‘They hit me,’ you will say, ‘but I’m not

hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?" " Proverbs, 23:29-35.

**"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise"** Proverbs 20:1.

"O you who believe, intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an uncleanness, the devil's work; so shun it that you may succeed. **The devil desires only to create enmity and hatred among you through intoxicants and games of chance**, and to keep you back from the remembrance of Allah and prayer. Will you then keep back?" The Quran, 5:90-91.

### **Moderate Dress encouraged in previous scriptures**

"Beauty should not come from outward adornments, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, *it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.* For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful." (The Bible, NIV, 1 Peter 3:2-5)

In all pictures of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, her head is covered.

"O Children of Adam! We have bestowed clothing upon you to cover yourselves and as an adornment; and the clothing of *taqwa* (righteousness), that is *best*. (The Quran, 7:26).

"And let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms. And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers" (The Quran 24:31).

"O Prophet, tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of believers to let down upon them their over-garments. This is more proper, so that they may be known, and not be given trouble. And Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful" (The Quran, 33:59).

In Judaism, it is also forbidden for a man to wear a woman's garment and vice versa (Deuteronomy 22:5).

In Christianity: "But every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head" (1 Corinthians 11:5).

### **Did God change Fasting, Sacrifice, the direction of Prayer and the method of the prayer in the scriptures to positively discriminate in favour of Muslims?**

**Fasting-** "When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:16-18).

"While they were worshipping the Lord and *fasting*" (Acts 13:2-3).

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After **fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.**" Matthew 4:1-4

Moses was "there with the Lord forty days and forty nights **without eating bread or drinking water**. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments" (Exodus 34:28).

"O you who believe, **fasting** is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil" (The Quran 2: 183).

In **Hinduism**, fasting is a Vedic practice. In Sanskrit, the word for fast is *upavasa*. This means, 'sitting near to ...', which implies being in the presence of God.

In **Judaism** There are two major fast days and four minor fast days that are part of the

Jewish year. The two major fasts, Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av, last just over twenty-four hours. They begin before sundown when it is still light outside, and end after the next sundown, when it is dark outside, and three stars can be seen in the sky. This fast is absolute. The faster may not eat food, drink, brush his teeth, comb his hair, or take a bath. Minor fasts differ in their duration from a major fast. No food or drink is taken from dawn until nightfall.

### **Sacrifice to God is as old as humanity**

**The Bible** says: "By faith, Abel offered God a better **sacrifice** than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. (Hebrews 11:4)

The Quran says: "And relate to them with truth the story of the two sons of Adam, when they offered a sacrifice, but it was accepted from one of them and was not accepted from the other" (The Quran, 5:27).

"And when he reached with him [the age of] exertion, he said, O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think. He said, O my father, do as you are commanded. You will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast. (The Quran, 37:10).

According to Genesis (22:16-18) Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

"Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it" (Genesis, 8:20).

But Moses said "You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the Lord our God" (Exodus 10:25).

In Judaism a *korban* was a kosher animal sacrifice, such as a bull, sheep, goat (in Islam we say "Qurbani").

The Rig Veda and the Yajur Veda speak of

animal sacrifices as well.

### **Are the methods of Prayer different?**

How to prayer? Although the prayer can (and should) be done from any bodily position, the Bible lists five specific postures: Sitting (2 Sam 7:18), standing (Mark 11:25), kneeling (Chronicles 6:13; Daniel 6:10; Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60, 9:40, 20:36, 21:5; Ephesians 3:14), with one's face to the ground (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:35), and with hands lifted up (1 Timothy 2:8).

**Judaism** - Stand, Bow, Sit, Prostrate with their face to the ground (Genesis, 48:12). Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. Similar positions are assumed when a Hindu performs their ritual worship.

### **Summary**

So in summary, after looking at the Quran in some detail, after looking at the Core of the message of God through scriptures and prophets I can conclude that God, Ella, Allah, Yahweh, Jehovah, Jealous, Parmeshwar - by whichever name you call the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, his message was fundamentally the same.

God Does not discriminate - it is not an attribute of God to discriminate; it is an attribute of Mankind. I used the various names of God mentioned in the scriptures because Allah says in the Quran:

"Say: Call on Allah or call on the Beneficent. By whatever (name) you call on Him, He has the best names. And utter not thy prayer loudly nor be silent in it, and seek a way between these" (The Quran, 17:110).

Allah Admonishes the whole of humanity to come together and at least agree on a few things to live in harmony and peace:

"Say: O People of the Book, come to an equitable word between you and us, that we shall

<sup>1</sup> According to Muslims, it was Ishmael and not Isaac, but the principle still holds.

serve none but Allah and that we shall not associate aught with Him, and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah. But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness, we are Muslims" (The Quran, 3:64).

I close with this verse of the Quran:

"And thou will find the nearest to the believers in friendship are those who say, 'We are Christians,' because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant" (5:82).  
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## Islam and Institutional Religious Freedom

**By Prof Ahmet T. Kuru**

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(Ahmet T. Kuru is a professor of political science at San Diego State University and the author of *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

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This Cornerstone Forum series, of which this article is the second, is published under RFI's Freedom of Religious Institutions in Society (FORIS) Project. FORIS is a three-year initiative funded by the John Templeton Foundation to clarify the meaning and scope of institutional religious freedom, examine how it is faring globally, and explore why it is worthy of public concern. This series aims to address the first set of issues (i.e., the meaning and scope of institutional religious freedom.)

In July 2019, Pew Research Center published a report on religious restrictions around

the world. Although Muslim-majority countries constitute only about a quarter of all cases examined in the report, they constitute over three-quarters (18/22) of the cases "with most restrictive laws and policies toward religious freedom."

In the Muslim world, exceptionally high levels of legal and governmental restrictions on religious freedom are directly associated with various socio-political problems, including limitations on freedom of speech, press, and assembly.

Therefore, those who seek to promote democratization in the Muslim world should thoroughly examine restrictions on religious freedom, even if they regard religion as a reactionary force. The next crucial step is to ask: What explains the high levels of restrictions on religious freedom plaguing the Muslim world?

Religious freedom should be understood as having individual and institutional dimensions. The former protects the liberty of individuals to act in accord with their religious beliefs, in private and public. The latter protects the liberty of religious organisations to function in society consistent with their faith.

A purely individualistic understanding of liberal democracy assumes that individual religious freedom may be secured without institutional religious freedom. In reality, however, the two are interdependent.

The rest of this article will argue that in the Muslim world, historical restrictions on institutional religious freedom have caused contemporary limitations on both dimensions of religious freedom.

### Does Islam Reject Religion-State Separation?

Institutional and individual religious freedom requires a certain level of religion-state separation. If the state fully establishes a particular religion, this inescapably means legal, financial, and discursive discriminations against those who do not follow that religion. Such a

full-fledged state establishment implies restrictions, even upon those who believe in and practice the established religion, but in a different way than defined by the state.

Many observers have claimed that Islam inherently rejects religion-state separation. If this is true, it is impossible to achieve religious freedom completely in the Muslim world.

I disagree with these observers. My new book, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment*, explains that in early Muslim history (from the seventh to the mid-eleventh century) most Islamic scholars had a certain level of separation from state authorities and were funded by commerce.

Until the mid-eleventh century, prominent Islamic scholars, including the founders of the four main Sunni schools of jurisprudence, refused to be state servants, even when they faced persecution. For their dissenting views, Abu Hanifa was killed in prison, Malik was whipped, Shafii was detained and chained, and Ibn Hanbal was beaten in prison.

The story of the founder of the oldest Sunni school, Abu Hanifa, is a telling example. He was a silk merchant who refused to be a state servant. Abu Hanifa rejected an Abbasid caliph's offer of judgeship with the excuse that he was not qualified for the post. The caliph became angry and called him a liar. Abu Hanifa replied that a liar could not be appointed as a judge. The caliph had him imprisoned and later poisoned to death.

By standing up against state control over religion, leading Sunni and Shia ulema established role models for succeeding scholars in the next few centuries in terms of operating with a significant degree of autonomy from political authority. According to modern analysis, out of 3,900 Islamic scholars living between the eighth and mid-eleventh centuries, only a small portion (8.5%) worked as state officials.

However, a transformation occurred in the eleventh century due to changing political circumstances. Two consecutive Abbasid caliphs

in Baghdad, who were politically weakened by the rising Shii military forces in various parts of the Muslim world, called for the unification of Sunnis. These caliphs declared a "Sunni creed," according to which certain Shiis, rationalist theologians (Mutazilis), and philosophers were declared to be apostates. The punishment for apostasy was death.

This call for the formation of a Sunni orthodoxy was well received in the mid-eleventh century by a newly emerging military force—the Seljuk Empire. The Seljuks defeated Shii military forces, centralised and militarised the economy, and established a series of madrasas to turn Islamic scholars (the ulema) into state servants.

The Seljuk model of the ulema-state alliance became the main pillar of subsequent Muslim empires, including the Mamluks and the Ottomans. This alliance marginalised merchants, philosophers, and dissenting Islamic scholars. In most parts of the Muslim world, the ulema-state alliance imposed a state-sanctioned orthodox Islam and restricted individual and institutional religious freedom.

In sum, Islam is not inherently opposed to the separation of religious authorities and state authorities. Historically, there was a certain level of separation between Islamic scholars and political rulers until the alliance between the ulema and the state emerged.

### **The Institutional Basis: The Madrasas**

The key institution that maintained the basis of the ulema-state alliance was a network of madrasas. The Seljuk grand vizier Nizam al-Mulk (r. 1064-92) patronised a madrasa in Baghdad, which later became the pioneer of that network. Hence, these institutions were later called after him—the Nizamiyya madrasas.

During the Seljuk era, Nizamiyya madrasas were founded in Iraq, Iran, and Central Asia. Later, in the Mamluk and the Ottoman periods, madrasas with similar institutional forms

spread to Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, and the Balkans.

These madrasas were funded by waqfs (pious foundations). Nevertheless, they could not be defined as private or independent because these institutions were not insulated from state influence. On the contrary, political rulers and officials were the founders of the madrasas' waqfs.

The madrasas promoted Sunni orthodoxy by removing the writings of Shii scholars, rationalist theologians, and philosophers from the curricula, as much as possible. Through the madrasas, the ulema-state alliance eliminated contenders until modern times.

### **Was Assertive Secularism the Solution?**

From the late nineteenth century to the present, several Muslim reformists have pointed to the madrasas and the ulema as barriers to progress and freedom of thought in their countries. These reformists' ideas began to materialise at the time of the Turkish Republic's founding in 1923. Following Turkey's Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, secularist leaders in other Muslim-majority countries, including Iran's Reza Shah and Egypt's Gamel Abdel Nasser, pursued top-down modernist projects, which marginalised the public role of the ulema.

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, a legal and political Islamization process has taken place throughout the Muslim world. Still, the legacy of secularist founders is visible in many cases. Currently, 22 out of 49 Muslim-majority countries have constitutionally secular states. Yet, most of these secular states have also restricted religious freedom.

Almost all of these secular states embraced—what my previous book calls—assertive secularism. According to assertive secularism, the state plays an assertive role to exclude religion from the public sphere. It is very different from passive secularism, which requires the state to allow the public visibility of religion. In

countries where assertive secularism is dominant, such as France and Mexico, the state imposes secularism as an official doctrine. By contrast, in cases where passive secularism is dominant, such as the United States and the Netherlands, the state is supposed to remain neutral in the struggles between secular and religious doctrines.

For decades, assertive secularist regimes from Turkey to Tunisia violated their citizens' religious freedom with such policies as the headscarf ban. Assertive secularism, therefore, created tension between these states and their pious Muslim masses.

### **Modern Forms of the Ulema-State Alliance**

To lessen tension, many secularist leaders reproduced the ulema-state alliance in different forms. These attempts to legitimise secular regimes on religious grounds have resulted in such examples as the Turkish government's control over all mosques through its agency, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), and the Egyptian government's control over Al-Azhar, the leading Sunni Muslim institution of education.

In the last four decades, Islamization processes throughout the Muslim world, especially in such leading countries as Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and Pakistan, have further strengthened modern forms of the ulema-state alliance, thus limiting institutional and individual religious freedom.

Being an ally of the state has made the ulema financially and politically dependent on the government and unable to criticise political authorities who have violated ethical principles they would otherwise perceive an obligation to uphold. Thus, the ulema have proven to lack the moral resolve to check state power when necessary.

Ulema-state alliances prevented alternative Islamic groups from enjoying institutional religious freedom. Consequently, those groups became obsessed with the idea of capturing state



power to prosper or merely survive, depending on their circumstances.

Moreover, since ulema-state alliances have depended on a centralised and political definition of Islam, they have violated the individual religious freedom of non-Muslim citizens and those Muslim citizens who do not ascribe to the same political definition.

### **The Future of Institutional Religious Freedom in the Muslim World**

Is this article promoting a pessimistic message about the future of religious freedom in Muslim-majority countries? On the contrary: By arguing that Islam is not an inherently monistic religion and showing that early Islamic history included examples of a certain religion-state separation, this article promotes optimism.

Ulema-state alliances have been problematic for non-Muslim actors, dissenting Islamic groups, and even the ulema themselves. Still, simply replacing these alliances with assertive secularist regimes is not the solution. When we explore some Muslim-majority cases such as those in West Africa where religious freedom has existed, we see that these cases did not have ulema-state alliances or assertive secularist regimes.

A crucial aspect of achieving religious freedom in the Muslim world is to separate religious authorities and state authorities into two distinct entities. By doing so, both the ulema and dissenting religious groups can enjoy institutional religious freedom. This will also improve individual religious freedom of Muslim and non-Muslim citizens alike. ([Return to contents](#))

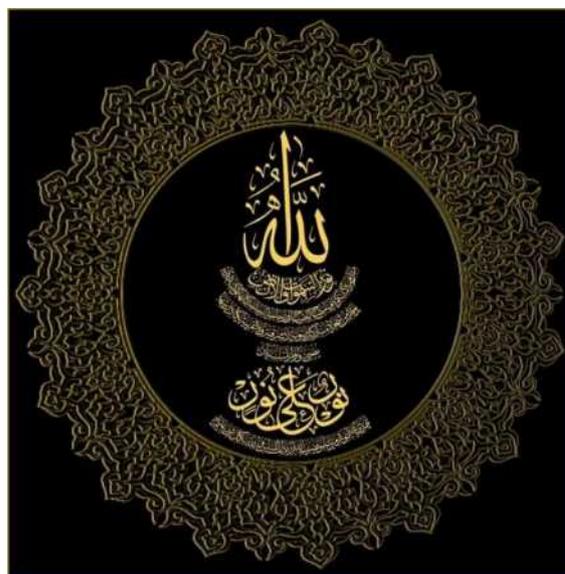
## **ISNA '19 Convention**

*Submitted by*

***Mrs Faryal Abdoel Basier***

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), which is said to be the largest Muslim organisation in North America, held its 56th annual national convention in Houston, Texas from August 30 – September 2, 2019. Their convention is generally regarded as the largest annual gathering of American Muslims. This year's theme was "What's your superpower for social good?" Besides ISNA, the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) and Muslim Youth of North America (MYNA) presented their programs as well.

Every day started with Fajr prayer at 6:15 AM and ended with Isha prayer at 10:30 PM. The program was packed with simultaneous sessions covering interfaith, spiritual, history, masjid development, fiqh, community, mental health, civic engagement, science & technology, politics, international affairs and finance related topics. In addition to the sessions, a women's' Zumba fitness class, girls and boys basketball skills camp, carnival, 5K family run, young professional luncheon, qawwali night, entertainment night, film festival and matrimonial event were offered. The workshops you could attend were: How to Debate Islamophobia, Mental Health First Aid, Imam Roundtable, The Art of Islamic Painting and Calligraphy.



There was an art exhibition showcasing the rich tradition of arts in Islam, with the artists present to explain their work or give a live demonstration. Special care was given to the elderly who weren't mobile, and separate sessions were held for them in the two adjacent hotels where most of the non-Houstonians stayed.

Due to the parallel sessions, you had to choose the ones you wanted to attend each day, which led to dilemmas for me. I wished I could attend all! See their program at

<https://isnacon.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/56Convention-ProgramWeb-08-19-19.pdf>

and you will understand. For me, the convention was a great success because it provided me with spiritual tools to apply in all aspects of my life. The speakers were inspiring, and the topics were very relevant. It was appreciated by many that they generally covered under highlighted topics in our society such as trauma, Muslim masculinity, divorce, sexual harassment and grief. The fact that they had to move the trauma session from a room that holds a couple of hundred people to the general auditorium with a capacity of a couple of thousand due to the massive interest is a measure of how much hunger there was for spiritual food to cope with these types of struggles in our lives. I am grateful to



have been able to attend the convention in my home-town and am excited to attend their future conventions.

Below pictures give an impression of the bazaar and art exhibitions. (Return to contents)



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