

Life and Faith



Prose & verse
Khaled Hazem Nusseibeh

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Introduction

In the Name of God the Compassionate the Merciful

This is a book that contains poems, essays, reflections and lectures which were produced over the last ten years or so, and which I wished to make available for the readers, in the hope that they may be of benefit.

This work might be perceived as didactic and composed by someone who views himself as occupying a higher pedestal of morality, achievement and knowledge. On the contrary, I honestly assert that whatever insights and ideas I have acquired and which I convey are to a significant extent a reflection on my shortcomings and inadequate performance.

I wish to deeply thank all who have helped and supported me in producing this text over the years, friends, relatives, and teachers. I pray for them all that God Almighty give them faith, success, health and happiness.

Amman, 10/7/2010

Faith & Life

Allah is Great, without beginning or end, One without partners, Almighty without finitude, Omnipotent without shortcoming, Merciful without parallel, Glorious without limitation, Beneficent beyond human imagination, Vengeful beyond human tolerance, AllCapable beyond any human threshold of knowledge and design.. Allah created life that He alone be worshipped and all of creation praises Him: our Only Creator.



Muhammad is the finest that has walked the earth.. Fine people appreciate that and remember the man- blessed in heaven and on earth- and try to follow his path: the way and the truth of God..



A person's sense of justice is more intensely tried under conditions of adversity. The temptation to respond to adversity through immoral retaliation on the innocent as well as the culpable, through cynical assessment of fate is great; the ability to withstand the vicissitudes of time with moral endurance is accomplishable- when the trials of time are met with moral will and perseverance, when the temptation to find resolution to grievance through oppressing others is transcended by hope, justice, love, and an ethical pursuit of redemption.



Faith offers us explanation and guidance. Satan offers us the ideas that make our sense of what is reasonable collapse. When in pain, the enemy of humanity will prescribe the medicine that will increase our pain and ailment. When in enjoyment of health and prosperity he will adorn the things that will lead to our deprivation of the blessings of God. If we doubt a truth, he will embellish for us moral transgression that we doubt more; if we do a moral act he will try to deflate its effect and deceive us into not repeating it or will whisper pride in our hearts. He will stand in

cunning opposition to every human move that pleases our Creator- that we become a part and parcel of his cursed fate; and he has, God Almighty willing, a vast reservoir of abilities to trick, to delude, to incite fear, to sow dissension and hatred, to plant the seeds of any possible opposition to the Will of God; his biggest weapon is the weakness of the faith of humans in God Almighty, their pride, their irrational fears and anxieties, their attachment to ideas and traditions they know to be false but are too unreasonable or prejudiced to recognize it. For that they pay a great price- in this world and the next.



Some politicians think their power to be indispensable. In fact, they are right, not, in terms of their attachment to power but in terms of the need of societies for a dominant dissuasive power. Some politicians think that exercising power without being just is natural, somehow inescapable. Societies need to know that justice and overwhelmingly powerful authority is indispensable and necessary for survival. If the majority realise that somehow politicians will too.



Many a politician has sadly underestimated the value of fairness in political conduct; equally, many politicians have underestimated their innate potential for politically sensible but also fair conduct..



Before anyone takes the blessed plunge into marriage the notion of “overriding interest” should be held in mind. What does this mean? It. means that in the final analysis every human choice leads to effects that have both desirable as well as undesirable consequences: it will remain an unassailable argument that societies and people, whatever the negative effects in a marriage (not to mention the enormous dividends), have an overriding interest in holy betrothal; the alternatives are too unholy, too

damaging to the interests of people and society whatever the perceived- real or imagined- advantages of abstaining from marriage.



Words may express truth or may express falsehood, but words are incapable of changing creation and its laws. Words can deny that only to remain within an intellectually futile opposition to the Way of God and the law of the universe. Words can affirm creation and become in harmony with the fundamental, indomitable power of the universe- the power of God- through accepting the Revealed Truth of Allah which is miraculously contained in the Holy Qur'an. The alternative is too costly, too insufferable, too irrational..



Sometimes, people's finest moments- and history's- are when humans deal with pain, defeat, and tribulation with dignified endurance alongside a rejection of submitting to the forces that brought about such affliction. Equally, human history's finest moments have been when people or individuals were triumphant— and upon the hour of triumph, exhibited moral restraint and vision which made them resist the temptation to dictate the obituaries of the innocent, the plunder of the defenseless, the humiliation of the blameless, the violation of what is sacred to all humans.. Both instances represent the triumph of conscience, courage and sense over the sinister use of power and force over the defeated. In contrast, human history's darkest moments have been when individuals or nations triumphed on the battlefield and in the marketplace, and unarmed with faith in the One who gives glory to whom He wishes and humiliation on those whom He wishes— have pursued the vanquished and routed them with self destructive disregard for humanity's collective self-worth and dignity. Also, humanity's darkest moments have been when the vanquished turned their affliction into a venomous opposition to the Writ of God and predestination, and into a mindless and indiscriminate hatred and

retaliation against those that vanquished them— some of whom were blameless in terms of the crimes perpetrated against them.



The muse feels, the philosopher reflects, the soldier fights, the merchant sells and buys, the artist creates, the politician rules.... men and women live and die... All of that for good purpose.. Life was not created for sport and play.. To recognize that is to affirm life, to affirm our Creator and to affirm our future.. Eternity is too long a period, too large a stake for people to think that life is sport and fun and play signifying nothing.. It's a fool's story- a fool who has relied on the vision of one who doesn't see, who has listened to the words of one who doesn't hear- and all have blocked the pores of believing and listening and, tragically, yielded to folly out of a sense of amusement at being the comical spokesmen of the universe, and, alas, Satan was amused that he deceived them in believing that, and they others- and all in a script subject to the destiny and Will of God.



God- make no mistake- does not deceive. He has revealed the truth to people and many have chosen not to listen— thus deceiving themselves and submitting to the endless chicaneries of Satan. Sometimes it is amusement at the pain of others, at other times it's the pleasure of getting away with what's forbidden, at yet other times it's out of self deceptive defense of human dignity and freedom- at others it is attachment to hatred and prejudice which is seen as affirming a sense of natural superiority; the motives, sensations and values that Satan encourages people to have are endless.. And when an enemy of Satan begins to move in the direction of being a friend of God and His people— Satan will say “it's the stars, man”.. “you cannot change a thing that has been decreed for you”, “death and pleasure are our arbiters”, “are you going to betray the gods?”



There are many stages in the commitment of an immoral act: two are often present: embellished entrapment followed by the condemnation of those that caused the entrapment. The first stage is when evil makes immorality look good through an appeal to a person's pride or prejudice, or lust or greed.. The second stage is when those that entrap condemn the moral act and try to deepen the intensity of the immoral act through whispering the necessity of cover up. Once that happens there may be a condemnation for false testimony; thus Satan triumphs over those that commit immorality, and those that embellish it for people. There is a way and a truth that makes Satan's methods and those of his followers collapse: repentance and submission, not to those that thrive in the waters of human frailty, but to the God who is pleased by the repentance of one of His servants and who forgives all sins- that people are free from the enslaving shackles of Satan, of wealth, of desire, of politics.



It pleases Satan that people disobey God and deepen the intensity of their disobedience through more and more deception; it pleases God that people, his honoured vicegerents, have moments of truth and admit their transgressions to Him, and repent only to Him. In return, God gives them Paradise everlasting, peace of mind, and sooner or later, victory over the forces of evil.



If you're in need of love try to endure the hatred of others and question, while being true to yourself, why the hatred or the love.. One avenue is to kneel to injured pride; another is to enrich your self worth through deeper trust in Allah's mercy. In the process, you may learn much about yourself and the people who hate you.. Why people love or hate is a question we feel but can't answer in a final way..



Hatred of things and people that are bad is good.. This shouldn't be confused with hatred that rests on the question: I don't like it that he has this or that; the first has to do with hatred of evil which is a good thing- and the second has to do with covetousness which is a bad thing..



Toil, however much the pay, is beyond reward.. If a person thinks he has given too much for someone's toil then he doesn't have a sense of value (even if he paid excessively).. And if a person thinks he has gotten too little for his toil then he also has undervalued his toil..



Pain can be felt, endured, but not communicated.. Each knows his pain, forgets it, remembers it— but in one way or another always lives with it..



When people rush to speak it is often a time when the silent should be heard, even if they insist on not speaking..



Doubt can be permanent turmoil if people lose the courage to embrace what is true and think that continuous doubt is the only acceptable truth..



To experience love in its highest form means admitting that such love is beyond reach.. And to begin to feel the beginnings of such love means submitting to the One whose love has no beginning or end..: Whose love compared to ours- and it mustn't be compared- is like a vast, ocean which hasn't a coast- and ours.. a drop.. and less.. and less..



Reason tells us what is correct and useful.. But, sometimes it simply doesn't.. This is one of the reasons that God in His Mercy, gave us Revelation..; and in His Revelation encouraged us to know more... (Read in the name of your Lord who created, created man from a blood clot. Read: for your Lord is the Most Beneficent, who has taught by the pen. He taught man that which he knew not. (Holy Qur'an. Tr. M.M Khatib, 30:96).



Who your friends are, and who your enemies are can tell you a lot about what you are.. If your enemies are good people then try to be a better person and maybe you may become good friends.. If your enemies are bad people try to enjoin them (and yourself) to goodness but don't become like them..



Yes.. at one point or another, we all feel despair.. But it somehow disappears when it is replaced with faith and hope..



If you respect someone a lot ask yourself why: if it's for the wrong reason you may be losing your self-esteem..and that will deprive you of the respect of others..



At a given point in time wealth and power seem sovereign, and deep inside we know they are not; yet we move on to another point in time thinking they are..



If someone tries to cut you down unfairly, avoid doing two things: getting release by unfairly cutting down others (especially friends & loved ones)- it increases your tension; when cutting

others down is the defense then your sense of inferiority will be increased- which may have been the goal of those who cut you down.. Feel and believe in a sense of equality and you won't be persuaded whatever the direction of the tide of fortune, or however mean spirited the denigration tactics.



The tide of fortune moves unevenly, unexpectedly- but is inescapably directed by the Wisdom and Power and Mercy of God. The foolish ponder the wisdom of its movement in their favour and decide that its final lesson is that it doesn't carry a meaning beyond their achievement. The foolish among those against whom its currents gush also affirm that it's a tide that moves without meaning or reason— but for the anguish and pain it brings on them. The seeds of good fortune may be sown, however adverse or happy the human circumstance when people are obedient to God under conditions of both adversity as well as health and well being.



Societies say much about themselves through the way women are viewed and treated.. If viewed as essentially equal to men then it is a society that has affirmed its sense of humanity..; if made to perform all the tasks that men perform then it's a society that has eroded its sense of moral discrimination..



Freedom is the finest of values.. Many times, however, it is defended and practised by villains.. At others, it is defended by those who have been denied it and, given the opportunity, would also abuse it.. Freedom, under the best of circumstances, is guarded dearly and practised with restraint within the system of rights and obligations that are knowable through the Law of Islam..



The powerful are oftentimes more capable of making their voices heard.. This does not necessarily mean they speak more truly- nor does it necessarily mean they speak falsely.. Free people are able to tell when power speaks truly and when it speaks falsely.. It's a part of our human circumstance that power is capable of creating many illusions for those who hold it and for those who are affected by it..



Many a powerful truth, once viewed as a heresy by society, was embraced by a valiant minority- only to become- through struggle and endurance— the faith of the majority... And many a falsehood, viewed as deviance by the majority, became- by dint of the moral decline that often visits societies, and by dint of the labours of the powerful minority that pioneers such deviance- the value accepted and practised by society at large..



There are always individuals who rush to persuade people of their ideas when major events occur in life.. The defenders of the false gods will say: such a good thing happened to us by virtue of the benevolence of the gods, and if a bad thing happens they will say: if only we were more true to them, or if only we gave allegiance to other more powerful gods; the defenders of the Only True God will say: such affliction is because of our misdeeds and we must accept our tribulation and praise God for whatever He has decreed for us; and if a good thing happens we must also praise Him and do more good that His blessings on us continue.. Whatever the tide of fortune- this category of people will remain loyal to their Lord, One, Indivisible, without beginning or end..



Love is not everlasting even if its only interruption is death.. To adequately appreciate that means guarding one's sense of love from both the illusion of infinitude and from the pain of losing the objects of love and the feeling of love.. God's love has no

beginning or end., unimaginable, transcendent... To experience the Love of God- through worshipping Him alone, can make a human heart, attach to the Being— Everlasting, Perfectly loving, unseable- and can keep the candle of love kindled- however much the strength of the wind, or the extent of the loss..



Love between people can endure more when people recognise the faults of each other and the good qualities, emphasize the latter and avoid bringing up the former.. Sometimes, mutual respect is increased- the essential ingredient. of love- when people deal with the faults of others as a basis for compassion and not as a basis for hate, degradation and aggression..



Muslims have sometimes been hated for their race, their language, their accent, their cuisine, their wealth, their poverty, their power, their weakness- and at times liked for one or all of these things.. In the process, an essential point may have been missed: the idea that the nation of Muhammad carries to the world- that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger. This is an idea people either accept or deny- irrespective of race, class, gender, geography- in sum, all the things that human culture is made of.. The result of such acceptance or denial is everlasting paradise or everlasting hellfire..



Sometimes the human heart whispers evil thoughts. A person can either nurture these thoughts or resist them. Evil whisperings may be resisted by remembrance of God, and by not taking steps that bring one closer to committing evil.. Every step towards evil may be aborted through an appeal to God Almighty for forgiveness and through the commitment of a good act..



Human beings should have a growing awareness of the nature of good and evil. This can happen through knowledge of Revelation and through actions that bring one closer to the Will of God.. Sincerity of intent is the pillar on which rests a person's knowledge of truth and a person's commitment of a moral action.. Without pious intent, moral deeds, however laudable, do not bear the plentiful harvest which both faith and deed bring to happen.



When thinking of committing adultery a person should have in mind the image of two capsized boats; the two boats represent the shipwreck that is caused to two families because of the fulfillment of a fleeting pleasure, a fleeting emotion, a fleeting escape from a blessed anchor.. There is a life saver on board the two ships: repentance, prayer, the veil, and a resolution not to yield to the whisperings and drives of pleasure that are legitimate but which should find expression only within the family.. Thus is the safer course for a person, for the family and for society..



Some men who support the liberation of women maybe talking of reducing their financial duties and fulfilling their natural desire for women without being committed to a nest, to a family, to a sacred cell, to the future of a woman and a family.. Through this, men harm themselves, the women whom they exploit and the society at large.. On the other hand, women should be aware of the things that can attract a man to a nest and make him committed to it.. Such things are knowable to women through being aware of their nature, through reason and through abiding to the law of God..



Make no mistake! Many women have been hurt by men. In the midst of their suffering evil has expressed for them the solution for their anguish.. Be like men and conquer them as they tend to

do to us! In the process, they have distanced themselves from their next of kin, from their natures, and from the honorable men among whom are their staunchest defenders..



Wives should obey the authority of their husbands. When such authority is moral, compassionate, consultative- society's best interests are served. Such authority should be grounded on the system of rights and obligations contained in the law of the One who created us all- and which husbands and wives must observe and obey.. When a wife objects to the dictate of a husband ordering her to commit an immoral act then he is in contempt of God's commandment – the Creator of male & female.



Some foolish people say: we will believe in God when we see Him with our eyes!" Others say: "all of creation bears witness to His existence; we see His Glory manifested in the worlds, in the horizons, in ourselves- but we are too finite, too limited to

experience physical perception."



If money is the cause of so much conflict then it's wise for people and states that are interested in peace not to worship it; necessities can be fulfilled for all through the wisdom of those that have power and wealth, and through the productivity and labor of all who should work.. This can be achieved peacefully through worshipping the One who gives provision and sustenance to all His Creation and through obedience to His Laws. Such obedience goes a long, long way in preventing conflict between people and societies..



Usury and the accumulation of wealth through it is a curse on individuals, families and societies.. At face value, it appears as a fast way to make money and have it available.. In fact, it leads eventually to the erosion of wealth, to hostility between people, and to a diminution of a sense of honor. Sadly, it is a practice which people and societies can avoid, to their enormous benefit. This has been perceived by many a believer, many a wise man throughout human history— and ignored by too, too many.



When doing something evidently wrong, and someone alerts a person to it, one thing should be avoided: engaging in immoral self-defense. On the other hand, alerting someone to wrongful acts should not be out of moral indifference, or out of an intent to inflict degrading reproach. Sometimes this happens to an extent far beyond the magnitude of the wrong committed..



Peace between people is achievable when people recognize their obligations and rights. This should not be confused with situations when there is an absence of conflict because of intimidation by the powerful..



Among good willing people are those who feel great happiness when a person mends his or her ways and undertakes self-reform through remorse over past misdeeds and through good deeds.. Among those that thrive on the defeat of the human will in the face of evil are those who register the dark points in the life of an individual and try to either deride or belittle the reform that happens to him or to her..



There are two sorts of people when it comes to exercising authority: those who, at the outset say: “this is my power, my

throne, my wealth, my kingdom”. And there are those who say: “I am of God and so are you; let us worship the One God and obey Him alone.” Truly, such people are our guides to paradise.



When the tide of fortune goes against a person or a group of people there are two kinds of responses: the first, is a reliance on a higher threshold of unscrupulousness to salvage a decayed circumstance; the second kind of response is an honest admission of responsibility for an adverse situation, combined with a resolve to reform, to rectify previous practices, to baldly cleanse the manifestations of corruption-even to the extent of self denunciation by those vested with authority.. If only the weak are penalized and the strong released from the arm of justice, decay will continue to spread and fester.. Societies are faced with these two choices at every moment of their existence; oftentimes, their very survival hinges on them...



Public institutions need to operate according to a system of regulations that is fair to all in society, that is free from nepotism, that is free from corruption. When reason and good moral sense triumph everyone recognizes that such is in the best interest of all- whatever the cost or sacrifice or benefit sustained in the process..



Some consider those who are ethical and inexperienced as an opportunity for forming an exceptional person- through trying to impart to them their insights into life and through developing their moral character; Others consider such a situation as challenging - and use their influence to guide such people, step by step, away from their moral standards. A deep mutual loss happens in the process.



To love and obey Muhammad is to love and obey God. Muhammad is God's chosen, the unlettered orphan, the blessed in heaven and the blessed on earth.. To understand him is to begin to understand God's purpose in life and creation.. May the peace of God be upon him, his next of kin, his companions.



People and societies have gone to war for different reasons. Most of the time conflict is preventable if people listen more to the Will of God and their consciences; many times, however, it is the voices of irrationality, of betrayal, of megalomania, of short-sighted statesmanship that carries the day. To be sure, there are just wars- and these have to do with the striving for human liberation from all forms of idolatry- in a way that achieves justice for people. None can deny that justice is the essential ingredient of human coexistence.



Politicians have all too often been misunderstood. Part of the reason may be that those with the responsibility of governance cannot reveal lots of kinds of information. The vital interests of states require it. All too often, however, this privilege to secrecy has been abused by politicians through their confusing between secrecy that is in their personal interest as opposed to the interests of the societies which they govern.



There are ways to guard mirth and laughter from the encroachment of heavy-heartedness. This may be achieved through striving for truthful humor that is supportive of human frailty and that avoids a mockery of the excusable or the blameless. Sarcasm and humor that is marshaled to attack falsehood and to defend the victims of evil derision helps maintain the warmth of a laughing heart.



Laughter may be a powerful platform for both good and evil. It's enjoyable: Satan knows that as do those who understand the purpose of God in laughter. Satan directs people's sense of what is funny towards self-degradation or towards amusement at opposing the values of goodness which prevail in the universe. The forces of good affirm the importance of laughter and mirth as a means to amusement at the comical- but not as a means to mock what is true or humanly blameless.



The lines between human emotions are sometimes very thin. Sometimes in the human circumstance the most humorous note is made at the most somber and solemn occasion. The result is a combination of guilt and laughter and a sense of eroded seriousness. Embarrassment is a human sentiment which sums up our sense of having behaved in a way contradictory to what a situation normally justifies.



Some have experienced wholesome mirth partly as a result of having sustained the derision of others. The pain of being laughed at somehow gives way to the emergence of compassionate humor, and freedom from the psychological stiffness which mean-spirited sarcasm causes in the heart of depraved comedians.



Affliction and suffering can lower people's self-esteem especially if reinforced by an apologetic to the more fortunate. The alternative is an appeal to God Almighty and the result will be an inexpressible sense of enrichment. Having done that such people must labor to change their condition that God answer their appeal.



In one possible circumstance of wealth and power there are two kinds of people: the sycophant who is willing to twist every kind of reality and truth to please the pride of his superior, and the one in authority who is willing to listen and believe (such is the power of his pride over him).. The alternative to such a situation is the courageous dissenter who, in one form of behavior or another, shows his disapproval of what is wrong, or his approval of what is right and reasonable. Ironically, such a dissenter maybe either the one in authority or the subordinate. Such dissenters may be the lifeline of many an institution, many an individual, many a society..



In many a circumstance, sycophants that thrive on questioning the loyalties of others are themselves the quicksand of institutions and power structures. They alienate those that like serving in dignified silence and may deprive an institution of its most worthwhile members. Ironically, such a type of people are often most willing to shift their loyalties if their perceived interests require it. Those in positions of leadership must be able to discriminate between the sycophants and the self-respecting loyalists.



In every age there is a minority that prefers death over yielding to falsehood. In the process, this valiant minority that carries the heavy burden of the collective human conscience finds itself at odds with the whims of tyrants, with the desires of those that have wealth, with the dictates of this or that power.. There are two kinds of responses towards this moral minority: one, is acceptance of the truths they communicate coupled with an undertaking to reform; the other is persecution of such a minority. When this happens, the damages sustained by the persecutors far exceed the interests achieved.



To be sure, men enjoy women- and women men. When people stop having a sense of when to refrain and when to indulge society pays a dear price. Such enjoyment is an expression of God's Mercy on us as much as it is an expression of His Will that people procreate and reproduce. This should happen within the sacred bond of marriage. If it happens in a widespread way outside of marriage societies may be destroying the institution on which is hinged their survival. People often belittle the importance of this fact- or recognize it when pain replaces fleeting pleasure.



There are those among the powerful in whose hearts Satan whispers the illusion of divinity, of earthly permanence, of being sovereign over life and nature and people.. This illusion becomes reinforced by the pride that power engenders and by the unreasonable acclaim of the followers of such men and women of power. Sometimes, such people have a merciful awakening which brings them to their senses through repentance and submission to the Lord of the worlds; and sometimes, the illusion continues to fester- carrying those that believe it and their followers to humiliation in this world and everlasting torment in the next. In contrast, there are those among men of power who feel the Sovereignty of God over them and govern to serve Him and His Religion and His servants to the point of martyrdom. Such men are God's blessing on people.



Love between a man and a woman is natural though not permanent. From one angle, such love can endure more when both love people and are compassionate to them. In a situation of hostility to people the love between a man and a woman is somehow affected- especially when the power of romance and physical attraction diminishes. In a sense, the love between a man and a woman is enhanced when both have compassion for people

in general; the fallout of such compassion makes their love endure and thrive more.



No doubt without belonging to society a person may lose his sense of what is true, of what is normal. But sometimes, alienation can help certain individuals question particular values that the majority holds to be correct- and which, in fact, may be based on manifest untruths. By contrast, alienation sometimes propels dissent from the values correctly held to be true by the majority- and, in such an instance, it's worthwhile for society to deal with the source of alienation and to resist the sinister values which such alienation engenders.



When dealing with a political challenge statesmen should have in mind three things: what is it that could be done? How best to go about doing it? How will such action or policy enhance the integrity and credibility of the society which they lead? If politics is simply the art of the possible then much that is unreasonable will be done. Politics, rather, can be seen as the art of the possible, the reasonable and the ethical . Somehow, the not so obvious political yield of ethical policy is too often mistaken to be a liability. On the other hand, moralism that is insensitive to the laws and realities of politics may lead to damaging consequences.



Somehow, the achievement of human dignity is possible: it is possible not simply in the angry outbursts of those whose honor has been injured but in the steady, unrelenting labors of those, whose faith and moral integrity, has made their dignified life the logical result of their sustained striving. Such people show others, also, the way to dignified life- which no reasonable human dislikes having.



There are some who have acquired a knowledge of the things that please Satan: seeing humanity, his enemy, living in a condition of degradation and moral decadence. Having become his followers, such people try to morally degrade each other- as well as trying to degrade the followers of God and his Way. Such attempts at degradation, which Satan whispers in the hearts of men, can take the form of injuring people for their faith in God Almighty, or in committing adultery, or in thriving in a sea of human suffering, or in making wealth through usury, or in robbing the wealth of others.. The list of possible sins is very long. And it pleases Satan that they occur. It pleases God, our Merciful Creator, that we repent to Him and that we consider Satan as our enemy. If this happens, the sovereignty of Satan over us vanishes. Many people do not sufficiently recognize that.



Material factors have an extremely important effect on societies and people. People that deny the importance of these factors in the name of spirituality are oftentimes misinformed about the realities of life. In contrast, those that consider material factors as the only relevant reality deny their spiritual essence and represent the tendency of decay of mind and of culture.



God tries His servants with wealth and power. Sometimes He gives them in abundance to some who regard themselves beyond his Laws and beyond the moral standards which He decreed for all His servants. At others, God gives influence and wealth to those who recognize their Creator and who respond to His Benevolence with almsgiving, prayer, service to society and compassion to next of kin.



Many a time in the human circumstance the relationship between kings and their subordinates affects the moral character and survivability of kingdoms. The trial of such subordinates is great

since, oftentimes, they owe their privileged positions to the kings and thus may be inclined to obey their whims, their wishes their ambitions, their sense of what is right or wrong. Some subordinates, however, give what they consider wise and moral counsel. Such people are attached to a moral standard higher than the power or wealth that accrues to them from allegiance to kings. When kings are wise they maintain such people in their positions however hard to their ears and hearts is the counsel they give. In contrast, some kings have been of a higher moral caliber than their subordinates; and through a combination of ambition, unscrupulousness, greed for wealth and power these subordinates may have weakened the foundations on which a system of power rests.

Usually, such a process may be reversed if kings show strength of resolve in reforming themselves and in relying on subordinates who tell them what is right, and what is wrong, and what is in the genuine interest of the kingdoms they govern. Reason and common sense tell us that this is in the interest of all kings.



The cult of worship of individuals is calamitous to people and societies. It feeds on the illusion that a servant of God controls a society in its rituals, its material sustenance, in its sense of what is right or wrong, in its sense of what causes life or death.. Abraham shattered such an illusion by asking the ruler who claimed sovereignty over the universe to let the sun shine from the west! It is vital for the sanity of people and in their interests in this world and the next to continuously demolish the tendencies for the cult of worship.



A part of the trial of unbelievers and believers is that both belong to an imperfect human reality. The difference between the two is that believers affirm a truth and the unbelievers cling to a falsehood. The human reality of both is assailable, subject to criticism; the truth that believers affirm, however- La Ilaha Illa

Allah Muhammadun Rasul Allah- is unassailable. Unbelievers, and under no compulsion, do not recognize that.



Under conditions of conflict the pressure on people to behave immorally increases. Sometimes, under such conditions, it is people of the worst moral caliber that, come to the top- people that play on the emotions of people and whose thuggery allays the fears of those subject to a conflict. By contrast, humanity has witnessed the valiant, honorable warriors- who resolve, out of a fear of God- that whatever the tactics of the enemy, they will not cut down a tree, nor deliberately kill innocent women or children, nor will they violate the honor of the enemy. Such warriors have built the structures of permanent triumphs; the others, sooner or later, bring defeat and humiliation to their camp. Oftentimes, their followers realize it when it is too late.



In the midst of conflict and fear it is natural that the strong exercise greater dominance. When the cloud of strife, fear and ambition hangs over a situation people will tend to support their leaders, their strongmen uncritically. But the moral behavior of the military in a particular battle may have a decisive effect on the outcome of the present conflict and the next. Some will make the argument that winning justified killing children and women, and committing acts of rape and plunder.. When a society loses its soul it will applaud their arguments and characterize as cowards those who counseled refraining from crime. The victimized are usually in too much pain and rage to recognize the existence of a debate in the enemy camp. When a society wins or loses a battle, the question relating to what actions were taken or not taken have to be honestly addressed...; moreover, the moral content of actions leading to victory or defeat must be assessed.



People must recognize the beginnings of power worship in individuals. Sometimes, helpers pander to the pride of a

triumphant leader or justify his -and their- defeats through apologetic and false reasoning; the second tendency is to remind a leader under conditions of triumph or defeat that he and the ebb and flow of his fortunes are from God and that unto Him he shall return- victorious or vanquished. The second kind of response saves leaders and their followers much grief and may be a reason for continued political success.



There are some whose behavior under conditions of defeat forebodes their imminent triumph. They deal with a situation of defeat with deep soul-searching, repentance to God and a rational and thorough evaluation of the reasons for defeat-followed by remedial action. When triumph occurs they say in humility: “It is God Almighty who grants triumph to whom He wishes, and brings defeat on whom He wishes.” Such people are triumphant, whether subject to defeat or in enjoyment of victory.



Every human being belongs to a clan, to a group of friends, to a group of allies.. When such a person enjoys success the pressure on him is great to benefit them. The beginning of corruption happens when such a person, by virtue of his ties of kinship and friendships, discriminates against those who don't enjoy such ties. The result is nepotism, irrationality in decision-making, corruption and indifference to the others' rights to fair opportunity and freedom from oppression; another result is resentment by those who are the victims of such a process. Sometimes, these victims wage a resistance that may deprive the successful person, his clan and supporters from their prosperity, even their life. Very often, such a cycle is preventable when those that enjoy success have a clear vision, not so much of their penchant for enrichment and power, but of the necessity for fairplay, honesty and fear of God.



Time is of the essence. When people believe that every drop of it is valuable then so much more is done.. is accomplished. Achievement is the result of accumulated labor over a given period of time; if time is not incrementally taken advantage of then the fruits of accumulated labor and achievement are diminished.



Laziness is more a habit than a quality intrinsic to people. When people are afflicted with laziness they should devote more energy to thinking about how to change their condition than to defending themselves against criticism. Laziness is replaceable with vigour and energy if people push themselves to adopt new rhythms of activity, to have a deepened

consciousness of the value of time..



There is a tendency in human thinking that sees sex as a necessary evil which tarnishes the spirit and mind of men and women.. There is another tendency which elevates sexuality to a level above spirituality and reason.. Both tendencies are extreme.. There is a middle way which sees sexuality as a blessing from God if expressed lawfully, and which also sees such expression as a part of the health of people's spirit, mind and body..



Among people are those with a kind, giving heart..Sometimes, such people are identified by a type of people who consider kindness as something that may be exploited, that is a weakness that may be taken advantage of.. When such exploitation takes place those that exploit lose their self respect, especially if they consider kindness a blameworthy quality..



A person's psychological state is influenced by the way he earns a living.. If the money is gained through lawful means a person's social circumstance is more stable, his self-respect is greater, his social circle freer from corruption. There is perhaps an invisible Divine Law in the psychological states of men and women—whereby they become uneasy, uncontented, anxious—when wealth is derived through unlawful means. When release from such discontentment is derived from drinking alcohol, oppressing others, having unlawful relations with women—the discontentment becomes worse, the social circumstance more unstable..



There are moments in the ebb and flow of human relations when conflict replaces harmony, and ill-feelings replace love.. In such situations people begin recalling the favors they have done for each other and reminding the others of them.. Oftentimes, this—if expressed dishonestly and mean-spiritedly—intensifies the conflict and may leave permanent scars on a relationship.. It may be best, under such circumstances, to abstain from reminding the other of such favors and of mentioning the other's faults.. This can often prevent the weak threads that keep people together from snapping..



When a person sees or hears something that is wrong there is a temptation to point it out.. Sometimes, this is done with goodwill and oftentimes not. A sensible person, with a wish for others to be better, points out what is wrong without intent to cause injury; such a sensible person also recognizes the usefulness of a criticism directed to him/her when he hears it.. An insensible person criticizes to degrade others; an insensible person also responds with self-righteous anger at the reasonable criticism of others..



Mountain

A seeker of truth is like one
Who slowly climbs and beholds a mountain

Viewing that is of limited perspective
Moving, though, enables wider perception

The other side of the mountain
Is verily not within vision's angle

But feeling, seeing, hearing, and smelling
Enable greater and increasing knowledge

The mountain truly undergoes constant change
The soil with rain turns into mud

And the force of water erodes the rocks
Forming ever-changing configurations

The view of the mountain is quasi infinite
From the top what is seen is small

While proximity to view objects
Engenders more realistic perception

Of size, texture, color, and substance
And all that matter is constituted of

At times the clouds touch the mountain heights
Which is moving? The clouds or the mountain?

Is the mountain solitary or,
Is it a part of a range, a constellation?

A material formation punctuating a terrain
To be contrasted with a coastal plain

Mountains convey what is mighty in nature
Awesome towers in our splendid planet

Containing roots that stabilize the earth
Preventing quakes and other calamities

As though anchors of sailing ships
That wish to dock at a safe port

On a wild journey in an unfathomable wilderness
Navigation with imperfect knowledge, effort, and technique

There is in existence a vortex
A solid unshakable rock to anchor at

To build life climbing a mighty mountain
Declaring La Ilaha Illallah

And placing the imperfect matrix
In an equation of infallible belief



Let us submit to God

As though shining pearls that dazzle
Pure water washing the bodily parts

An intent to worship the One God
Preceding a great ordained ritual

Beautiful actions that connect
A sinful soul with the Almighty God

A face washed of its impurities
Of sins, of acts of transgression

A visage cleansed of all evil
Prepared for sincere prostration to the Lord

The water is likewise applied
To the two hands up to the elbow

Will only these simple acts please
The Great Deity of Endless mercy?

And water on the back and front
Of the hair of a transgressing soul

Thank you Lord for your Commands
A prelude to blessed salvation

Then cleaning the two feet with water
Legs that have trodden sinful paths

Testimony that God is One
And that Muhammad is His Messenger

Then performing blessed prayer
O Lord! Do not expel us from Your Mercy

All praise is due to Him
Who has made so easy the path to surrender
To the valley of good and mercy we must walk
Bearing the weight of untold trespassing

Help us Lord on our paths of tribulation
That we gain your unending favor

To Him we shall return bearing
The burdens of inordinately evil deeds

Accept from us the righteous actions done
At your behest, and with your guidance



Columns

No I do not fail to notice
The lapidary structures of Jerash

Superbly built stone columns
Embellishing the landscape of an old city

Containing theatres, markets, and paved roads
Testament to a great, defunct civilization

Embedded in the Jordanian terrain
Grafted onto an impressive natural environment

Builders who immortalized their deeds
Artists who produced with aesthetic brilliance

Virtuosity captivating the human senses
Dazzling creations of people perpetually seeking excellence

Architectural feats that met the highest standards
Engineering cisterns, aqueducts, roads surviving for millennia

A city whose vestiges powerfully remind us
That worldly greatness is but an ephemeral, passing moment



Mutual Denunciation

An irony of monumental proportion is manifest
In the devil's speech in ultimate eschatological time

He taunts his followers for obeying him
And likewise dissociates himself from them

In the world he promised them illusory things
Tempting them to commit evil and unbelief

Bearing toward them an eternal grudge
Owing to God favoring humans over him

His sin of pride drove him to disobey the Lord
Incessantly trying to imbue humans with the same sin

Driving people to contravene Divine injunction
While himself recognizing what is true and false

He well knows the meaning of history's drama
Mystifying and confusing its teleological content

His perennial aim is to lead astray
The most numerous multitudes possible

Humans he will encounter in hellfire
When he speaks to them with foretold astounding irony



Train Station

In a morose mood can I compare you, O life
To a train station bustling with movement?

People in throngs entering and exiting
Boarding and descending from numerous trains

Myriad destinations and multiple directions
As though a metaphor for life's infinite variety

The train of life is boarded
On a wondrous voyage of turbulent, uncertain existence

Beatitude, sadness, and joy encountered on the way
Fraught with the senseless and meaningful alike

An inescapable amount of
Both happiness and grief

Engendered by dint of personal volition
And inaction- or action- committed

The train moves in meandering pathways
Fertile and desert land on its way

Consuming energy for human benefit
People commanding its diverse trajectories

Like stars orbiting in the vast galaxies
Constellations of celestial bodies

God did not permit us a say in the origin of life
For He determines the purpose of all

And did not seek the help of humans in creation's act
A deed of mercy in His immense universe

If only they believe, if only they listen, if only they respond
To his call that He alone be worshipped

That His Legislative Will be obeyed
That His Religion be followed

For all I have savored and experienced of this life
I choose to tread Heaven's Way

And though the self whispers the evil of doubt
Faith is the fruit of human choice and God's guidance alike



The Soft Touch of Endless Love

Like the sweet rain that softly touches the earth
Giving life its essential provision

Like the red roses that adorn a landscape
And the daffodils embellishing the fertile terrain

I am at a loss for words to adequately describe my love
A stark white cloud that with fecundity animates life

A coming of souls that is a splendid embrace
Of two people enamored of each other

Like the grass clothing the expansive meadows
Giving vision a noble and invaluable perspective

Or a masterful portrait of lush color and towering virtuosity
Capturing the mighty force of human passion

You are a garden of stunning beauty
Or an orchard of magnificent grace

Driving me to love, to adore, to honor
A bond of forceful and lasting passion

Yes, I will compare you to a distant and wondrous horizon
That touches gently my every sense

And enshrouds the rough edges of a turbulent life
With the soft touch of endless love



Conflict

Conflict has so permeated human history
Punctuating both the dark and bright episodes of time

Systems of ideas propelled actions
Undergirded by both love and aversion

Antipathy to a race forming an ideology
Heterodox in its ideational parameters

White supremacism or negritude
Excluding the other from civilized orbit

Or extremist ideas challenging an urban order
Notions intermeshed with a quest for a changed reality

Or class conflict driven blindly
By a monocausal focus on matter

Or epistemic idealism glorifying a race
Where it is 'proper' that all are its servants

Verily history is underpinned by ceaseless social motion
And movement punctuating inexorably changing fortune

Of individuals, races, classes, and nations
Striving to survive in oftentimes unfriendly environments

Sometimes to expand, at others to retrench
Seeking security, prosperity and oftentimes elusive peace

In the vast oceans of human history
Have been the great torchbearers of truth

Those that affirmed the necessities of civil living
While affirming Islam's timeless creed

For truly the present life is a tiny distance
Incomparable with the infinite voyage of eschatological time



Grievance

Oftentimes he and she that suffer
Strive to understand the cause of grievance

Victimization by men, women, a race, classes
Or the age, or illness, or cultural or economic influence

Thinkers articulate an idiom of protest
Oftentimes monocausally demonizing an aspect

And so, grievances are intellectually addressed
With an ideology that imperfectly comprehends

Thereby unfairly treating a race, a gender, a class, a faith
The "other" that is not within a set of identities

People can overcome by slowly climbing
A mountain of more objective truth

Rendering reality with more circumspection
Removing or assigning blame with balance



Longing

The inexpressible joy that I have felt
The pain that withered away

In the deep darkness
Of a summer night

Only to redefine what I have fathomed
In a profound sea of doubt

Overcoming a skeptical self
Unawakened to the truth I sense

In the innermost soul
The deeper regions of the unconscious

Kindle the fire of faith!
And make it ablaze with certitude!

I am not a being at the edge of the universe
Or at its unfathomable center

I yearn for your sincere love
And the unbridled emotion of unending longing

To be enshrouded with a broken will
That staggers in a vast expanse

Submitting to Him who forever is
For I am naught but a passing shadow

A traveler by night and day
Illumined by vanishing stars

Searching within and finding
That all but He is an illusionary flicker

Of veritable truth
Which defies the forces of evanescence

That have been with us all
Since time's earliest dawn

Until the twilight of every day
Of every age, of every epoch

Help me, O Lord, with your speedy succor
That I breathe the rhythms of endless love

Actualized in an unknowable configuration of time
And space in which I cannot travel

I am, O Lord, a slowly moving wave
That strives to reach a near or distant coast

Of fine sand on which I shed my tears
Of exhausting journey

Seeking a sojourn of true love
Not betrayed by the chicaneries of life

The alleyways that have been endlessly trodden
By Man, who insistently does not learn

To be within an orbiting moon
Of true light and unimpeachable truth

Which I strive to apprehend
With hands bound behind my back

In the prison cell of the finite universe
Inexorably expanded by the Omnipotent Creator

Let there be a sound to awaken me
From the slumber of false love

From the cesspool of adulterated perfume
That discharges foul scent

Concealed by a cover of dazzling roses
With sharp thorns producing immense pain

Redeeming those that restore
The right steps of love's authentic dance

Emitting the sweetest aromas
Of the noble Arabian nights

The desert lands in which have dwelled
The soldiers of Mehmet's knights

The monks who shook the core of darkness
Riding handsome white stallions

Doing battle against an inner yearning
To throw an anchor on faith's port

A whitened road
A blackened hill

An immense mountain
At whose heights are perched homes and birds

Overlooking vast plains
Of verdant and fertile terrain

The horizons of hate are brimming
With a quest to deflower purity

To somehow create black tulips
To make the rivulets flow with red blood

And the black ink that darkened
The great and ancient Euphrates

And made vanish the innumerable pages
Composed by intrepid, though succumbing scholars

Men and women that lit endless candles
Red, white, green and blue

Chromatic configurations as varied
As the color shades of clay

From which the Lord created
The family that is the human race

I long for an unshakable rock
To shed the attires of life

To build a mind that I know
Could not abandon its love

For all the boats in the harbor
And all the colorful masts that they bear

Those that circumnavigated the wide earth
Sailing around the cape of good hope

But true hope is rekindled
When the Arabian Ahmad is followed

A mercy to all the worlds
To all the isles, to all the continents

The loving cry of Bilal
The eternal truth of God is Great

The plaintive cry that issued from
An Abyssinian free slave

Converting chains into indomitable

Tools of great liberation

The inner yearnings of souls
Incarcerated by the jails of illicit desires

Indulged only to arouse
An appetite for unfulfilled desire

I seek the song of whole harmony
Green grass that hosts lovely daffodils

Highlands that love in prostration
Preparing a tryst with kind destiny

Male and female dancing to a great tune
A ballad at peace with itself

Ire overcome by true compassion
Bravery that defies the sinister impulses of race

The fables of old have been retold
Beware of evil's folk

The terms of war or peace are defined
The veiled lady is our foe

The minaret produces alien sound
The place of worship is against our kind

The bearded men are hostile
To an old way of life

Our neighborhood must be free
From a system of total truth



Hyperbole

An advancement of human culture
When language precisely describes reality

Objective reality reified
In narratives that accurately portray

Discourses that are firmly anchored
In intellectual activity that empirically observes

Facts, events, phenomena
Recorded in guarded, carefully crafted language

Science and the discourses of the humanities
Circumspectly erecting structures of knowledge

Subjecting the knowable to inductive reasoning
And deducing theoretical postulates

Fusing the visible with metaphysics
By God, the earth around the sun revolves

Plant, animal, and physical reality
Ontologically dependent on the Divine

Poetry, though should not be banished
Nor hyperbole, not superlatives, nor far-fetched metaphor

For language accommodates a vast system of meaning
Containing the potential for infinite variety

My Lord, I wish to catch the moon of life

And relish its lustrous shine

And orbit in the region of its movement
To become the son of the age of space



Thinking

The irrational oftentimes animates human action
Confusedly ascribing effects to erroneous causes

Thinking that the ultimate cause of a condition
Is a particular contingent reason

A political circumstance completely engendered
By a man, a trend, or an extraneous variable

Surely, permeating the landscape of events
Are innumerable causes and influences

Sound reason dictates gaging such multiplicity
While ascribing all to a unitary Originator

Even the basest of evil is not ontologically
Independent from the Ultimate cause of phenomena

Monotheism is perfectly harmonious
With reason and senses that unveil reality

While monotheistic Reality is a supreme truth
Mind and senses vehicle incomplete knowledge



We will Overcome

Is it not a pernicious application of "justice"
That the village of Ni`lin should be so abused?

The crime is to resist land expropriation
And the building of an apartheid wall

Dividing a brave little hamlet
Defiant in the face of iniquitous occupation

Olive groves that have been possessed for centuries
Planted and nurtured to sustain a livelihood

Presently threatened by a vicious penchant to seize
To transfigure, to colonize, to violently pacify

Ni`lin, however, is a citadel of steadfastness
Bolstered by activist conscientious objectors

Brave Jews and foreigners who have joined a righteous cause
To defend a village fighting for its integrity, its survival

For its place in the midst of immense power
That dictates profoundly unfair terms

That treats the victim as an oppressor
And subjects the oppressed to untold suffering

The separation wall will not overcome
A nation's indomitable will to eventually prevail

In God Almighty we place our faith
That a just cause will be redeemed



Freedom Needs a Midwife

Many books that are a product of monumental labor are like a vast dark river: the vastness of the river may symbolize the extent of the scholarly and mental labor; and the darkness of the river: that its central idea is a falsehood.



Somehow, individuals and societies feel an enduring sense of indebtedness to those that midwived their freedom from dependence. In contrast, people tend to feel a sense of resentment towards those that may have shown largesse, but did not instill in them the elements of self reliance and enterprise. Oftentimes, those that feel such resentment are themselves responsible for their lack of independence.



Many an individual who harbors a sense of resentment at the unfair privilege of others, will, once in enjoyment of such privilege, object to the resentments of others and consider them unfair. When faced with the contradiction, and in the absence of honest soul searching, he will yield to the hegemony of privilege over his heart and his circumstance.



Conflict between nations and individuals happens when the pursuit of interest undermines the legitimate interests of others. Harmony between people has a higher chance of achievability when the strong can both deter aggression and also behave with justice and fairness.



People and individuals oftentimes inflict a heavy blow on themselves. When in a position of strength they will exercise power unfairly and unscrupulously. But the balance of power

between individuals and nations is in constant change, and a situation may arise when the oppressors become subject to the revenge of those whom they have oppressed. Oftentimes in the annals of human conflict the oppressed, once victorious, will pursue revenge with an intensity that is humiliating to their former oppressors. Those in power have an ongoing interest in maintaining the interests and dignity of those subject to their power. It could save them and their future generations a lot of grief.



Rulers and those who are governed should deal with each other with vigilance. But, sometimes, it is particularly vital that rulers vigilantly monitor the behavior of those who are the mainstay of their power. Oftentimes, it is the abusive use of force-unpunished because it was committed by a partisan of this party or that ruler- that feeds the forces of resentment and helps build the resolve of an opponent of a regime or a ruler. It often turns out that it was the unmonitored, unchecked abuse of power that brings about the moral collapse of a regime- and perhaps its political collapse. Those involved in doing battle against this or that opposition to a regime often do not recognize that. It is natural for leaders to enjoy witnessing expressions of loyalty by their soldiers. But they should have the resolve and wisdom to deter abuse of force by their loyalists. This is in their short and long term interest.



Some empire states have recognized the disparate threads of families, tribes and races and have perceived a political dividend in exploiting these differences. Others have viewed it differently: all people are related to Adam and Eve and all are created by the One God; the threads of kinship, geography and history are interwoven: through recognizing our common ancestry and our common God multi ethnic cooperation may build the blocks of political alliance and cooperation.



The shadow of death and finitude hangs over every human being. There are those, however, who are more comfortable with the idea of death, not out of a sense of nihilism but out of a sense of hope and yearning for the Mercy of God and the paradise that He promised the believers. Those who don't believe are left with the enjoyment of the temporary moment and with a sense of despair at the future. Such people miss out on the best that is in this world and in the next.



From the point of view of men women may be the finest that is in the world. They indeed can be that if their characters embody the elements in them that naturally attract men with the qualities of modesty and virtue. Such combination will endear to them self respecting men and will please God who created all people and decreed that the best of human beings, whether male or female, are the most God fearing.



Somehow, loyalty to the next of kin— by dint of a law in society that operates both visibly and invisibly- can affect the fortunes of people in this world and in the next. Such loyalty yields a dividend in terms of the sense of security that a person derives— in the sense that infidelity can lead to counter infidelity. The most stable system of kinship is when the ties of blood, of habitation, of economics is reinforced by the most important bond: the indissoluble bond of faith in the One God in his Revelation, in his Messenger..



Some take pleasure at the expression of human frailty and betrayal of what is true and just. Some, who are the genuine helpers of Muhammad, strive to reform such corruption and to lead people to the path of morality and dignity through

submission in the One Creator and to His Messenger Muhammad. Such people are the honorable descendants of Adam and Eve.



Whatever the arguments, the intellectual acrobatics, the scientific facts: nothing exists without an act of Creation. The only Being who exists Everlastingly, without beginning or end, is God Almighty- One, Indivisible. He has created everything and everyone; God punishes those who deny that and rewards those who affirm it. Satan, the enemy of God and of humanity, struggles to lead people into denying that truth; once he leads them astray from what He knows to be the truth he denounces them. God did not compel, either Satan or his followers, into disobedience, although He decreed it in His Wisdom and Justice. Those blessed with the gift of life should sow the seeds of faith and salvation so that God wills for them salvation and freedom from everlasting hellfire. Satan has no sovereignty over such people.



The issue of predestination is one that Satan most uses to lead people astray; “if everything is decreed”, he will whisper into the hearts of people, “then what is it that you can do to prevent encountering your destiny?”. The followers of God and His Religion will affirm the truth of predestination but will enjoin people to faith and good moral deeds: “True it's all predestined but let's plant the seeds that will please our Creator and will save us from the damnation which is the fate of Satan,” they will counter.

Satan will continue his act of deception and say:”Where is the justice of God and where is the role of free will if everything is predestined?” Of course, Satan knows that to be a false argument but whispers it to deceive: equally he knows that his act of disobeying God was done under a condition of freedom. His hatred of his fate and Adam (a circumstantial reason for his

disobedience to God) propels him to bring under the curse of God as many of the descendants of Adam as he could.

Moreover, the followers of the truth will say: "God has predestined it all and has enjoined us to believe but does not compel us into disobedience."

Such is the perfection of God and our intellectual limitation that we see an illusory contradiction. The solution is to affirm predestination and human free will and accountability, all at once, and to take refuge with God Almighty from the whisperings of Satan and the doubts of a created mind which can achieve enlightenment, through surrendering to God.



Besides the disputes of intellectuals and theologians about predestination and free will there is a simple way out from what seems to be a contradiction: without water plants cannot live; similarly the plant of faith should be irrigated with good deeds and with prayer. By not praying and by behaving corruptly the plant of faith will be deprived of the things that keep it alive. In either case God has willed the result; but it's an undeniable fact that people have the opportunity to water the plant of faith every day of their lives or to keep it thirsty. Abandoning prayer, belief and good moral deeds, while at the same time taking cover with the doctrine of predestination puts such people in an inexcusable contradiction.



Charisma helps certain individuals exercise influence over others. Like so much about human beings and societies it is a phenomenon mostly beyond explanation. Individuals who have charisma also have other qualities, limitations and faults. Those subject to the influence of charismatic individuals should be aware of them; it's to the benefit of both sides.



Some individuals are trapped by the admiration of others for them. Lots of what they do is applauded regardless of the soundness of such actions. In the process one of the most important elements of reasonable behavior may be missed: strict and honest self evaluation. When narcissism and enjoyment of the admiration of others takes over a lot of bad decisions are made.



People are social beings. They exist in a group. Much of what individuals do is learned from and oriented towards the society to which they belong. But in addition to existing within societies people also exist within the universe- and both societies and individuals and the universe are created and sustained by God. When individuals and societies orient themselves to that reality a much higher level of freedom, happiness and justice visits the human condition.



Behaving and speaking truthfully can become a habit which may be reinforced by the rewards that societies provide such behavior. But, under circumstances of moral decline, such rewards may decrease.



Many an instant in the history of human society it is individuals and groups that orient their behavior more to God than to society which is a cause for moral renewal. Ironically, these groups, vital to the survival of societies as they are, encounter social sanction after another; equally ironic is that this reinforces their steadfastness in striving for the Faith. They become freer from the hegemony of social sanctions over their

behavior and minds, and are lighthouses and signposts to truth in the midst of social decay.



The paradox of power is that. it sometimes appeals to our lesser qualities as people. Under the worst of circumstances, however, certain human interests are served through the quest for and maintenance of power by certain individuals and groups. Societal order is reinforced by the ability of a minority to dissuade a majority. Sometimes, this preponderantly powerful minority is politically and morally reasonable, and sometimes it isn't. The majority can do much to deter the injustice of a minority; usually, such a majority doesn't exercise such a power.



Much of human behavior is derived from the perception of others. Usually, language plays a great role in forming such perception- and language- or communication- may be sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. However, the word is not simply made out of the five senses; Nor is mind formed by matter; nor is matter formed by spirit; nor is reality created by mind: mind, matter and spirit were all created by God, and God said to existence "be" and it was- through a word that is an Attribute of God and which is neither matter nor mind nor spirit nor human language. How the Word of God became the universe, the earth, humanity- is a question that is humanly unanswerable. It is entirely reasonable, however, to affirm it.



Poverty and need may contribute to corruption and theft. But more often than not it is greed which causes the violation of the right to property- private and public. Equally, very often thefts occur in situations of both prosperity and wealth as much as refraining from theft may occur within genuinely poor social circles. Moreover, under certain situations of both justice and general prosperity respect for rights to property may be very deep. This is achieved when wealth is legitimately acquired by people, when alms are collected and fairly distributed to the needy, and when the violation of property rights are punished in a way that is just to both the rich and the poor.



There is, in the world in which we live, secretive planning that leads to the good of people, to cementing harmony between people; and there is also hidden contrivance that sows dissension between people. Such contrivance, in one variety of human situations, may take the form of causing injury to someone and leaving tracks suggesting the identity of a culprit- who is in fact entirely blameless. The result is that the real culprit is hidden and animosity occurs by dint of recriminations between the victim and the blameless person- portrayed as the culprit by the unknown sower of dissension.

By contrast, there is well intentioned contrivance involving good deeds with a suggestion that this person or that is responsible for those good deeds- while in fact, such persons have not done such deeds. The result is harmony between people and an ennoblement of those that strive for the good of people- self-effacingly, without regard for getting credit from others. Their reward is in pleasing their Creator and seeing the values of good triumphing over those of evil.



Some have reflected much on the nature of good and evil. Of those there are ones who have gained knowledge of good and evil and in the process became righteous; and others who have become knowledgeable about good and evil and in the process have become believers in and practitioners of evil. Those are the enemies of God, of humanity, and are friends of Satan.



There are many who have taken a bird's eye view of reality and have decided that bad people are usually victorious in life. In the process, some decided that the only way out is to follow the bad people and learn the ideas and ways that make them triumph so often. Others have clung to their faith in the good Almighty God, however adverse the circumstance, and gained peace of mind and happiness in this world and paradise everlasting in the next.



Under threat and in a condition of ambitious aggression individuals and nations will tend to resort to a fundamentalist tribal or ethnic affiliation; sometimes, such a process engenders a darkness of heart that sees through the lenses of mortal hatred of the other individual or tribe or race- without regard for the innocent among them, the righteous, the defenseless.. It serves nations well to well define their sense of who they are, where they came from and to defend these sacreds- but to do so with a vision of what is right and what is wrong- whatever the peril, whatever the threat, whatever the ambition..



Reason can go a long way in telling people what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil; equally, reason can paint a picture of reality that is false and that is evil. This is what makes the invocation of conscience a necessity; and this is what makes Divine Revelation also a necessity. Reason and Revelation go together and people of sound conscience recognize that.



People's learning abilities vary. People's teaching abilities also vary. But somehow, a good teacher can make bad learners know more with greater ease, as well as pushing good learners to become exceptional students..



Faith is like a candle that glows with work. And life is like a lantern that never fades with faith.



Scholars have often felt that society doesn't show enough appreciation for them. They are right in feeling this. However, this has many a time made them more modest, more pure and

more able to seek truth with a sense of freedom from the sin of pride which the admiration of others so often develops in the hearts of men. No doubt, the sin of pride can diminish a scholar's vision of what is true- however laborious his toil, and however elevated his status.



Alcohol may release people from their sense of restraint, their sense of what's conventional. But it is like a creeping plague which corrodes the moral fabric of human community. People need and deserve having their desires fulfilled, but should do so with vision and through a process of sensual gratification that is within what's Divinely Lawful. Such sensual gratification maintains our sense of what is rational; and what is rational is good for society. Everything that the Law of God prescribes is good for society.



It's good for people to think in terms of what's predestined. It's also good for people to think in terms of what is doable, what is preventable. Human actions can cause socially desirable results and such results are predestined. Human inaction can lead to socially undesirable results and such results are equally predestined. But in every moment of our life we have a choice between doing or not doing, between action and inaction..



One of life's finest pleasures is eating and drinking. None can deny that.. But thanking God after a meal, and feeding a needy person, leaves a person with a wonderful after taste.



Pride is a sin. It is also an uncomfortable feeling. Those that have humility enjoy life more. Humility and modesty become more possible when people prostrate themselves to the One Great God

and commit good deeds. Society becomes a happier place when more people are sincere in their faith and a sense of community is cemented through modest behavior between people- regardless of status and power held.



In a moment of death a funeral is attended by some who are knowledgeable of the significance of death and others who are ignorant of it: the knowledgeable will say that the earth is a temporary abode and that all of us will to the grave and to God return; the ignorant will say that this is indeed a short life, but death is yet to come- we must enjoy more- and there is no life after the present one.



All of us who have been taught in schools or universities have been influenced by the received wisdom of scholars, of men of letters, of philosophers.. But an alert learner listens to the thought of great thinkers as well as listening to the truths and insights that are so often expressed by uneducated people, by children, by adolescents.. by those who are not the creative mouthpieces of high culture, by the voices of knowledge wherever and whenever they occur.. A good learner keeps his ears open to facts and truths and insights.. wherever they can be found..



God has put the love of children in the hearts of parents.. He did not make the devotion of parents to their children depend only on their rational wills, however.. God ensured the existence of such devotion through creating the awesome instincts of paternity and maternity.. which are instances of mercifulness and self-sacrifice overwhelming the factors of pure economics and power.. It's manifestly beneficial to societies and individuals when people can generalize their sentiments of maternity and paternity to people other than their immediate offspring.. The result is a more compassionate, more tightly woven society..



The success of a business enterprise often depends on the opening chapters. Particularly, the relationships of its founders are of critical importance. If the beginnings have to do with each trying to make wealth out of the other at the expense of putting the business on its feet the sense of trust between the partners is diminished- which is something that influences the general ethic and behavior of the employees.

In a sense, when each owner selfishly pursues his interest at the expense of the other owners, and at the expense of the institution, a loss maybe incurred by him, his partners and the institution as a whole..



Founding members of a business should have this vision from the beginning. Putting aside their temporary gains from selfish behavior, coupled with their commitment to the welfare of the business serves their short term as well as long term interests. An insufficiently recognized fact is that the way partners socialize may contribute to the stability of business partnerships: alcohol free socializing, avoidance of contact with a partner's spouse coupled with avoidance of some forms of corruption will put a business relationship on steadier grounds- as will honesty in business dealing.

The success of business enterprises has to do with efficiency, productivity, daring entrepreneurship and vision. If these elements exist alongside the mentioned moral ingredients any business can be more successful.



In a circumstance of anguish, suffering or disappointment a human being can direct his pain to a person, a woman, a state, the elements, or one can prostrate himself to His Merciful Creator and ask His help, His forgiveness.. In such an instance a person is making an appeal to the Lord of Creation who is All Capable, All- Knowing, All Merciful.. None can deny that He, and only

He, can make an opening for a human being in his provision, in his health, in his psychological state..



There are times when a person is reprimanded for doing something wrong and sometimes for doing something beyond his will (i.e. involuntarily). Justice in behavior requires that reprimanding someone must be based on culpability.. Those that reprimand the blameless cause injury to others and lose their sense of moral balance and self-esteem..



Adults can learn much about themselves by observing children.. Children exhibit frankly their instincts, emotions, fears, needs—in ways that. are free from the codes of conduct which adults adopt and which oftentimes disguise these human impulses.. From children we learn that people have what is good in them and what is bad.. No doubt, the basic goodness of human beings is evident in children.. In the absence of a commitment to faith, Revelation, reason and fairness adults may lose a lot of that basic goodness; in effect, the inclination for evil may be deepened through human choice- as can the inclination for goodness.



War, viewed from one angle, may be compared to art. Like art it is amenable to continual refinement, it has its masters, it often conveys a destructive message and it may be highly unpredictable- even to those who are highly skilled at it. As in art the techniques often have a defining influence on the outcome of war (the moral as well as the instrumental techniques). Art, as well as the ability to wage battle, may be upgraded from mediocrity through the excellence of their moral content— or may be substantially downgraded by the decadence of their inner techniques and messages.



Nations were often triumphant for many reasons: one such reason is a fair system of accountability where gross negligence or treason by a foot soldier or a person of high rank was subject to review and penalization. In the absence of such accountability avoidable concessions to an adversary on the battlefield- or in other arenas- may be an outcome.

Another important factor that saps the military performance of a nation is the urge of individuals, subordinate or in command, to lay blame on others while refusing to accept a share of responsibility for a setback of one kind or another.



Over and above competence, organization, discipline, technical factors, numerical superiority, courage, training, favorable environmental factors, exceptional planning abilities etc. the moral circumstance of a fighting force can play an important role in a battle. Faith, prayer, absence of alcoholic beverages, abstinence from adultery, financial honesty and respect for an enemy's human rights can strengthen the morale of a fighting force and may turn the tide of a battle. In contrast, corruption in a fighting force may help sap its determination to fight under circumstances when endurance and self-sacrifice are crucial. To a large extent, a better moral circumstance in any army is too often underrated as an asset in situations of military training and planning or in situations of execution of military action.



There is a thing about battle that in its most silent, unnoticed moments can be devastating to an enemy camp. Essentially, the more unknown the nature and source of a battle being waged the more protected a camp waging a battle can be from retaliation. In the modern age this type of battle is sometimes called covert war.



Oftentimes, when states wage a covert war their societies may be deeply influenced by its implications- but may often be entirely

unaware that it is going on. Perhaps, when covert wars are waged for the wrong reasons the societies of both the targets of covert war as well as the societies of the states waging them fall victim.



People, in many kinds of situations, are hampered by indecisiveness. The results of indecisiveness may be worsened when mutual recrimination replaces the impulse to

decide, to cooperate and to take coherent effective action.



Chains of command in any institution are much weakened when subordinates undertake the rituals of obeying commands but not the substance of comprehending them and implementing them reasonably, without the presence of supervision. Good commanders should distinguish between subordinates who implement orders effectively and those who exhibit obedience to commands but who insufficiently appreciate what needs to be done to carry out a set of instructions.



Some of the finest decisions are often reached when a single person recognizes the importance of certain decisions and actually oversees their implementation. Usually, however, debate, consultation and informed deliberations among executives helps, God Willing, in reaching better decisions. Oftentimes, advice that is given to decision makers communicates certain private interests.



Decision makers should be aware of the general motivations and interests of advisers or subordinates; being aware of these motivations may help a decision maker distinguish between

selfishly motivated advice, on the one hand, and advise that addresses the requirements of a situation.



Under circumstances of overwhelming strength pride may considerably reduce the performance of an athletic team, a fighting force or a private company: on the other hand, winning elements in a team are those who perform well but modestly, and who do not let the winning tide of a battle blur their vision or weaken their resolve to fight with consistency and discipline. Oftentimes, the vainglory of a leader and his quest for admiration may reduce morale- especially, when the contributions of a team, in all of its elements, are not sincerely recognized; or when his followers are reluctant, to give credit to important contributors to a team effort.



Success of military or political movements is oftentimes intimately related to the willingness of leaderships to self sacrifice. When soldiers perceive an inclination to sacrifice within the ranks of leadership their faith in self sacrifice intensifies. In contrast, defending a leadership with diligence and effectiveness may set an important standard and may have a positive influence.



The degree of force used or threatened in situations of conflict may be an expression of the sophistication, vision, farsightedness and skill of a leadership. Excessive use of force, under certain situations, may lead eventually to loss and suffering in the camp of the currently victorious. Using force wisely is often as critical, in the short and long run, as using force effectively.



The success of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in many of his campaigns was oftentimes related to his willingness to forgive bitter enemies, to enlist to the cause of Islam people who were previously infidels and corruptors on earth, to neutralize potential adversaries through endurance, through indefatigably calling on people to repent, through economic reward and wise statesmanship.

There is a reason for that: God sent him as a mercy to the worlds- and in his mission as a Prophet, a judge, a preacher, an organizer of military campaigns- his Divinely ordained purpose was to spread Islam and to show the path to the worship of the One God. For that goal he forgave many an enemy, endured many a tribulation, and waged many a battle against the enemies of Allah and the enemies of Islam.



Fine military leaders are usually those who are in command of the general principles of conflict management, strategic planning, tactical warfare, logistics... But, sometimes, the qualities that can make a difference have to do with skilled and situation-oriented application of these principles.. Oftentimes, it is not a sophisticated absorption of these theoretical skills that are important inasmuch as being in touch with basic, simple facts and details on the ground.. In many conflict situations, basic common sense may be more vitally important in a battle than grand strategic thinking...



In any military institution successful performance is related to many variables... A crucial ingredient is the presence of fundamental realism.. This often means an ability to follow the tide of an unfolding conflict, arms race, military preparedness etc. with objective realism. This is often accomplishable through a better mastery of the methods of measuring the indicators of achievement or setback: without being daunted or demoralized by a setback or becoming irrationally euphoric about an episode of triumph...



Battles are often won through the presence of determination to make sustained effort at every juncture, to consider the seemingly unimportant challenges as significant- let alone the major challenges..When this attitude prevails in thinking and behavioral habit preventable mistakes are avoided, inroads by a foe can be contained.. Victories and achievements are a product of sustained effort and will... Defeats are often a product of people's inability to adequately recognize the importance of small but continual effort..



Information, undoubtedly, is of the essence in human conflict.. Leaderships and institutions who systematically pursue knowledge about an adversary or ally are better equipped for battle or peaceful alliance... However, the question related to how much does an enemy or ally know can also be of crucial importance... This is why military establishments are keen on concealing facts from a perceived adversary.. This is also why it is wise to undermine the negative implications of situations where an adversary knows information that can be damaging to human life or to the security of a nation.. It is also wise that once such leakage of information is uncovered effective containment procedures are undertaken..



In situations of conflict recognizing the weapons, targets and methods of an adversary is extremely important.. Such knowledge, if absent, will deepen the inability to effective self-defense.. It is also wise, from a military point of view, to identify options for retaliation in case an adversary strikes one side's targets.. It is wise because a threat to retaliate may deter hostile action... Moreover, insufficiently defended targets may make the battle of an enemy much easier..



In conflict situations a party to a conflict would prefer to choose the location of a battle.. Every location contains a set of battle advantages- as well as disadvantages.. Luring an adversary into a specific location may make the battle more winnable.. The venue of battle may, sometimes, prove a decisive factor in a battle..



Inflicting damage to an adversary involves a variety of weapons; however, without mechanisms of delivery and prosecution weapons may prove useless, waging battle may be impossible.. The more defended or shielded the media of implementing battle the greater the capability to maintain a battle, the less the casualties sustained...

The media of battle may be of a variety of things: institutional, human and material...; for those that resist a battle being waged identifying the media of implementation may be of crucial importance..



It is a known fact that cohesiveness of a society or the cadre of an institution is vital in battle situations... When domestic fronts are in disarray (through oppression, disorganization, corruption, injustice, irrationality, demagoguery etc) the capability to prosecute battle by society or a group is diminished... Oftentimes, the ethics of a battle may help strengthen a battle formation; oftentimes, the lack of ethics in a battle may strengthen the forces of internal dissension while contributing to increased determination on the part of an adversary to counter the damage inflicted..



In a sense, increasing the range of power over an adversary through the use of force is oftentimes possible; the essence of long range victories, however, is to wage a winning battle but to do so while defending what is universally sacred: the sanctity of faith in God, the sanctity of innocent life, the sanctity of the

family institution within the domestic as well as an adversary's front, the sanctity of the variety of human languages and ethnic groupings, the sanctity of human entitlement to know more and to progress more..



Muslim victories were many in history: there are many reasons to account for those successes related to the Religion of Islam, its values and principles: to mention only a few, the self sacrifice that hope in the hereafter can foster, its hatred of racial and social bigotries (which helped many tribes & races become a part of its nation), its encouragement of any group or race to defend its values and become a dominant element, its defense of the oppressed throughout the world..



War may be waged by any group or nation; a crucial ingredient in any war is the morality of the cause being fought.. Moral victory is as much related to accomplishment on the battlefield as it is related to the morality of the cause for which a battle is waged... Islam's battle is basically related to calling people of whichever race, tribe, gender, social class or region to the worship of the One God (and the acceptance of His Messenger Muhammad), and to life under God's Law..



Fortification is of the essence in conflict situations..When advancing militarily if the necessary measures for fortification are not understood or implemented an adversary will counterattack with great ease and will offset the positive results of a battle.. Likewise, in defending a territory effective fortification will make the tasks of an advancing army much more difficult.. In Islam, the challenge of internal fortification is as much the battle against corruption (within the important institutions of society) as it is fortifying what is vital to society's ability to defend itself... In essence, societies that wish to exercise

dominance over other societies try to build fortifications in other societies..



It is not so much the number of people that share an ideology that is important in human conflict: rather, it is how much organization and the degree of mobilization of human and material resources which is important.. Essentially, vast human and material resources— if not mustered organizationally and institutionally in battle will not produce the desired results.. In effect. small numbers of people who are well organized, skilled and effective can accomplish much more in a situation of battle than multitudes who share a common interest and an ideology but who simply are not mobilized in a battle..



Battle has as much to do with attack as it has to do with counterattack.. Planners of conflict usually calculate what it takes to wage an attack- but, likewise try to assess the implications of counterattack..and also prepare for containing a counterattack in the event that it should occur..



Adversaries- or two sides in a conflict possess certain altitudes, assessments and perceptions of each other.. It is often extremely valuable to know the assessments of an enemy, or to know of its general perceptions of a conflict situation- elaborated through the genuine texts and words of an adversary- and not through general assumptions and suppositions.. What an adversary thinks, his general perceptions, his goals and plans of action- may help in forming more sophisticated strategies and plans of action- and may be a helping factor in achieving dominance in a conflict situation...



An extremely important element in waging war is thinking that emphasizes phases and time schedules in the pursuit of military or political objectives.. The importance of thinking about time periods in planning for or carrying out a battle is that it leads to the issue of sustainable conflict (i.e. the presence of munitions, food supplies, fuel, spare parts in a battle etc.).. When in situations of either defense or attack leaderships take into account the possible length of a conflict and try to amass the required supplies in such a conflict- or try to think in terms of contingency options for situations when vital supplies may be scarce..



The importance of contingency planning is that, theoretically, it makes a state or an institution less vulnerable to hasty, irrational decisions or courses of action.. Essentially, contingency planning has to do with elaborating plans or options for situations when a state is challenged by a threat, or when a state is faced with unexpected behavior by an ally or an adversary.. The existence of such planning may reduce the risks embedded in unpredictable situations- through making well thought out plans of action available in situations when time is extremely scarce..



Oftentimes, cooperation between states may cause victory in a battle, or may contribute to a defeat.. Basically, a challenge to two or more states may be more effectively withstood when these states lay the necessary groundwork for alliance or cooperation.. Usually, this cooperation may require joint decision making by states- involving a diminution of unilateral decision making..



Arrows of Splendid Prose

To state that life is oftentimes wrapped in painful paradoxes would not be saying something new or extraordinary. The elegant and graceful handwriting and prose of Iss'af Nashashibi-- about whom this article speaks-- stand in paradoxical contrast to the turbulent and sometimes difficult circumstances to which the people of Jerusalem and Palestine, and to which Iss'af Nashashibi himself was subject.

If his handwritten and remarkably seasoned prose show elegant, adept self-expression to extend the metaphor, the people of Palestine showed great resilience in the face of the challenge to survive the threats of dispossession, dismemberment, Diaspora and the unrelenting distortion of a legacy by Zionist forces and ideology.

If we accept that Nashashibi's year of birth was 1882 (and this writer has seen contradictory accounts about his year of birth) then we would be speaking about the year in which the forces of the British government occupied Egypt during the reign of Khedive Isma'il. The year of his death is, by contrast, without doubt 1948.

Both 1882 and 1948 were years of great consequence for Egypt, Britain, Palestine, and the Arab World. In a sense, 1882 fortified the presence of British imperialism in the Middle East through the political and economic subjection of Egypt.

And, 1948 was the year of Arab political and military defeat and the establishment of the Zionist entity on the soil of Palestine-- as it was, likewise, the year of Palestinian exodus and colossal loss of territorial and human rights.

Unfortunately, British influence in Egypt and mandated tutelage over Palestine both catalyzed and oversaw the fruition of the Zionist project of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Equally, the Zionist project was a harbinger of great suffering and instability for the Arab region-- let alone the world at large-- as well as a sordid saga of oppression, abuse of power, a systematic violation of the rightful entitlement of the Palestinian people to live in security on their ancestral soil, on their orchards, and in their villages and cities.

Ironically, Zionism was and is still viewed by some who are politically and culturally influential in the West as a strategic asset when in fact it has and continues to undermine trust and goodwill in relations between the East and West.

Iss'af Nashashibi, scholar, teacher, man of letters, publicist and poet is the son of Uthman ibn Salman Nashashibi who was a Jerusalemite noted for his learning and private wealth-- in addition to being a member of a leading Jerusalem Muslim, Arab family.

Iss'af's early years had to do with a socially and religiously conservative upbringing within the framework of the Ottoman system of Sunni Caliphal rule of which Palestine-- and especially Jerusalem-- were a vital part. The great ancestor of the Nashashibis was Amir Nasser Eddin who was appointed by the Mameluke King Jukmuk to a leading position in the administration of Palestine and its places of worship. After his tenure expired he decided to move from Egypt and settle in Jerusalem from which time onwards the family enjoyed continuous habitation in the Holy City.

It is interesting to note that the name Nashashibi derives from "Nashab" which means bow: essentially, Nashashibi may mean those who produce bows. Far from being a producer of bows Iss'af hurled many a lance at tendencies in modern Arab culture which sought to supersede traditional matrices of thinking, of belles lettres, of styles of classical Arabic expression of which he was a staunch defender; in a cultural sense he was deeply conservative.

That by no means implies an oblivion on his part to trends in modern civilization, whose selective adoption he may have advocated as a means to overcome tendencies of backwardness and decline evident in the material and cultural performance of the Arab nation: the progressing march of Zionist colonialism and, Arab and Islamic disunity were perhaps important stimulators of a realization that progress was critically important in the task to overcome these enormous challenges.

Having acquired a conventional “Kuttab” (small classroom gathering) education in his early years in Jerusalem in the sciences of religion, language, and mathematics, he traveled to the great city of Beirut and studied in a Missionary school where he acquired some knowledge of French and Western Culture, in addition to continuing his study of the Arabic language and literature under the supervision of Abdullah Bustani, Muhyi addin Khayyat and Mustapha Ghalayani. By the end of World War I he taught Arabic at Al-Salahiya and Al-Rashidiya schools.

Nashashibi wrote prolifically on such subjects as politics, language, grammar, and poetry, though he was more skilled as an essayist than as a poet. In 1935 he published a work about Islam titled “Al Islam Al Sahih” or “The Correct Islam” in which he attempted to give an interpretation of the Muslim creed in its pure form.

Nashashibi wrote this book after much research and during a decade when some of the finest literary figures (for example, Muhammad Heikal, Abbas Al-Aqqad, Taha Hussein) were showing increased focus on Islamic themes in their writings.

The year of his death (1948) in Cairo was also a year of grief for the Arab and Muslim worlds because it ushered in a time of political turbulence, Palestinian dispersal and considerable dispossession for the people of Palestine. His funeral, which the exiled Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al-Husseini, attended, evoked the condolences of leading figures in Egyptian society including the Muslim luminary Imam Hassan Al-Banna, King Farouk, Nuqrashi Pasha-- in addition to many in the arena of

culture who paid tribute to a remarkable man who lived and struggled defending the integrity of Arab culture and the survival of Palestine as a land with a people, a history and a future.

It may be of symbolic significance that Nashashibi passed away in the land inhabited by his ancestors because of circumstances beyond his control: his ancestors, several centuries ago, were inhabitants of Egypt.

Equally symbolic, perhaps, is that funeral prayers were held at the “Sharkass” Mosque (or Circassian Mosque): the Circassians were the dominant group in the Mameluke State which appointed Nasser Eddin Nashashibi-- the family’s ancestor, perhaps five centuries earlier, as Nathir Al-Haramayn in Palestine, or the Superintendent at the two holy places (Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and Al-Ibrahim Mosque in Hebron)..



Equal with the Dhimmis?

Islam and Muslim civilization have been criticized by many detractors. The anti-Islamic polemic has addressed many themes. One such theme is the question of the dealing of Islamic societies with protected people (Dhimmis), or the “People of the Book”: Christians and Jews.

In all fairness, some of these critics, or students of Muslim civilization have often mentioned the tolerance of the Muslim religion towards Ahl Al-Kitab-- or People of the Book: the people of the Torah and the Evangel. In fact, in comparison with other civilizations Muslim civilization embodies tolerance of an unequalled extent.

The issue of the view of Islam of Christianity and Judaism, or of Jews and Christians is too broad to be dealt with in a short article. Relevant to say here is that Dhimmis’ freedom of religious practice, rights to property, to life, to honor were generally defended by the Islamic caliphate and by Islamic governments. In fact, the law of Islam defends those rights.

Even under circumstances of a military conquest of territory by Muslims the rights of the non-Muslims were generally safeguarded: In the sense that freedom of religious belief was not infringed (although people were encouraged to become Muslim, and hence, an integral part of the Muslim nation), women and children were not murdered, private property was generally safeguarded.

When we speak about Israeli occupation of Arab territory and honest comparison between historical Muslim treatment of Jews and Israeli treatment of Arabs is perhaps never evoked. Quite objectively, the record of the Israeli governments over fifty years has been dismal: land is routinely expropriated, economic warfare has oftentimes been perpetrated with viciousness, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who remained in Palestine have been arrested over the years--

sometimes tortured and killed-- not to mention the denial of the right to return for perhaps more than half of the Palestinian people-- multitudes of whom continue to live in camps of refuge in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt.

This writer recently attended a lecture delivered by a Jordanian official describing his impressions of east Jerusalem at the premises of the Jerusalem Forum in Amman: in a nutshell, the situation for the Arab quarter of the city is dismal. Compared with the western part of the city the municipal services are vastly inferior, the economic circumstances are recessionary, there is an absence of intellectual and political leadership, and Arab property is shrinking.

In effect, the Arab quarter of Jerusalem that is so talked about in the press and by politicians has been ghettoized. Even Islam's holy Aqsa Mosque is being continually threatened by elements that wish to inflict damage to it-- through the construction of underground tunnels or through periodic attacks on its premises by extremist elements.

On a final note: it is best for those that criticize Islam on the issue of "protected people" and who are at the same time supporters of and apologists for Israeli occupation to refrain.

Intellectual and moral honesty may be better served in the process.

Say, "O you people of the book, come to a just word between you and us, that we worship none but God, and that we associate naught with him, and that we take not one another for Lords apart from God." But if they turn away, then say, "Be it witnessed that we are Muslims." (Holy Qur'an, 3:64)



Is Laughter Banned in the Holy City?

No doubt mirth and laughter are a part of what we are as human beings. In addition to its being a natural human tendency--universally observable-- people's sense of humor is often times culturally derived. The people of a tiny hamlet or town may have a sense of humor especially enjoyed and that is familiar to that particular town or region. Traditions and a shared historical experience may explain a great deal.

Can we say something about the sense of humor of Arab Jerusalemites?

Before addressing this question lets say something about humor in Islam: The Muslim faith encourages laughter to the extent that it is a religion that seeks to achieve human well being. On one occasion, the prophet Muhammad told an elderly woman that her likes will not go to paradise; she was obviously astounded by the Prophet's remark... But he (peace be upon him) explained that this is so because in paradise people are forever youthful...(this is not the exact narration).

Having said that we can say that certain types of humor which encourage racism and prejudice, or which foster denigration by dint of the humanly blameless (social status, the physical and social environment, accent or cuisine of a group, gender affiliation, handicap, etc.) are Islamically discouraged. In contrast, humor which brings to focus these differences but which at the same time helps in social solidarity and compassion is Islamically encouraged.

Going back to the question: what can we say about the humor of Jerusalemites? Generally speaking it is a subdued sense of humor. A part of the reason is that Arab Jerusalemites are extremely conscious of social perception, generally reluctant to engage in boisterous kinds of laughter-- especially on occasions when many people are present. It is commonplace to reproach

someone who express lewdness in jokes to be reproached as "Qalil Haya" (or suffering from insufficient sense of shame).

Does that mean that Jerusalemites are incapable of vulgar humor, or that, in fact, lewd joking doesn't exist? The fact is it exists: but when it is practiced, this writer would argue, there is sometimes an effort to conceal it or to resist it. But like any other city there is a certain amount of corruption which occurs in how people stimulate laughter, or how they go about resisting it.

After the 1948 and the 1967 catastrophes it is arguable that the Jerusalem Arab community (inside and outside Palestine) became more exposed to influences transmitted through newer social environments, through avenues of the media and education which were not present in earlier times.

No doubt, Israeli occupation and culture also had an influence on the styles of humor of Jerusalemites. In effect, humor is evoked oftentimes by both the painful as well as the sweet, by enemies as well as friends, by what is indigenous to a social group and what is extraneous.

Sometimes, absence or availability of money is a source for humor, when wealth is referred to: "Fulan Zangil" (a word of ostensibly Turkish origin) may mean: so and so is rich. By contrast, the remark "Fulan mfaliss" may mean he is penniless. The adjective "mfaliss", may mean "without fils"-- the first syllable of which is "mafi" (without), and the second syllable "fils" is a monetary unit.

Perhaps for Jerusalemites the moral example may be the Egyptians: they maintain their mirth and sense of humor under the most difficult or under the easiest of circumstances. Oftentimes, that may add up to laughing hearts that get warmer over time.

Do the Turks have a sense of humor? To the extent that a Turk is a man, and to the extent that humor is a human trait we can

deduce that the Turks have a sense of humor. To observe Turkish humor directly knowing Jerusalemites may be a helpful thread.



Dangerous Dice of the Earthly Moment

Eternity may be understood through many avenues and at many levels. The primary avenue of understanding it is the permanence of life after death and resurrection; by extension, the ephemeral, temporary moment of life is an obvious fact.

The temporary nature of life is oftentimes difficult to accept. The unwise have challenged life's fading moment through celebrating only this life, and through suppressing its underlying meaning and reality.

Many in life's history have appreciated life with its joyous occasions-- success, birth, health, material well-being, and betrothal. Those have lived their earthly moment-- but have also struggled to remind themselves of life's fading moment, in addition to their yearning for the abode of paradise and for liberation from hellfire.

According to Islam, the road to salvation has, since the dawn of human habitation on earth, been doctrinally and ethically identical: surrender to the One God our Creator, to his messengers, belief in the hereafter, and performance of righteous deeds and avoidance of corruption.

The Unity of God-- and his exclusive entitlement to be worshipped-- has been a belief communicated through God's Covenant with our collective ancestor Adam, and his descendants, and through divine revelations to the peoples and tribes of mankind: e.g. the Torah, the Evangel and the Holy Koran, revealed to Moses, Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad respectively. (Peace be upon them).

It is no secret that many, in human history, until present times, have not been believers. There are common threads in the phenomenon of unbelief too many to enumerate here: but one of them is a denial of the significance of life's temporary moment, coupled with an irrational denial of God's Capability to resurrect the dead on the Day of Judgment. That the denial of the

possibility of resurrection is an irrationality is because it limits-- through an intellectual fiction-- God's Attribute of Omnipotence (i.e. that God is Almighty and that he is Capable of all things). It is an irrationality, moreover, because all of us can witness the miracle of life in the birth of each baby, in the growth of each tree...; and yet, through observing the seemingly ordinary birth of life many exclude the possibility that the God who created life in the first place is capable of creating the same life again. To deny this is to express a limited observation of life as occurring once. But to say that life occurs once is simply false: the proofs of Revelation and reason support this.

The argument may be made, furthermore, that one of the primary sources of human folly and oppression is denial of resurrection and Divine accounting, over and above clinging to the illusion of permanence in this life; sometimes, this has been the folly of individuals-- at others, it has been the folly of elites of empires, ruling dynasties, fiefdoms-- and, also, the folly of very modern secular states (e.g. Communist, Nazi or liberal states). Hitler believed that Berlin would be the Third Reich's capital for 1,000 years; Communists were convinced that Socialism is where the direction of history is; the liberal intellectual Fukuyama claimed that liberalism is the final ideological and political event of human history.

Jerusalem very much embodies the notion of the heavenly kingdom and life after death; and yet, it has been characterized by some Zionist politicians as "Israel's" eternal capital. It is, sometimes more appropriate to withhold comment when claims to political eternity are made! History's simplest lessons would have to be ignored in the process.

Human vision is maintained-- and the moral content of political conduct is enhanced-- when people have the ability to affirm life's and power's temporary moment. To affirm God's unchanging reality and to believe in the hereafter is critically important in the human quest to avoid what is painful or disastrous. To learn, to build, to struggle, to toil are facts of life: to do so with faith, with a commitment to justice, and with an

awareness of God's purpose in life is to avoid rolling the dice of uncertainty and self inflicted injury. Truly Allah is All-Merciful and absolutely just.



Lecture delivered at the American Center for Oriental Research/Amman

Introduction to Islam

To begin this lecture, which I feel privileged to deliver at the invitation of ACOR, and before a distinguished group of American academics, I would like to juxtapose two inclinations or proclivities that have deep roots in both Western and Islamic civilization. The first inclination or method of conduct and reasoning is embodied in the Platonic approach to attaining truth and wisdom, namely through a narrative of dialogue, debate and critical assessment of intellectual propositions- and thus, the monumental edifice of wisdom bequeathed by Socrates and Plato to humanity which was firmly underpinned by dialogical and dialectical method. The second inclination that is enshrined in Islamic thought and civilization likewise fosters the attainment of truth and wisdom through peaceful and reasoned dialogue: And here I quote a verse from the Holy Qur`an which epitomizes this attitude: “Call to the path of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and dispute with them in the best manner. Surely your Lord knows best those who are perverse from His path, and He best knows the guided..” (H. Qur`an 16:125)

An Introduction to Islam is too vast a challenge to be undertaken in a single lecture. Hence, my approach shall rest on treating certain themes which may contain some, rather selective, elucidation of the creedal, epistemological, doctrinal and historical premises of Islam.¹

The early manifestation of Islam was in the 7th century A.D. in Mecca, western Arabia. The biography of the Prophet Muhammad (or the Sira) relates that on one night during the month of Ramadan, the Arch Angel Gabriel visited the Prophet in

¹ This lecture has relied extensively on the Encyclopedia Britannica article on Islam, on Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall's translation of the Holy Qur'an (and its introduction), and Muhammad Mubarak's book entitled "Islam: Doctrines and Rituals" which this lecturer has translated from Arabic into English.

his retreat on a desert hill that is contiguous to Mecca (Mount Hira), and inaugurated the revelation of Islam to him by his command to Muhammad when he was in slumber or in a trance: "Read!" He said: "I cannot read." The voice again said: "Read"! He said: " I cannot read." A third time the voice commanded: "Read!" He said: "What can I read?"

To which Gabriel said:

"Read: In the name of thy Lord Who createth. Createth man from a clot. Read: And it is thy Lord the Most Bountiful, Who teacheth by the pen, Teacheth man that which he knew not."

Muhammad, son of Abdullah, son of Abdul Muttalib, of the illustrious tribe of Quraish, was born in the small oasis town of Mecca in the year 570. Given that his father passed away prior to his birth, he was taken care of by his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, and after the latter's death by his uncle Abu Taleb. It is related in the Sira that he, as a child, traveled in the company of his uncle in the merchant's caravan to Syria, and a few years later undertook the same journey on behalf of a wealthy widow named Khadijah. So exemplary was his conduct, and so profitable, that Khadijah proposed to marry him, although he was fifteen years younger than she.

The people of Mecca considered themselves descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, while tradition held that their sanctuary, the Ka'ba, had been built by Abraham for the worship of the One God. However, decay and corruption in the religious practices and beliefs of the Arabians crept in, and the monotheism of the patriarch Abraham was supplanted by paganism and idolatrous worship. In pre-Islamic Arabia, the Ka'aba was called the house of Allah. However, the objects of worship were several idols such as Lat and 'Uzza, which were considered daughters of Allah and were believed to possess intercessory powers. In addition to the presence of Christian and Jewish communities in Arabia, there existed a group of monotheists who longed for the faith of Abraham, and these were known as Hunafa (sing. Hanif) which came to mean "upright". The Hunafa of pre-Islamic Arabia did not constitute a single

community per se, but were individuals yearning and seeking truth through contemplation, moral excellence and spiritual pursuit. It is historically attested that Muhammad was one of the *hunafa*, and that he had rejected all forms of idolatry prior to the revealed dispensation.

The Arabian peninsula during the time of Muhammad was living on the margin of civilization to the south of both Byzantium and Persia, both of which were the major empires of that age, and which were in intermittent conflict in the Middle East region. . The major portion of Arabia was arid steppe and desert which were dotted with small oases. The majority of Arabians were nomads whose source of material sustenance was raiding other tribes and tending their herds. There were also a few agriculturally supported communities such as Yathrib, or Medina (the city of the Prophet). A few towns, among which was Mecca, prospered from the trade passing from the Mediterranean world to the East. On the cultural plain, the Arabians had a common identity that was fostered by a rich literary-poetic tradition but did not have, against the background of the tribal constitution of Arabia, a centralized state.

The preaching of Muhammad led to the conversion of some relatives and other Meccans.- especially among the downtrodden of Mecca. Owing to Islam's opposition to idolatry and its equalitarian message, the enmity of Quraish was increasingly evoked. The persecution of the Muslim converts was undertaken which led to a group of Muslims migrating to Ethiopia. It is recounted in the *Sira* that the Muslims migrated to Ethiopia journey there by virtue of a belief that it was ruled by a just Christian king, the Negus.

The opportunity presented itself to Muhammad to preach his message to individuals from the town of Yathrib which is located in the Hejaz, over 400 km north of Mecca. The majority of the people of Medina eventually embraced Islam and accepted Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah and arbitrator. The year 622 AD. in which the Prophet and his companion Abu Bakr- who was to become Islam's first Caliph- migrated to Yathrib

inaugurated the Muslim or Hijri calendar. In effect, Medina became the center of the Islamic call (da'wa), and in it the Prophet became judge, ruler, preacher and military commander all at once. Without doubt, during the years of the Prophet's sojourn in Medinah the content of the message of Islam changed from having an exclusive emphasis on monotheistic tenets, eschatology and ethical exhortations, to dealing with secular and legislative themes underpinned by a perpetual focus on tawhid (monotheism).

To give a sample of the Qur'anic revelation from the Meccan period, which must have had a mesmerizing effect on the Meccans, as it does on modern Arabs and Muslims, the following is quoted from the Qur'an: The theme is inexorably the day of judgment and resurrection combined with allusions to social injustice and oppression pervading Meccan society:

“When the sun is coiled up, and when the stars become grimy, and when the mountains are set in motion, and when the pregnant camels are discarded, and when the wild beasts are mustered, and when the seas simmer, and when the souls are reunited, and when the girl-child buried alive is asked, for what reason was she slain, and when the pages are spread open, and when the heaven is expunged, and when Al-Jahim (hellfire) is set ablaze, and when the garden is brought near, every soul will then know what it has wrought. Nay, I swear by the slinking planets, the running planets covered by sunbeams, and the night when it darkens, and when the dawn when it breathes; it is indeed the speech of a gracious Messenger.” (Quran 81: 1-19)

After a prolonged process of warfare, proselytizing and struggle Muhammad and the Muslim community achieved hegemony over most of Arabia. In fact, even Mecca surrendered to the authority of Islam and the Ka'aba was purified of idols and idol-worship. In effect, the achievements of Muhammad were monumental: he established a state that unified Arabia, he brought a revealed book to the Muslims which became the paradigm and guide for millions upon millions of Muslims until today, and he provided the impetus for the creation of a

civilization that was to encompass a vast geographical expanse stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, from Africa and Europe to China and Indonesia- and likewise, an astounding variety of races and ethnic groups that assimilated into the melting pot of the universal culture of Islam, belonging to a single community –umma- and bound by a common faith.

It is worthy of mention that the word ‘Muslim’ is the active participle of the verb Islam which literally denotes surrender i.e. human surrender to the One God, unique Lord of the worlds, Creator, sustainer and restorer of the world, and to His Will enshrined in the doctrines, laws and precepts of Islam. Furthermore, Islam or surrender likewise entails submission to and belief in Muhammad as the Messenger of God and seal of the Prophets. Hence, the Will of Allah is knowable through the H. Qur`an as well as the Sunna which contains the sayings (hadith) and actions of Muhammad, and which represents an expounding and elaboration of the principal revelational element, namely, the Qur`an- which literally means recitation or reading.

According to Muslim belief, Muhammad is the final of a series of Prophets and apostles spanning the totality of history, among whom are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus whose messages are identical in terms of doctrine, but may differ in points of law and legislative precepts. Thus the more recent revelation vouchsafed by God to a messenger may abrogate the legislative precepts of a previous legislation.

The fundamental article of Muslim faith is represented in the ‘shahadah’, or the Muslim confession of faith: ‘There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.’ As a corollary to this testimony are a core set of beliefs or doctrines: namely, a belief in God; angels; the revealed books, namely, the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel; belief in the prophets; belief in the last day, or the day of Judgment; belief in providence, or predestination.

As a consequence of the foregoing creed, a Muslim must also observe a set of duties, characterized as faraid or duties by the

Muslim jurists (the fuqaha): 5 daily prayers (salat ar.) , a welfare tax called zakat, fasting from daybreak until sunset during the month of Ramadan (siyam), and pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). All of these religious observances including the profession of faith are considered the five pillars of Islam. It may be noted that the foregoing religious duties are characterized by an individual as well as a communal dimension. To illustrate this point, one may mention that prayer is more laudably carried out in group forms of worship. Again, fasting in Ramadan is undertaken by all able Muslims, and is thus both an individual and collective form of worship. This epitomizes something that is intrinsic in Islam- namely, its balancing between the individual and the collectivity within the context of a community: to use Qur`anic terms, the best nation ever raised among mankind, enjoining good and forbidding evil.

As earlier mentioned, Islam acquired its characteristic ethos in Medina as embodying both the temporal and spiritual dimensions, with its law regulating both the individual's relation to God as well as human interrelationships in a social environment and setting. Thus, unlike Western Christendom, there does not exist in Islam a religious institution that is independent of a temporal dimension. The fact is, that the two dimensions coalesce, and the aforementioned religious duties have both an individual significance as well as a communal one. It may be mentioned that the experience of modern Turkey insofar as the separation of church and state so to speak, represents a novelty in the venture of Islam- a novelty that has also been embraced by many secular Arab and Muslim thinkers and statesmen in the preceding century and the present one. In the intellectual and social ferment of Arab and Muslim society, the relation between religious identity and authority on the one hand, and the temporal or worldly plain continues to animate vigorous debate- perhaps even antagonism- as it does in Western societies. Hence, recently we witnessed the heated debate and emotions engendered by the French government's decision to ban the Islamically enjoined hijab (or head scarf) based on the premise that it violated the secular premises of the French Republic.

Sources of Doctrine

Although as a consequence of the stunning and rapid expansion of the domain of Islam, the cultures of Greece, Byzantium and Persia had a considerable influence on the fabric of the nascent Islamic civilization, the early piety-minded individuals and scholars assured the Islamic underpinnings of doctrine and law. The legists postulated that Islamic doctrine and law should be based on four sources or fundamental principles (usul): the Quran, the Sunna traditions, ijma`a or consensus, and ijihad or qiyas (independent mental exertion and analogical reasoning respectively).

The Quran, the uncreated speech of God, as it is regarded by orthodox theology, constitutes the principal source of doctrine and law. It is divided into 114 Surahs or Chapters of unequal length. To reiterate, the Qur`an revealed in Mecca primarily address the monotheistic imperative, so to speak, as well as ethical and spiritual and eschatological tenets and teachings. By contrast, the Surahs revealed in the Medinan period are more concerned with social legislation and politico-moral principles necessary for the tasks of ordering the Muslim community.

The Sunna, or the well-trodden path as it may literally mean, which had its precursor in the pre-Islamic tribal custom, came to mean in the context of Islam, the words and deeds and example of the Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, the Hadith is a report of a saying attributed to Muhammad. In orthodox Islam, there exist six great compilations of Hadith (al-sihah al-sitt – or the six authentic works) which were done in the 3rd Century Hijri (9th century A.D.) and which acquired great authority among Islam's orthodox community, the sunnis, who constitute the majority of Muslims.

The ijma`a of the community (denoting consensus) is a source of Islamic law and dogma. A tradition attributed to the Prophet reports Muhammad as saying "My community shall not agree on an error". Thus, consensus, probably developed as a juridical vehicle in the 2nd century Hijri/8th Century A.D. manifested an

effort to standardize legal practice and theory and to transcend disputes and differences on points of law and theology.

Finally , ijihad (the exertion of oneself) was originally categorized as 'ra'y or opinion. However, in order to mitigate the emergence of vast differences in the opinions of Muslims, ra'y became qiyas (reasoning by strict analogy) which was a derivation of legal principles (ahkam) from the two primary sources of the Shari'ah (Islamic law) by means of analogical reasoning or deduction.

In effect, ijma'a played a conservative role in the Muslim intellectual tradition, given that it delineated the space of intellectual creation. The saying that the door of ijihad was closed is a famous one. However, throughout Islamic history there have been efforts at intellectual regeneration represented by, for example, the great mystic-theologian Al-Ghazali (d.1111) who reappraised the edifice of orthodoxy, reformulated it in spiritually and intellectually vigorous terms, while at the same time adhering to the accepted parameters of the Quran and the Sunna. In modern times, there have been sporadic calls for the reopening of the gate of ijihad by Arab and Muslim thinkers and reformers of various philosophical and political orientations.

In addition to the four sources of Islamic law mustered by legists to derive legal principles, there have been others which were articulated by the protagonists of the four major surviving Islamic schools of law, historically founded by Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi'i and Ibn Hanbal. It may be noted that the Maliki school of jurisprudence is dominant in North and West Africa, the Hanafi in Turkic Asia, the Shafii in Egypt, East Africa and South East Asia, and the Hanbali in Saudi Arabia. It also may be remarked, in this context, that the legists formulated five categories regarding the actions of humans: obligatory, meritorious, permissible, reprehensible and forbidden. Thus, with respect to any aspect of human conduct, whether in terms of ritual, or economic activity, or marriage etc.- the fuqaha state, based on the four sources of the law, whether the action is halal, haram, mustahab, makruh, or mubah. While differences between these

schools of jurisprudence exist they coalesce on the fundamentals of Islamic doctrine and law, and complementarity is the defining feature of their reality.

Doctrine:

The Indian philosopher Muhammad Iqbal remarked something to the effect that the ancient Greek mindset emphasized cognition through reasoning more than through an experience and apprehension of nature. Within the context of the Islamic view of God, it is undoubtedly the case that the Islamic method of inculcating the monotheistic view of God and life underlines reference to nature and the universe and man himself as vehicles for knowing God. This may be contrasted to a method that emphasizes metaphysical speculation and that attempts to unravel metaphysical or unseen reality through philosophical reflection- and not through empirical observation that ontologically ties contingent created existence, to a unique Creator.

To illustrate the apprehension of monotheistic truth through a human striving for enlightened consciousness of God and the universe I shall read for you the following Qur`anic verses describing Abraham`s attainment of monotheistic faith by means of reflection on nature and the Universe:

“And thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might be of those possessing credulity. And when night spread out over him he saw a star. He then said, “This is my Lord.” But when it set, he said, “I love not things that set.” When he saw the moon rising, he said, “If God does not guide me, I shall surely be among the perverse folk.” Then when he saw the sun rising he said. “This is my Lord. This is greater.” But when it set, he said. “O my people, I am free from that which you associate with God.” (6:75-78)

To quote Muhammad Mubarak, the late Syrian thinker, in this context: “Thus, Abraham arrived (at a monotheistic) conviction as a result of personal reflection and (spiritual) experience. He despaired of ascribing divinity to any aspect of the Universe since those aspects, or phenomena, are subject to change and eclipse.

Abraham declares the result of his quest by saying: And here Mubarak quotes the Qur'an:

“I have directed my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as a hanif (an upright believer in God), and I am not of the idolaters.” (6:79)

In essence, Islam espouses a rigorously monotheistic view of God. The Qur'an rebukes associating or ascribing partners to God. He is One, without beginning or end, the Lord of the worlds and their sustainer. Islam's condemnation of idolatrous worship is categorical, while it considers the Christian Trinitarian doctrine as a deviation from the true monotheism taught by the Judeo-Christian Prophets, including Jesus Christ. Having said that it must be remembered that Islam regards with high esteem the Christian people of the book (Ahl Al-Kitab), and affirms considerable parts of the Christian dispensation which Islam claims to have completed. It could be mentioned that belief in the Gospel and in Jesus the son of Mary is part of the Muslim creed, as is the miraculous immaculate conception of Jesus.

Historically speaking, the pristine faith of the early generation of Muslims in the One God was subject to considerable debate among jurists, theologians, mystics and philosophers. The transcendental God with attributes knowable through the Qur'an and the Sunna, under the influence of Greek metaphysics, or eastern mysticism, gave way to conceptions of God which detracted from a clear-cut, categorical monotheism. Existential monism, philosophical pantheism and sufi esoteric doctrines sometimes transfigured the parameters of monotheistic doctrine. Thus, Sunni orthodox theologians strove, mustering scriptural as well as rational proofs derived from Greek philosophy and logic, to maintain a doctrine about God that is based on exoteric- as opposed to esoteric exegesis, that is rooted in rational evidences, and that does not necessarily repudiate the insights of mysticism. Al-Ghazali, perhaps more than anyone else epitomizes the foregoing.

Allow me to share with you a poem I wrote that conveys a monotheistic perspective and conveys my sense of seeking the Divine:

Travels Beyond:

The mystic traveler has a tryst with truth
A moment of joyous love of God

He sees naught but His cosmic presence
Nearer to the heart than the jugular vein

Knowledge of God is an endless trail
To be trodden with yearning for more

Dazzled is a heart of a praising soul
The universe a sign of the Great Lord

But a dazzled heart must be from sin washed
Pondering the truth that encompasses all

The journey to know has a weapon to use
A Shari`ah that's God's guide to spirit's trek

Subhanallah is the utterance of a heart consumed
The calling to fear an Omniscient God

The traveler meets His Lord even at a labyrinth
Dhikr that nears him to God's unknowable mercy

Life is a canyon of pleasure immense
Matching dhikr is unattainable quest

Afterlife is the soothing thought of penitent hearts
Paradise the splendid abode of an awaited morrow

And hellfire the fear of a heart torn
Grief at the sins of a youthful day

Love of Muhammad is the tune of wondrous worship
Peace on him the guide of knowing souls

A haqiqa of amazing surrender
A repository of Revelation Divine

God's Word anchored in Muhammad's radiant heart
Uncreated speech of truth and love

Ahmad the guide and mercy to every world
Illumining darkness with shining truth

The traveler years for Ahmad to know his Lord
Following the exemplar of obedience to God

Journeyers of noble though unrested souls
Finding a truth beyond reason's bound

The kings may strike the saints with swords
If only they knew the pleasures of dhikr's way

Islam's View of the Universe:

The universe, according to Islam, is created and originated by God. He is the sovereign in the universe who both expands and terminates it in his apportioned time. Hence, all the laws (sunan ar.) that pervade the universe are under His hegemony. If He should so will, he may terminate the effect of those laws- though they are invariant and unchanging. Existence is an orderly cosmos and not a chaos.

The Qur'an continually enjoins people to reflect on and discover nature and the universe. Although the scientific spirit has receded in the later ages of Islam, it is very positively depicted in the Qur'an; nevertheless, it is a scientific spirit that repudiates paganism and that portrays the world as being a manifestation of Divine sovereignty. To quote from the Qur'an:

“May He be glorified, for whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His, all are submissive to Him.” (2:116)

It is not surprising, hence, that through the encounter with other civilizations, Muslim scholars, scientists and thinkers were in the main not reluctant to assimilate the knowledge of those civilizations, to creatively develop it, but also to intermesh it with the fundamental paradigms and worldview of Islam. It should be mentioned, however, that there existed varied orientations among Muslims vis a vis external culture, ranging from the zealots to the herodians, to use the terms of the British historian Toynbee. For instance, the philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Al-Kindi, Ibn Rushd and others were deeply influenced by and very positively disposed toward Greek philosophy and science, while the 13th century theologian, Ibn Taymiyya, repudiated Greek philosophy and logic as having exercised an insidious influence on Muslim scholastic theology, or to use its Arabic term *Ilm Al-Kalam*.

To prove the existence and unity of God the Qur'an perennially highlights the order and design of the universe. Each created thing is endowed with a definite and defined nature which constitute an ordered form of existence. However, everything is limited in both the theology and cosmology of the Qur'an. All created things have an inherent nature and are subject to laws of behavior that God endowed them with. The Qur'an states: “Everything has been created by us according to a measure”. All existence is contingent and finite, and it is God alone who is self-sufficient, necessarily existent and unlimited.

Islam's View of Man

In Islam's view, God created two distinct species: namely, humankind and the jinn. The former was created from clay and the latter from fire. The descent of Adam and Eve due to their eating from the forbidden tree as a consequence of Satan's deception- a story already occurring in the Judeo-Christian tradition- is related in the Qur'an. However, the Christian doctrine of original sin is not affirmed, as God accepted the

repentance of Adam and Eve and made mankind His vicegerents on earth. To quote from the Qur'an:

“When your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am setting on earth a vice-regent,’ they said, ‘Will you place therein one who will act corruptly in it and shed blood, while we extol Your praise and sanctify You?’” (2:30)

Thus, the angels protested to God against man's creation, but lost in a competition of knowledge against Adam, who was taught the names of all things. The Qur'an declares man to be the finest of all creatures and he willingly bore the trust which the heavens and the earth refused to bear. All of creation was subjected to man, who by virtue of the rational faculty with which he was endowed, was enjoined to, and entrusted with, the development of civilization. In such endeavor he may be, either righteous or corrupt, a monotheist or an unbeliever. As the Qur'an affirms, there is no compulsion in faith and religion; in other words, faith belongs to the domain of individual freedom and choice. Moreover, life and existence were not created in vain, but were brought into being so that God is obeyed and worshipped. Thus, Islam is profoundly teleological while affirming theodicy in creation.

It must be noted that Islam views human nature as fallible and faltering- that man is oppressive and prone to ignorance- despite his lofty station in the universe. By contrast to angels who are instinctively obedient to God, man is inclined to error. Pride is the cardinal sin of man- a sin which detracts man from submission to a unique God, and which makes him ascribe partners to Him. In Islam, the most heinous of transgressions is shirk or polytheism.

Knowledge, it must be mentioned, is essential for man shouldering the responsibility of vice-gerency on earth. To reiterate a point earlier made, the Qur'an emphasizes knowledge of the physical universe as a means to fulfilling the purpose of God in creation, namely, worshipping and obeying the Creator. The following two quotations from the Qur'an are illustrative:

“Have they not seen that We lead the water to the parched land, so that We bring forth crops from which their cattle and themselves can eat? Do they not perceive?” (32:27)

“It is He who has spread out the earth, and He placed in it mountains and rivers, and of every fruit He has made parts therein. He covers the night with the day. Surely in that are signs for a people who ponder. And in the earth are tracts neighboring one another, and gardens of grapes, and plantations, and palm-trees of one root and of different roots, watered by the same water. And We distinguish in produce some of them above others. Surely in that are signs for a people who comprehend”. (13:3,4)

Repentance and Satan and Resurrection:

In the story of the fall of Adam, Satan figures prominently as owing to the sin of pride- he refused to honor Adam as God commanded. Previously, Satan had had an honored standing but became the nemesis of man. In Islam, the role of Satan is to beguile people through chicanery until the last day. The role of the Prophets of God, on the other hand, is to guide people to repentance and the righteous path. Repentance of people restores them to the state of sinlessness in which they were born.

It may be deduced from the scriptural texts of Islam- i.e. the Qur`an and Sunnah- that invariant laws pervade life and the universe. However, Islam affirms the occurrence of the miraculous as having been a vindication of the Prophets; thus, Noah was saved from the deluge, Jesus was immaculately born, Abraham was saved from the fire, and so forth. Muslim thinkers have dealt with the apparent contradiction between the invariance of universal laws and the Qur`an`s recognition of the miraculous event. The received wisdom is that the invariance of laws prevails in the universe, but God may intervene to effect exceptional phenomena. It may be mentioned that the Ash`ari school of theology, which is the dominant one in Sunni Islam, affirms Divine voluntaristic intervention in the natural world- and perhaps this was a reaction to the naturalism of the philosophers

who questioned the notion of Divine intervention in existence- while the Andalusian Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taymiya emphasize the notion of cause and effect permeating the universe at the behest of God.

Islam affirms that the dead will be resurrected and that judgment will be pronounced on every soul. To quote from Surat Al-Zalzalah which powerfully captures one of the scenes of the day of resurrection:

“When the earth quakes with a mighty quaking, and the earth casts forth its burdens, and man says, ‘What ails her? On that day, she will make known her tidings, that your Lord has revealed to her. On that day, people will issue forth in concourses to behold their deeds. So, whoever has done an atom’s weight of good, will behold it. And whoever has done an atom’s weight of evil, will behold it. (99:1-8)

A Word On Sufism

Sufism in the modern age has gained prominence in the Western world- as a philosophy of inward piety, love, compassion, universalism and religious devotion. In the Islamic historical tradition, its genealogy is traceable to the ascetic and mystical practices of zuhhd (penitents), such as Al-Hassan Al-Basri (d.801) and Rabi`a Al-Adawiya, a woman from the city of Basra, whose form of religiosity underlined love of God as opposed to a yearning for His reward in paradise or fear of His hellfire.

The term Sufi, it has been asserted by some historians, is related to the woolen garments worn by some early penitents in the 8th century/2nd century Hijri. Sufism entails many concepts, two of which are central, namely tawakkul (trust in God) and dhikr (remembrance of God). The sufi tradition acquired gnostic elements (ma`rifa) through the figure of Dhu Al-Nun Al-Misri (d.857). Through the doctrine of fana`a, or dissolution into the Divine being, Sufism evoked the criticism of piety-minded orthodox ulama. Al-Hallaj epitomized the doctrine of fanaa when he declared the heresy of ‘I am the Truth’ or ‘Ana Al-Haq’, which event led to his execution, a rare event in the history of

Islam- rare to the extent that it was highly unusual for a Muslim to be killed for his religious beliefs or scientific research or philosophical speculation; in other words, perhaps with the exception of period of rule by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma`mun, who sought to impose the Mu`tazili school of thought, the Islamic tradition did not witness an inquisition.

As earlier mentioned, orthodoxy and Sufism achieved a fusion or synthesis in the thought of Al-Ghazali, particularly his monumental work "Ihya' Ulum Al-Din" "Revival of the Religious Sciences". Among subsequent important protagonists of Sufism was Muhieddine Ibn Arabi (d.1240) whose religiously brilliant thought displayed a marked pantheistic tendency. In effect, Sufism contributed greatly to the spread of Islam through its sufi orders into central, south and southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. It may be noted that the oldest sufi order was founded by Abdul Qadir Al-Jilani (d.1166), and other sufi orders including Al-Naqshabandiya, Al-Shadhiliya, Al-Tijaniya and others.

Many modern reformist jurists, thinkers and theologians have criticized sufi thought and practices such as saint worship, the visiting of tombs and extremist predestinarianism.

In this lecture, I have rather selectively dealt with Islam's doctrines and worldview in the hope that I may have said something useful. In the contemporary age of globalization which requires a global ethic and ethos, I believe Arab and Islamic culture has much to contribute, not only in spiritual terms, but also in terms of partaking in the values of democracy, freedom of speech and belief, respect for human rights, as well as in contributing to achieving higher thresholds of justice for human societies.

To the claims of Islamophobia that Islam fosters terrorism, dogmatism and authoritarianism it may be said that the true Islam represents tolerance, pluralism, humanism and is a message of goodwill to humanity including the American people, who have been exposed to extensive myths about Islam and Arab culture, and who must become aware that certain manifestations of

hostility may be remedied by pursuing greater even-handedness vis a vis the Arab-Israeli conflict, by showing deeper commitment to Arab independence, by fostering more actively respect for human rights and the processes of democratization.

I end my talk to you with a poem I authored describing what is perhaps the principal theme of Islamic civilization, indeed, in my view, of human history, that of tawhid or the One God worshipped by Gentile and Jew, Aryan and Semite, Easterner and Westerner, without compulsion, without a clash of civilizations, but through dialogue and purposeful interaction:

Stations of Galaxies

I do not swear by the stations of galaxies
For a question unveils the secret of oath

Does the moon in splendor forever glimmer?
And doesn't it in complete form recoil to a crescent?

The sun at noon with brilliance shines
But sinks in reddish orange at a distant horizon

The stars illumine a darkness of intense depth
But fade from the view of earthly life

Pyramids stoutly stand with magnificent posture
But are immensely below the nearest cloud

Abraham exclaims revolt at vanishing splendor
Affirming that God is without twilight

I do not swear by the stations of galaxies
For being is conditional on Almighty God

The tallest wave on the shore's sand breaks
Yielding to numbers of succeeding waves

Michelangelo's David stuns the viewing eye

Exceeded by the creations of other men of art

The sea waves and earth bow to the Macedonian's conquest
But death chooses to its side the finest general

Athena makes each citizen a member of the jury
But history's indomitable verdict is that all have an end

I do not swear by the stations of galaxies
For finite life overwhelms all that lives.



Preventable Thorns of Future Life

There are moments in the annals of human history when nations face, sometimes willfully-- at others under compulsion-- the bitter burdens of conflict. Each nation, in the ebb and flow of historical movement, has had a taste of both triumph as well as defeat. At each moment of such conflict individuals and states have grappled with the imperatives of an ethic of conduct, or have at other times been, to grave consequence, oblivious to the importance of a moral premise for behavior in times of war.

The modern world has, in this closing century of the second millenium, been profoundly shaken by the brutalities of modern warfare, the extent of which brutality and suffering has been unmatched in the preceding millennia of human civilization. The two world wars, the camps of incarceration of the Stalinist Soviet Union, Nazi Germany-- and the multiple conflicts of this century have visited on both innocent and culpable life a heavy toll of suffering and death; likewise, the unfolding conflicts in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Balkans have entailed a saga of oppression, the unethical targeting of innocents, the expropriation of legitimately acquired wealth and substantial abuses of human rights.

When children are targets of war, when the honor of women and men is a weapon in the arsenal of foes of dimmed moral vision, when the rights of civilian populations under military occupation are violated men and women of sense must pose the question: is there a code that can prevent human descent into the code of the jungle under conditions of conflict? Or have those participating in current conflicts forgotten the lessons of previous wars, or can't they be awakened to a code of conduct, adherence to which, may be disaster preventive for future generations?

To speak in simple terms: there are ground rules for peaceful co-existence between states which may be enhanced when basic and politically tolerable restraint is shown by politicians and military personnel of all ranks in times of conflict. In other words, ethnic

cleansing, attempting to starve a portion of a civilian population as a weapon of battle, rape of women, destruction of vital food crops, violence against children, plunder of the private property of a population under occupation, and degrading treatment of prisoners of war, all contribute to writing the following chapter of human conflict and suffering.

Islam has an ethic of conflict which is both humane, reasonable, and merciful to protagonists in a conflict: Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, the first Caliph of Islam, captured an important part of this ethic in these words which he addressed to his troops in A.D. seventh century:

“O people, be alerted to ten matters, so learn them from me; do not betray.., do not cheat, do not defile dead corpses, do not kill a small child, or an aged man, nor a woman, do not cut or burn trees of palm, do not cut a fruit bearing tree, do not slaughter a sheep or a cow or a camel except for your nourishment; and you will encounter people who are dwellers of cloisters (i.e. monks and priests) so do not harm them...” (Quoted from: Mawsu't Al-'Alam Al-Islami/'Umar Al-Armuti, pp.205)

All of the preceding, in my view is relevant to the issue of Jerusalem which the One God of humanity has sanctified and blessed as the land of peace, holiness, and human surrender to Heaven. Such blessing is anchored in human striving to accept the races of earth, to build monuments of equity and tolerance, to defend what is inviolable in God's Law, to water the plant of human glorification of God Almighty through deeds which do justice to an orphan, which support a righteous struggle to prevent the bulldozing of a home, which spread knowledge that is useful to people in their livelihoods-- but which also helps people in their struggles for salvation in the hereafter.

It is very often a paradox that perpetrators of injustice and its victims are sometimes driven, through the blinding influence of power, or the sense of grievance at victimization-- to unethical methods and views of struggle. In a word, any struggle that is injurious to Religion, property, inviolable life, the dignity of

people, the integrity of the family is reprehensible-- under circumstances of both military preponderance or under conditions of occupation; Muslims and people of goodwill will continue mourning the occupation of the Holy City of Jerusalem and will hopefully, continue to reform themselves and to strive that it is restored to righteous and tolerant sovereignty.



Roxilana's Enduring Favor

When history meshes with multi ethnic venture Jerusalem's legacy tells an amazing story; and when compassion rests in a crucible of philanthropy with enduring benefit the story of Suleiman The Magnificent's Russian spouse's endowment is evoked.

It is a well known fact that the Ottoman Caliphate governed wide expanses of territory spanning Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Parts of Eastern Europe, the Arabian Peninsula as well as parts of North Africa. The magnificent world and venture of the Ottomans endured for about seven centuries. From the sixteenth century until the First World War the city of Jerusalem was within the political patrimony of the Ottoman Islamic Caliphate.

Suleiman The Magnificent's Russian wife, "Roxilana" made a charitable endowment in the year 1551 which would feed the needy and the seekers of knowledge in Jerusalem for several centuries. The mentioned endowment's name is "Takiyat Khaski Sultan". Various properties in various parts of Palestine became a Waqf (Inalienable Endowment) in order to provide continual financing for the Takiyat Khaski Sultan.

In practical terms, the income from these endowments would be used to maintain the "Takiyat Khaski Sultan". But what did this "Takiya" actually entail? Or, rather, how can we go about describing it?

This Takiya has two ovens, a place for ritual ablution (mutawada') made of stone, a kitchen, over and above a room housing a tomb. The tomb is said to be that of a Sheikh Sa'd Eddin Rasafi.

The father of the present writer related that the Takiyat Khaski Sultan continued to distribute food to the poor in Jerusalem up until the 20th century. He further relates that some of the food distributed was a form of cooked wheat.

But why would the Russian wife of Suleiman The Magnificent (or Suleiman al-Qanuni as the Ottoman Caliph is known to Arabs and Muslims) make such an endowment? Probably out of a piously motivated action of charity. Moreover, many persons of wealth and influence are keen on communicating an image of benevolence and social compassion. That Roxilana's charitable action was in Jerusalem is indicative of her piety as well as the stature of Jerusalem in the hearts of the elite of the Ottoman Caliphate.

Al-sadaqa al-jariya is one of three things that benefit a Muslim after he parts with life. This is what the Prophet Muhammad taught. What is al-sadaqa al-jariya? It is an act of charity whose benefits continue after a person passes away. Many, many Muslims have made vast amounts of charitable contributions over 14 centuries out of a belief in the divine reward of al-Sadaqa al-jariya: e.g. water fountains for pedestrians, contributing to educational projects and places of health care...etc.

In an age when ethnic warfare and racial discrimination continues to menace the stability of world civilization the story of Roxilana's endowment is a memory of hope and endearment.



Sense of History, Sense of Belonging

Palestinian Jerusalemites do indeed have a sense of the past. Arguably, any people do. How can we begin to define the Palestinians' sense of history? And can we speak about the existence of a collectively shared sense of the past?

In a sense, it is an objective statement to say that Palestinians are a people with historical belonging to the land of Palestine. It is, moreover, objective to observe that Palestinians share the Arabic Language and an experience of history that dates to biblical and pre-biblical times.

The mistake is sometimes made whereby Palestinian history is viewed as having a beginning in the Arab-Islamic conquest of the lands of Syria and Palestine in the 7th century. Perhaps the processes of conversion to Islam and cultural Arabisation began then- yet Palestinian history by no means started then.

Palestinians are an Arab, predominantly Muslim people with varied ethnic and cultural genealogies and who have inhabited Palestine for countless centuries (1). The various ethnic and cultural genealogies are attested to by the names of its hamlets and towns and through the archeological ruins that communicate a dazzlingly rich history of awesome and modest happenings alike.

The Palestinian, irrespective of his/her level of education, has a sense- intensified by the assaults on his/her land and identity- of belonging to a national community. But this national community accommodates other affiliations and identities such as the Jordanian national identity, the Lebanese national identity, the American national identity, etc.

This writer belongs to a segment of Palestinians who are aware of their being Arab and Palestinian, but who equally underpin this

national belonging to a belonging to the community of Islam or the Ummah of Mohammed (Peace be Upon Him).

What does belonging to the Ummah of Islam mean? It means respecting, cherishing, and honoring one's homeland and the near and distant kinship ties. However, it also means feeling a sense of brotherhood with all who profess the faith of Islam and who bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is His messenger.

This sense of brotherhood/sisterhood transcends the boundaries of politics, ethnicity, geography, language, social standing, etc. Because it is a communal belonging that is based on the sense of our divine origin, the God who created mankind, the universe, the homeland, and history.

The Palestinians are a people with a land, with a history, with a faith, with a struggle, and with a future (God Willing).



The Quest for Common Ground: Themes in Islamic Thought

I wish to extend my warm thanks to the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies and The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue Vatican City for inviting me to partake in the deliberations of this encounter involving a Muslim-Catholic dialogue. I, as a Jordanian, along with many other Jordanians, was impressed by the humanism and compassion of His Holiness Pope Benedict the 16th shown during his trip to the Holy Land of Jordan and Palestine.

I would like at the outset to quote the pithy words of the British historian, Arnold Toynbee, a scholar who possessed an unsurpassed panoramic view of human history:

"We are now moving into a chapter of human history in which our choice is going to be, not between a whole world and a shredded-up world, but between one world and no world. I believe that the human race is going to choose life and good, not death and evil."

Yes, ever since the industrial revolution and the advent of capitalism, the world has been driven towards interdependence and intimate interaction between all the societies, inhabitants and actors of the globe. Concomitant with this development have been ideological changes that have generally affirmed materialism, agnosticism, and a despiritualization and desacralization of knowledge and culture. Those developments, which were embodied in the Enlightenment in Europe have managed to spread throughout the world by means of colonial conquest and a revolution in communications. Also concomitant with the Enlightenment was a secular ethos that affirmed respect for human rights, democratic government, and the idea of social contract as the underpinning of political governance.

Today, the world faces a great challenge. Amidst the preponderance of materialism, hedonism and Dionysian

tendencies, will culture reaffirm the belief in God as the underpinning of the human venture on earth? Or will it yield to a moral and religious relativism and disbelief that would perpetuate the odious proclamation of Nietzsche in the 19th century that 'God is dead? Surely, Christians and Muslims, adherents of the monotheistic faith, have a great role to play in salvaging human civilization from slipping into the abyss of atheism and universal doubt- a joint venture that is rooted in a response to the call for a common word of belief in the oneness of God and love and respect for neighbor.

Feuerbach, the illustrious philosopher, posited the notion that humans should arrogate to themselves the attributes and qualities of God- that is, grounding human thought and consciousness in deified Man. Likewise, Marx asserted the idea that religion is the opiate of the people and was a precursor to secular revolutions that brought great suffering to human societies. In Germany, fascism, rooted in a deified national consciousness and a racialist conception of the universe and history, put humanity on a collision course which produced the Second World War.

Is it not the case that monotheist faith affirms the unity and brotherhood of mankind? The Quran says, "O mankind, we have created you from male and female, and made you into nations and tribes. Verily, the most honored among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing."

Likewise, Christian tradition, originally rooted in a monotheistic creed, affirms the equality and brotherhood of human races.

But out of intellectual honesty, should we not recognize that Islam and Christianity, while converging on the affirmation of the oneness of God, diverge over the matter of the Trinitarian doctrine of God which states that God is of three persons: the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. Islam, while calling the respected People of the Book to a common word, underscores its rejection of conceiving of God in terms of paternity or as begetting a son. قل هو الله أحد Through a process of affirmation and negation, Islamic theology and epistemology drive a seeker of

God to recognize Him as absolutely transcendent, preeternal, and Almighty. By corollary, any deified component of existence that does not fulfill the requirements of Divinity- its deification and worship should be negated as invalid. He is the first, the last, the apparent and hidden, to Him are the beautiful names.

In a world tormented by conflict, injustice and inordinate suffering, let us consider the idea of theodicy which connotes the vindication of God's goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil. A human mind is inclined to ponder this matter. The Pangloss of the French writer Voltaire is a vicious derision of the philosophically optimistic notion of theodicy. But, yes, as Christians and Muslims, we affirm it, given that the attribute of justice is intrinsic to the essence, being and conduct of God in this life and in eschatological existence. Both Christian and Muslim theologians have grappled with this issue. The response may take the form of: God is Just; He commands justice and forbids evil; suffering in the human condition is the product of human folly; there is a veritable afterlife in which the perfect scales of justice will be applied. When people suffer, this is a manifestation of God testing them: will they endure, or will they commit unbelief and corruption?

Actually, Islam and Christianity converge on the issue of the immortality of the soul and the inevitability of resurrection. The Quran is rich in its description of the afterlife. In the Meccan period, the Qur'an entwines depictions of the Day of Judgment with exhortations to act justly and morally: I quote: "When the sun is coiled up, and when the stars become grimy, and when the mountains are set in motion, and when the pregnant camels are discarded, and when the wild beasts are mustered, and when the seas simmer, and when the souls are reunited, and when the girl-child buried alive is asked, for what reasons was she slain, and when the pages are spread open, and when the heaven is expunged, and when hellfire (al-Jahim) is set ablaze, and when the garden is brought near, every soul will then know what it has wrought, Nay, I swear by the slinking planets, the running planets covered by sunbeams, and the night when it darkens, and the

dawn when it breathes; it is indeed the speech of a gracious Messenger." (Quran 81:1-19).

Thus the eschatological moment in the foregoing verses is entwined with the condemnation of worldly injustice. Humans may contribute to buttressing theodicy both intellectually and also in terms of the objective conditions of life. For instance, free trade, enterprise and toil foster the accumulation of wealth and alleviate poverty; education helps in undermining the deleterious effects of ignorance; accountability in political life and good governance help reduce corruption and lead to better living conditions for citizens; common human action to combat pornography and dehumanizing art (within a milieu of reasonable freedom) enhances the dignity of men and women and helps protect the family- that great human institution which Muslims and Christians alike believe in as the bedrock of civilization; freedom of expression nurtures the flourishing of culture and fosters political and social stability; economic freedom leads to the augmentation of wealth; scientific progress strengthens command over the physical and social environment and helps in curing illness, overcoming superstition, and drives economic growth..

Also related to the foregoing is the issue of free will and predestination. Allow me to quote the American scholar Ira Lapidus on this matter.."by the ninth century two basic positions had emerged in Muslim theology. One was a rationalist oriented position that emphasized the centrality of reason as an ordering principle of God's being in the human understanding of the universe, and in the governance of human behavior. The rationalist position had, as its corollary, belief in free will and individual responsibility for moral choices. A contrary position stressed the absolute omnipotence and inscrutability of the divine being, who can be known only insofar as He has chosen to reveal himself through the Quran. This view denied the utility of reason in religious or moral choices. All human action is ultimately an expression of the power of the Creator rather than an autonomous exercise of free judgment and will." (A History of Islamic Society, pp.89). In the ninth and tenth century, Muslim

theologians endeavored to postulate a middle ground between a position which gives excessive primacy to free will and another position which is radically predestinarian.

This theological issue has had reverberations on Muslim culture and society for many centuries. Modern Islamic reform movements have devoted extensive attention to it, considering radical predestinarianism as one of the main causes of Muslim and Arab decline. I personally believe that Islam encourages a proactive posture and perpetually calls to positive action; did the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) not say: "If doomsday should arrive while one of you has in his hand a small palm tree he should plant it." In effect, predestination should not be the refuge and justification for inaction and procrastination, but at the same time is compatible with trust in God.

The Indian philosopher Muhammad Iqbal remarked something to the effect that the ancient Greek mindset emphasized cognition through reasoning more than through an experience and apprehension of nature. Within the context of the Islamic view of God, it is undoubtedly the case that the Islamic method of inculcating the monotheistic view of God and life underlines reference to nature, the universe and man himself as vehicles of knowing God. This may be contrasted to a method that emphasizes metaphysical speculation and that attempts to unravel metaphysical or unseen reality through philosophical reflection- and not through empirical observation that ontologically ties contingent created existence to a unique Creator.

To illustrate the apprehension of monotheistic truth through a human striving for enlightened consciousness of God and the universe, I shall read for you the following Quranic verses describing Abraham's attainment of monotheistic faith by means of reflection on nature and the Universe:

"And thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might be of those possessing credulity. And when night spread out over him he saw a star. He then said. "This is my Lord." But when it set he said, "I love not things that set."

When he saw the moon rising, he said, "If God does not guide me, I shall surely be among the perverse folk." Then when he saw the sun rising he said, "This is my Lord. This is greater." But when it set, he said, "O my people, I am free from that which you associate with God." (Quran 6:75-78)

In essence, therefore, Islam espouses a rigorously monotheistic view of God. The Quran rebukes associating or ascribing partners to God. He is One, without beginning or end, the Lord of the worlds and their sustainer. Islam's condemnation of idolatrous worship is categorical, while it considers the Christian Trinitarian doctrine as a deviation from the true monotheism taught by the Judeo-Christian prophets, including Jesus Christ (pbuh). Having said that it must be remembered that Islam regards with high esteem the Christian People of the Book (Ahl Al-Kitab), and affirms considerable parts of the Christian dispensation which Islam claims to have completed. It could be mentioned that belief in the Gospel and in Jesus the son of Mary is part of the Muslim creed, as is the miraculous conception of Jesus. (quoted from a lecture delivered by the speaker in 2004 at the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman) The latter should indeed be part of the common ground between Muslims and Catholics in an age when people deny the possibility of the miraculous. But the question may be posed: is not the God who created the universe and instilled in it His laws capable of suspending or violating those laws?



Tent of Wounded Pillars

Sometimes, ideas may be likened to a tent in a desert that houses the beliefs of a group, but at times, encounters a storm that partially changes the structure of the tent, perhaps some of the pillars on which it stands.

Tragically, the changed structure of the tent (which, in this context, corresponds to a group's sense of the sacred, of what is true) becomes a harbinger of conflict among religious denominations, among tribes, even among civilizations... Likewise, oftentimes it creates a movement in a culture's direction, which may have negative consequences for a society for many an era.

To extend the metaphor further, the truth that the ancestral patriarch of monotheists-- Abraham-- communicated was, in essence, human surrender to the One God, coupled with an adherence to His Revealed Doctrine and Law. In effect this basic doctrine or truth was disseminated and taught by Isaac, Jacob and Ishmael and many other Prophets, the seal of whom, according to Muslims, is the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)-- to whom was revealed the Holy Qur'an.

It is not a coincidence that the ummah (community) of God's Final Revelation, to which any human being of any tribe, race or geographic location may belong-- through witnessing that there is Only One God and Muhammad is His Messenger-- became custodian of Mecca's Sacred Sanctuary (built by Abraham and Ishmael), and of Jerusalem. To Muslims, the Arabization and Islamization of Jerusalem and Palestine represented the worldly vindication of monotheistic faith manifested in the governance of Islam's tolerant and just system of Law and values.

The realization of these ideals in actual human reality (i.e. the Arab-Muslim history of Jerusalem)-- in a multi-ethnic, multi-denominational urban setting-- was a task that Arab and non-

Arab Muslims undertook to perform with varying degrees of piety, political success, moral probity and judiciousness.

The opening of Mecca by the Prophet Muhammed and the faithful in AD 7th century (1st Hijri) and the purification of its Sacred Sanctuary was a crescendo in the human striving to demolish idolatry and to cleanse the House of Allah from its evil. Equally, the Arab Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in roughly the same period was a milestone in terms of ushering in the age of the political sovereignty of the Unitarian, Universal Caliphate of Islam.

The pact signed between the Patriarch Sophronious and 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (the second Rightly Guided Caliph) on the hour of the Arab-Islamic opening of Jerusalem in AD 637 was an enduring framework for dignified coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the shadow of God's Final Revealed Code. The liberation of Jerusalem symbolized, moreover, the vindication of early Christian and Jewish teachings insofar as Islam is the consummation and perfect elaboration of earlier monotheistic Revealed Religions.

Paradoxically, therefore, Islam was Heaven's vindication of the Torah revealed to Moses (peace upon him), as it was a vindication of the original teachings and doctrines of Christianity (which prophesied the mission of Muhammad)-- and yet, it was viewed by many churches, by many Jewish theologians as a heresy. Inevitably, this fostered much conflict through the prolonged wars of the crusades, and in the present day, through the Zionist occupation of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the Holy City of Peace or Salaam. Salaam is one of the Attributes of the One God who gives people the blessing of peace when the pillars of His Covenant with mankind are revered and observed: faith in the One God, His angels, His Revealed Books, His Messengers, the Hereafter and Divine Predestination—and observance of and obedience to His Merciful and Just Law.

The earth is in need of making peace with Heaven: to achieve that, its inhabitants must honor the pact with God which includes spreading justice, mercy and love on earth, and resisting oppression, corruption and bigotry. Then, the reasonable foundations of peace may be built.

(Indeed We have sent Our Messengers with the ostensive proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, that man may uphold equity. And We have sent down iron, wherein is mighty power and many uses for mankind; that God may know who helps Him and His Messengers in the unseen). (Holy Qur'an, Sura 57, Ayah 25)



The Religion of Peace and a City of Holiness Monotheism in Two Sacred Sanctuaries

When the expanses of existence, the glory of Divine Creation, and the twining of places of sanctity manifest themselves in the miraculous, a Muslim may think of the event of Al-Isra'a W'al Mi'raj. This event was the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) trek by night from Mecca to Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem towards the outermost regions of the skies.

Al-Isra'a W'al Mi'raj was recorded in the Holy Qur'an in this verse: (Glorified is He who took His servant by night from the Sacrosanct Mosque to the Furthestmost Mosque, the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him (some) of our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer) Holy Qur'an, 17:1, Tr. Dr. M. M. Khatib.

Inasmuch as this event represented a form of travel that defies the parameters of humanly knowable speed-- or the physics of time and space-- (considering that the trek was made to Jerusalem, and to the heavens in what is subject to experience), it also embodied a lasting bond between the Sacred Mosque of Mecca and the Aqsa Mosque of Jerusalem for the nation of the Arabs and Muslims. In fact, Al-Aqsa Mosque was the first Kibla (the direction of prayer) of the nation of Islam before the Ka'aba became the focal point of worship.

From the vantage point of Islam (which is a word that carries the meaning of human surrender to God, inasmuch as it carries the meaning of peace) the sanctification of the connection between Mecca and Jerusalem is like a blessed tree, watered by the strivings and yearnings and self-sacrifice of Prophets, saints, soldiers, artisans, women, and people of all walks of life and nationalities who revered Jerusalem as the Holy City of God and as a symbol of human submission to the One Creator.

It was with this spirit of faith and righteous undertaking that the ancestral patriarch of the nation of the Arabs and the Israelites,

the Prophet Abraham, planted the blessed tree of monotheistic faith in Jerusalem and Palestine; indeed, Abraham (peace be upon him) watered the terrain of Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Arabian Peninsula with this blessed tree of submission to the One God through his sojourns and travels in these ancient lands where the cradle of human civilization had its earliest beginnings.

This message of human submission to God was shouldered by countless hordes of humans who were awakened to the significance of God's Covenant with humanity's collective ancestor (Adam), and who lived in accordance with the fundamental premise of this Covenant: that only God should be worshipped, and that only His Law should be observed. This message was communicated by the Prophets and sages and men and women of learning that belong to every tribe and race in every age of human history.

This message was likewise guarded and defended against the follies of corruption and oppression by the towering Prophets of the Israelites and the Gentiles- the seal of whom was the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the unlettered orphan of Arabia to whom was revealed the Holy Qur'an- God's final Revelation to the human race.

The Muslim conquests of the 7th century A.D. were to a great extent motivated by the strivings of a new universal nation, with a universal message of monotheistic worship and Law- to plant the seeds of faith and justice in the Holy Land. In this sense, the struggles of Abraham, David, Solomon, Jesus, and every righteous individual, to purify the Holy Land of profanity and corruption encountered great vindication when the Muslim-Arab army of liberation entered Palestine (with the consent of its Christian inhabitants) in the age of the Muslim Caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab.

Jerusalem was liberated in 637 A.D. It is said that the pious Arab Caliph 'Umar, upon entering the City of Jerusalem, insisted on entering the city on foot out of a sense of reverence for its sanctity and meaning in Islam. It is also a fact of history that he

refrained from performing prayers in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher out of a fear that Muslims would forcibly convert it into a mosque and thus infringe on the spirit of tolerance and justice that the Faith and Law of Islam enjoins.



Weakness is Not Righteousness and Might is Not Right

The Muslim historian Al-Mas'udi wrote: The wise have said: a sign of the fidelity of a human being and his adherence to pledges is his yearning for his brethren as well as his yearning for his homelands. And one of the signs of maturity is a person's longing for the place of birth... And another person said: God developed the countries of the earth through (human) love for the homelands, and so, a sign of benevolence... is love for the place of birth.

People through an innate instinct have a sense of belonging to a homeland. This belonging is nurtured through experiencing life on the soil of a city or a village or a homeland. Building life through toil, supporting a family and shouldering a responsibility in honoring a homeland cements a sense of belonging. Faith in God and righteousness make belonging to a homeland a more noble sentiment, a truer feeling; corruption, conversely, alongside other factors, may diminish a human being's sense of belonging.

Many, many Palestinians-- and indeed many human beings-- have experienced uprooting and displacement from a homeland. For many human beings that chose settling in another homeland the choice was voluntary. For many Palestinians Zionist seizures of their land, their farms and cities, their orchards and ancestral dwellings faced them with forced deprivation of their ancestral land.

The present writer is an example of multitudes of Palestinians who know of their entitlement to Palestine, or to the city of Jerusalem-- but who also recognize that their uprooting was an affliction that sometimes visits people on their journey in life. In effect, visiting one's homeland is presently possible as a tourist: similar, for example, to a citizen of Japan acquiring the right to visit Russia after getting a visa from the embassy of Russia in Tokyo.

But disinheritance does not mean the cancellation of a right or a group of rights; nor does dispossession have the effect of legitimizing usurpation; nor does force have the impact of redefining a structure of rights and obligations related to rights to dwelling, property, secure life, freedom from oppression, entitlement to worship in Allah's sacred sanctuary-- i.e. the Aqsa Mosque of Jerusalem.

It is arguable that in each instance of human dispute over protected or violated human life, honor, property-- it is morally and rationally possible to distinguish between justice and injustice, between righteous conduct and oppression, between lawlessness and respect for people's rights and obligations. It is also arguable that by virtue of preponderance or inferior power the stronger have been able to dictate the resolution of a dispute: but the dictation of the stronger or the protests of the weaker do not necessarily constitute what is just. Civilized conduct attempts to defend what is right in addition to affirming power and force.

The beginning of the article speaks of integrity as related to love and yearning for homeland: Palestinians who derive their sense of belonging from faith in God Almighty will build their homeland even in dispersal and will struggle to return-- and will also honor, build and defend their homeland of migration.



About the author

Belonging to an old Arab Jerusalemite family Khaled Nusseibeh was born in 1961 in Amman, Jordan where he lives and works as a writer and translator at the Ubada Center for Writing and Translation Services. He received his education in several countries, which include Jordan, Egypt, Italy, England and the United States. He has a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and a Master's degree in Near Eastern Studies which he obtained from Columbia University and Princeton University respectively.

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