

# Misconceptions and REFUTATIONS

*Sabighat*

AHMAD YUSUF ALSAYYID



مركز أصول  
Osoul Center

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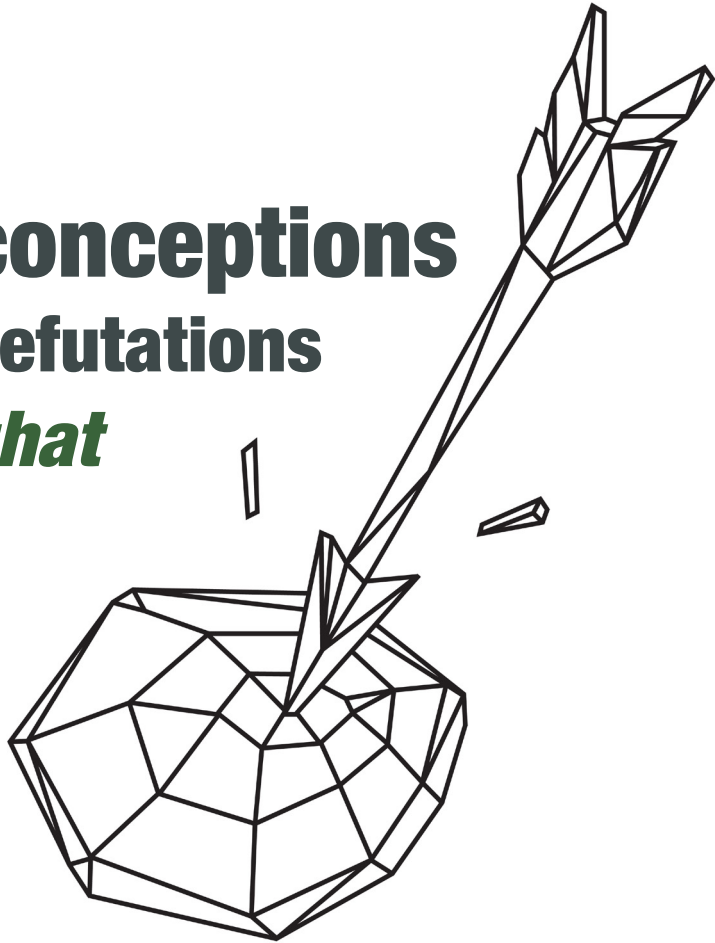


osoul@rabwah.com



www.osoulcenter.com

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**Ahmad Yusuf Alsayyid**



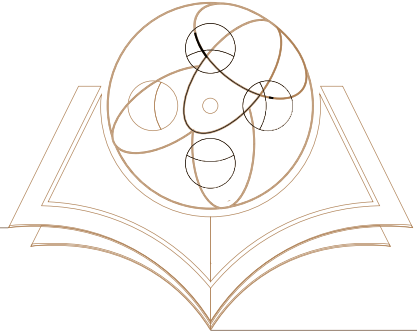
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah,  
the Lord of Grace,  
the Ever-Merciful



# Preface



*A*ll praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds, the One who creates and proportions well, who determines and guides. May God bestow peace and blessings on Prophet Muhammad, his household and his companions as well as those who has and will follow them with dedication until the end of time.

That people differ and hold conflicting views and beliefs is an old phenomenon, going back to the first time they steered away from the pure nature their Creator had given them. Such conflict has never been as clear as it is today, because our world has become like one town. Today, we get to know what happens in the remotest part of the world within a very short time, as modern technology has made contact very easy. The social media has enabled people to exchange views and ideas, and this has shown the extent of differences between people. Therefore, they try to present and advocate their views and beliefs on the world stage.

Perhaps the gravest danger such interaction represents is that some wrong ideas and false philosophies are being advocated among young Muslims. This danger requires that scholars should provide what helps young Muslims to hold on to their faith, showing them,

with clear evidence and proof, the fallacy of the misconceptions circulated by those who try to raise doubts about Islam.

One of the worthy efforts in this line is undertaken by Shaykh Ahmad ibn Yusuf Alsayyid and his colleagues in their programme Sinaat al-Mahawir, which tries to give reassurance to young Muslims. We at Osoul Centre are pleased to present to English speaking Muslims this translation of one of the releases of this programme, under the title Misconceptions and Refutations. This follows an earlier release in this endeavour, The Qur'an: an Eternal Challenge by the late Shaykh Muhammad Abdullah Draz. We will continue our efforts in this line, God willing.

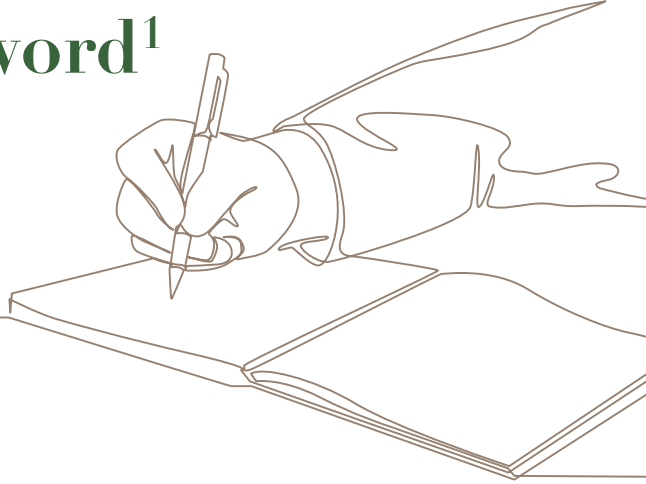
We pray to God to reward the author, Ahmad Alsayyid, and to benefit our brethren by this translation, as He benefited many people by its Arabic original. All praise be to God who blesses all good efforts.

**Osoul Center**

2019



# Foreword<sup>1</sup>



**W**ar is a prominent feature of human history. Not least because of the sizeable share of the human race it has claimed. Indeed, war lays open an important aspect of human nature and the values it attaches to power and cruelty. Some, or rather most wars reflect man's unreasonableness and his tendency to be unjust towards others. However, some wars may be considered both just and necessary. When we analyse war, we are bound to note that it possesses two essential elements: attack and defence. Man has, therefore, needed tools to suit both situations. In inventing tools to suit both conditions, he has equipped himself with swords, spears and arrows for attack, and made body armour for defence.

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1 In the Arabic original, the author gives his book the title Sabighat, borrowing the Qur'anic description of the coats of mail Prophet David used to make for his soldiers. In its linguistic sense, the word means 'of good length, full covering, etc.' The implied sense is that those coats gave proper protection. Hence, the reference in this foreword to the coats of mail as giving protection against misconception. To use a translation of the word in the title of the English edition will not give the same sense. Hence, the choice of the title.

We do not know for certain at what period of history man started to use iron to protect himself in war, but we do know that prior to the Prophet David's time, the protective shields that were available during battle were not suited to a fighting situation where a person may need to constantly alternate between sprinting forward and retreating. Allah tells us in the Qur'an of His favour as He taught the Prophet David how to make suitable body armour: 'And We taught him how to make garments for you, so that they may fortify you against all that which may cause you fear. Will you, then, give thanks?' (21:80). In this verse, the word 'garment' means body armour to protect the wearer during battle. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, Allah commands David to perfect the armour he makes: 'We caused iron to become soft for him, saying: "Make coats of mail and measure their links with care".' (34:10-11). Commentators on the Qur'an have given different interpretations of this verse, but these generally refer to the manner of making protective body armour, with metal rings or nails so that the coat covers the main body area and ensures the wearer's protection without impeding movement.

Human conflict, however, is not limited to fighting with swords, spears or firearms. There are other battlefields where written and spoken words are used to achieve victory. If such a battle is fair, it uses sound and good argument to prove the point and demonstrate the other party is at fault. In an unfair situation, the battle employs deliberate distortion and fabrication to undermine the values, beliefs or reputation of the opponent.

It is not my intention to discuss the history of human war and conflict. I rather want to look at one of the most important periods of human history, which witnessed the birth of the greatest constitution man has

ever known. That is the message delivered by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). We note that his enemies launched both types of war – physical and verbal – against him. He repelled such aggression by clear evidence and argument on the one hand and by sword and spear on the other. In the initial period of his messengership, Allah commanded the Prophet to confine himself to a struggle that used the Qur’an as its only weapon: ‘Do not obey the disbelievers, but strive most vigorously against them with this Qur’an’. (25:52) Allah, Mighty and Exalted, took it upon Himself to refute the arguments the disbelievers and the followers of earlier religions raised against His Messenger. He says: ‘Whenever they come to you with an argument, We shall reveal to you the truth and the best explanation.’ (25: 33). The Prophet answered all the arguments his enemies raised and was always ready to state the clear truth. With every attack aimed at Islam and its beliefs and principles, Muslim scholars exerted good efforts in responding to enemy accusations. They refuted their arguments, showed the fallacy of their evidence, stated the truth and cited its proofs based on logical reasoning and Islamic texts. They were able to demolish all false arguments and establish the truth of Islam and its perfection as well as its continuous validity, flexibility and suitability for all generations.

Yet doubts continue to be raised about the Qur’an, Prophet Muhammad and the divine law. A careful observer cannot fail to recognise that clouds continue to gather in an overcast sky. The whole atmosphere is that of a rough sea with successive high waves of doubt that reach the ships at bay. Some remain steady, some shake violently and others are overpowered and soon sink into the deep.

Such waves are merely a new form of verbal onslaught. They need a suitable coat of protective mail. The person who fails to so equip himself with such a shield leaves himself vulnerable to targeted arrows. These few words are only preliminaries to explain the purpose of this book. Essentially, my aim is to contribute to the provision of an intellectual coat of arms that is easy for the reader to wear. My hope is that, by Allah's will, such will serve as effective protection against the contemporary onslaught that continues to raise doubts about Islam and its fundamentals. I shall endeavour to answer the following questions:

- What are the causes that have led some of our youth to become atheists, or to reject some of Islam's fundamental principles despite continuing to accept its essence? Has the contemporary religious address contributed to this phenomenon?
- What are the main features of the contemporary onslaught that continues to raise doubts about Islam? What effects does it have?
- Does this onslaught confine itself to certain questions? Does it raise countless other questions?
- What are the most important questions raised? How should they be answered?
- How should we protect the new generation against these attacks without denying them the right to think and evaluate?
- Can we provide them with suitable methodologies to deal with whatever they may encounter of anti-Islamic ideas?
- How do we argue with people who uphold some of these problematic views?

I have sought to list some important works of reference covering most areas for readers who wish to study the problem further. This book is based on courses I conducted and to which I gave the title: ‘How to deal with contemporary intellectual doubts?’ The book, however, presents the material in a new form, with some additions and improvements.

**Ahmad Yusuf al-Sayyid**

**Madinah**

1437 AH, 2017

**Email: [alsaiyd998@gmail.com](mailto:alsaiyd998@gmail.com)**



# Features and Effectiveness of the **Contemporary** Onslaught against **Islam**



*T*he production of a vaccine to ensure immunity against a particular disease requires some preliminary measures that help to determine the nature of the disease, its causes and how it spreads. The same applies to intellectual and social phenomena. It is not right to deal with any such problem unless one understands its nature and causes. The main purpose of this book is to present a methodology to protect oneself with, and to deal with intellectual doubts, citing the main questions and problems with relevant answers to all these. However, it is better at the outset to describe the contemporary onslaught that raises doubts about Islam, outline its features and discuss how effective it is. When we have done this, we will, Allah willing, delve into our purpose.

## **Features of the contemporary onslaught:**

**One:** This onslaught is, in the main part, destructive and not constructive, disorderly and unmethodical. It presents problems and cites objections but does not present an alternative, coherent view or idea. This is reflected in various ways. For example, when we look at how atheism is presented, we find most of it steering away from presenting a basic atheist concept that denies the existence of a creator. The focus is mainly on criticising religion, particularly Islam, and overlooking the major flaws in the very concept of atheism. We note that atheists pay little attention to answering

substantive questions about their own belief system, while they are always ready to ridicule those hadiths that refer to camels' urine and the report of Aishah's age at the time of her marriage to the Prophet. If they try to be a little more reasonable, they speak about the punishment for apostasy or the stoning punishment of married adulterers. All this shows the destructive nature in their discourse which pays little attention to methodology and construction.

In a debate, the well-known advocate of atheism Richard Dawkins asked Mahdi Hasan if he actually believed that Muhammad ascended to heaven riding a horse with wings. He asked the question mockingly which, in turn, earned him the applause of his supporters. In a different programme, Dawkins was himself asked about the essence of his atheism, yet the shallow answer that ensued was a disappointment to his own atheistic camp. Essentially, he was asked about the origin of life and his answer was that at some point in time, somewhere in the universe, a civilisation evolved, most probably according to Darwin's theory, and produced a certain type of life which was then planted in our universe. When he discussed the origin of the universe and its fine laws with Steven Weinberg, an atheist physicist, he suggested that it might have been the result of the existence of a multiverse that ultimately led to the evolution of our universe. Weinberg replied saying that the number of universes required for such purpose would be 10<sup>120</sup>. He added: 'In fact, this is disturbing'.

Thus, we see that the main issues are blurred, having no firm basis, in the minds of these atheist advocates. Rather than concentrating on proving the validity of their ideas, they confine themselves to criticising religions and seeking to undermine them.

Another approach that is destructive and unmethodical is that of Dr Adnan Ibraheem, which has had widespread influence in recent years as several websites carry his lectures and views. Some people have benefited from his ideas at the religious and intellectual levels, but he does not present



a coherent and constructive vision, while there is much methodological confusion in his approach, which, in turn, is transmitted to his audience. Basically, his viewers cannot formulate a clear concept of several highly important issues he frequently discusses, such as his attitude towards the sunnah, i.e. the Prophet's traditions and statements. At times, he praises al-Bukhari's Sahih, which is the most authentic anthology, particularly when he cites some hadiths in support of the idea he is presenting. At other times, he severely criticises the anthology and its author because the hadiths it includes run against his ideas. He employs some very harsh words to express his horror at what the anthology presents, leaving viewers with the impression that al-Bukhari was no more than someone who sells cakes or tends horses, rather than a scholar with few peers in history.

A person who follows Adnan Ibraheem is likely to acquire an aggressive attitude towards fundamental principles, without having the necessary methodological approach and with no regard for proper debate and scholarly differences. As a result, such a person may deal with religious texts according to his own intellectual portal, which he may consider as clear logic. This may lead him to accept such texts as fit with his own understanding and reject what seems to him unsuitable. I am writing this to make clear that I reject reform that is based on confused methodologies and destructive vision. I support reform when it is based on a constructive vision or fair and methodological criticism. Disorder can never be a way to rid us of our backward status in science, knowledge and thought. Disorder can only increase our backwardness and make it more complex. I have seen cases where people acknowledge that their first step towards disbelief was by following Adnan Ibraheem.<sup>1</sup> They then sank further to follow Muhammad Shahroor<sup>2</sup> and ultimately sank into deism or outright atheism.

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<sup>1</sup> I wrote this a year ago when the first edition of this book was published. Now that I am preparing this third edition I am more convinced of this fact. I have seen numerous cases of people whose atheism was the result of following Adnan Ibraheem.

I am only writing this as a witness, not as an analyst.

<sup>2</sup> A writer who rejects the sunnah and distorts the Qur'an.

I do not think that this is the outcome we aspire to achieve through reform.

**Two:** This new onslaught is loaded with open-ended questions. No issue or question is excluded, whether related to Allah Himself, His actions, Islamic legislation, the prophets, or ideological issues such as the universe and whether it is created or ever-existing, etc. Such questions require psychological and scholarly preparation by specialists so that they can provide the relevant answers.

**Three:** The present attack raises general slogans that have superficial attraction, but they are neither clear in their import nor well designed nor scholarly based so as to protect those who repeat them from ambiguity or contradiction. We frequently hear slogans like ‘mind liberation; critical approach to heritage; rejection of imposition; freedom; etc.’ Such slogans are not totally false. They need to be clarified so that the wrong ideas advocated by those who raise doubts about Islam and its fundamentals through such slogans can be identified. The right ideas in such slogans would also be identified and separated from those that are wrong or false. Only in this way can we ensure that these slogans are not used to serve false concepts. For example, some people reject the sunnah totally under the banner of taking a ‘critical approach to heritage’. This is faulty usage because the slogans are so general and their employ is arbitrary, serving personal ideas.

**Four:** The impact of this attack on our society is at a level in between openness and concealment, but it is closer to the latter.<sup>3</sup> This makes it difficult to measure the impact of the attack and its spread among the population. At the same time, concealment is a cause of worry for parents and educators.

**Five:** The main battlefield for this onslaught, up to the present moment, is

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<sup>3</sup> At least until the time of writing. The situation may change according to circumstances and various impacting factors.

social media. It is there that it is aimed, received and making its impact. This gives it an ever-expanding dimension that is unaffected by the social means of resistance, such as the mosque, school or family. Indeed, the impact may equally affect those who frequent mosques, and those who are raised by devout parents. I noted this in various discussions with some who were influenced by it. One woman told me frankly, on the telephone, that she disbelieves in Islam, and then started to discuss certain issues. She then abruptly hung up. Later, she phoned again, apologising for cutting me off, but had done so because her father was very religious and she feared he might overhear her.

**Six:** The present onslaught is particularly dangerous because it is aimed at the very essence of Islam and the unanimously accepted and fundamental principles of Islamic law. The case would have been different if it was aimed, for example, at one of the schools of Fiqh or a particular scholar, without encroaching on the essentials and fundamentals of Islam. The gravity of the matter becomes clearer when we consider the status of those who are influenced by it. When a person loses faith in Islam, that person becomes a disbeliever who incurs Allah's punishment in the life to come. Moreover, abandoning the essential and fundamental Islamic principles means a loss of identity and direction, as well as negligence of Islamic duties. It is indeed more than that, because denying some essentials makes a person a disbeliever. All this puts the problem at a level that cannot be ignored or looked at with complacency.

**Seven:** What adds to the seriousness of this attack is that the majority of those influenced by it are youth and young adult men and women. This means that its negative effects on society will be at its fullest level in the near future when these young people are working in different fields, including education and social guidance. Hence, it is most important to tackle the problem wisely and with the means suited for the present stage.

**Eight:** Those who are impacted by the current onslaught of doubts may be

classified into two categories:

The foolish who are using these doubts as a means to pursue their personal desires, and they are numerous.

Those who have been genuinely influenced by these doubts, leading them to adopt new ideas and concepts that involve violating Islamic principles.

This means that we must not make generalisations. Indeed, we must stop levelling generalised accusations and partial portrayals of the problems. We need to look for varied means to face these problems, each to suit the different scenario.

**Nine:** Those who raise these various contemporary misconceptions have different aims. Some want to divert people away from Islam, so that they may abandon it, and all religions. These include the neo-atheists, deists and those who stand to gain politically from the loss of the Muslim community's power and influence.

Some of those who raise some misconceptions do not wish to destroy Islam or undermine it. Indeed, they may raise their banners with good intentions, hoping to improve the image of Islam, showing it to be consistent with contemporary ideals. Yet serving this purpose may lead such people to deny some essential Islamic principles, or interpret them in a way that aims to allay the fears of non-Muslims. When I speak of essential Islamic principles, I refer to rulings and texts that Sunni Muslims consider to be true and valid, such as considering the sunnah, i.e. the Prophet's traditions, a main source of religious rulings and information. The limits set by the Islamic faith provide another type of such Islamic principle.

**Ten:** This onslaught consists of a number of objections and reservations relating to Allah, His existence and perfection, as well as prophethood and Islamic law. We often find the same questions raised by those who are impacted by this attack, despite their widely different ages and resident

domiciles. This is not the result of any independent thought or reasoning that has led them to raise such questions and objections. It is rather the result of the circulation of such information on the internet which has managed to bring the world together around one table. I shall mention in this book a number of these questions and objections. Several books have highlighted the main problems, either generally or in devoted chapters, such as the encyclopaedia known as Bayan al-Islam; and Tanzih al-Qur'an al-Karim an Daawa al-Ta'inin. One of the best works on this subject is Sultan al-Umayri's Ph.D. thesis entitled *Zahirat Naqd al-Din fi al-Falsafah al-Hadithah*, or Criticism of Religion in Modern Philosophy.

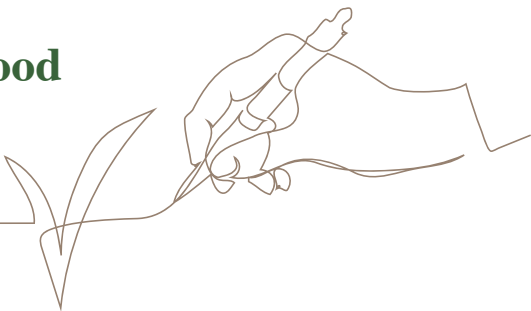
I conclude my discussion of the features of the contemporary onslaught by mentioning a book that provides a fine description of neo-atheism. It is Militia al-Ilhad, or Atheism's Militia, by Abdullah al-Ujayri.





# Contemporary

## Misconceptions and the Good They May Produce



*I* do not like to be pessimistic even though the reality presents multiple challenges. Allah never creates pure evil. When we look at the different aspects of the attack levelled at Islam and understand its implications, we may feel optimistic that it can bring about some good, but whatever good it may produce depends on an important matter which I will mention after my discussion of its different aspects.

**Firstly:** This attack may lead to a positive reaction by many of those who are influenced by it and those who realise the serious consequences it can lead to. Such a positive reaction means re-embracing Islam with conviction, not by growing up in a Muslim environment. In fact, nothing is better for Islam than a situation in which Muslims are absolutely certain of its truth, appreciating its grace. This positive outcome may, inevitably, happen after a stage during which some people will go the wrong way while others choose the right way.

When we look at the history of the Prophet's companions we realise that prior to Islam, they experienced the depressing state of disbelief, uncertainty and ignorance of the truth. They were in a deep state of ignorance, i.e. jahiliyyah, before Allah provided the guidance of Islam, spreading its light with the message of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). They looked at what Muhammad said and recognised the truth of prophethood, setting before them the straight path. They firmly held on to it and lived under its

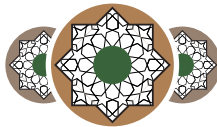
clear light. They endured much hardship and overcame great difficulties, sacrificing much for their belief. The result was that they kept the light of Islam shining before mankind. This was because they embraced Islam on the basis of clear conviction.

**Secondly:** Encouraging the pursuit of the truth as well as open discussion and debate.

**Thirdly:** Renewing the determination to act. Many Islamic scholars have so far failed to live up to what was expected of them spreading Islamic knowledge, defending Islam and advocating its truth. However, it is hoped that when they see the doubts and misconceptions raised all around them, they will rise to defend Islam, determined to devote their efforts to this noble cause. If only this takes place, it will bring much benefit, Allah willing.

**Fourthly:** Advocates of Islam will review their methods of presenting and advocating the Islamic message.

I will, Allah willing, add more on this point when I discuss the features of the effective Islamic address in the present intellectual climate. These good aspects that may come about as a result of the present onslaught against Islam depend on scholars and advocates of Islam doing their best in stating the truth and its proofs in the best way. If they do not take up the challenge, or dismiss its importance and fail to face this attack with proper insight, I fear that a catastrophe will befall us all, and that its evil consequences will take a long time to remove.





# How People Are Influenced by Contemporary Misconceptions



When analysing a problem or a social phenomenon, many people tend to simplify its causes. They often cast a casual look at it. When some serious questions are asked, such as: why do some of our young people turn to atheism? Or, why do they reject the sunnah? Some people give one or two simple reasons. This is the wrong approach, because the problem is a complex one and has many causes, some of which overlap. I have reflected on this problem for long and have identified many contributing reasons. These I have examined and classified under separate headings. I am breaking down the various problems into those caused by external or internal influences. Other problems are the result of methodological and advocacy shortcomings.

## Type One: External influences.

### 1. Social media

Everyone knows that there is much good, benefit, exchange of knowledge and mutual care that is done through social media, but such are also the principal mediums for transmitting misconceptions and problems. They have also helped to put the misconceptions of old times in front of those who are easily influenced by dubious ideas. Social media provide easy mediums to those who want to spread misconceptions, without going through difficult and complex procedures. People who want to achieve

fame have adopted dissident attitudes and odd ideas, using social media to gain publicity and fame. Moreover, social media spreads misconceptions to all sorts of people, thereby giving the problem an added risk dimension.

## **2. Cinema and fiction**

Television and books rarely have the same appeal to young people, of both sexes, as films and novels. This tends to broaden the population group that are influenced by the latter. The problem here is that their influence is indirect, as they present a totally alien culture, with all that it involves of right and wrong, good and evil. There is no possibility here to exclude what is contrary to Islamic values.

## **3. Various direct contacts with foreign cultures, including education**

The main problem here is that a young Muslim is taught by non-Muslim teachers, some of whom endeavour to spread atheist concepts. Some students, including postgraduate ones, have fallen prey to such attempts. If we ensure that our students go to educational establishments equipped with certainty of belief and a good standard of Islamic knowledge that enables him or her to evaluate new ideas and information, the situation would be much easier.

## **4. Availability of what is desirable yet forbidden**

We live at a time that is characterised by widespread sexual temptation. The question then arises: is there any connection between the availability of illicit sex and susceptibility to misconceptions? The problem with temptation in our times is that it has taken on different manifestations and attained several stages, one stage leading to the next. It can, thus, easily become predominant within a young person's mind and emotional set. When they become so influential, a person may feel religious duties to be too demanding. They then seek some way to stop what detracts from

enjoying such tempting desires. They want to enjoy without facing the guilt for having resorted to illicit ways of fulfillment. One such outcome is to disbelieve or to deny accountability in the life to come. This sequence of events may not be the most frequent in reality, but it is possible and its outcomes very serious.

From another point of view, frequent indulgence in sin without following it with repentance and a resolve not to revert to it leads to make one's heart rusty, and when such rust accumulates, one cannot see the truth. This is as Allah says in the Qur'an: 'Their own deeds have cast a layer of rust over their hearts.' (83: 14). If barriers gather around one's heart, the light of faith becomes dim and a person is likely to be influenced by even casual doubt or a flimsy misconception. An authentic hadith related by al-Tirmidhi and others quotes the Prophet as saying: 'When a person commits a sin, a black spot settles on his heart. If he regrets it and turns to Allah in repentance, his heart is cleared. If he repeats it, the black spot increases until eventually it covers all his heart. This is the rust Allah mentions as He says: "Their own deeds have cast a layer of rust over their hearts".'<sup>1</sup>

We must not ignore such abstract concepts Islam mentions when we try to understand any problem related to moving away from religion.

## **5. The material progress of the West and the influence of Western culture**

The German author Sigrid Hunke wrote her famous book *Allahs Sonne über dem Abendland*, or *Allah's sun over the Occident*. This book was published in 1960. She wrote another entitled *Allah ist ganz anders*, or *Allah is Unlike That*. In this book she defends Muslim and Islamic history and civilisation. She quotes an interesting and important text which describes an attitude similar to what many Muslims experience today as they look with admiration at Western civilisation. She quotes the Bishop of Cordova

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1 Related by al-Tirmidhi, 3,334. Al-Tirmidhi said: this is a good, authentic hadith.

as he speaks of the superiority of Islamic civilisation. He laments the status of his people, saying:

Many of my co-religionists read tales of the Arabs and study the writings of Muslim philosophers and religious scholars. They do not do so to refute them, but to master the Arabic language and be able to express themselves in good and fine style. Where do we have today a non-specialist Christian who can read Latin exegesis of the Bible? Where do we find Christians who study the four Gospels and the Books of Prophets and the Acts of the Apostles?

Alas! All Christian young men who have excelled with their talents only know Arabic language and literature. They exert maximum effort in studying Arabic references, and spend much of their money on buying Arabic books. They say openly and everywhere that Arabic literature is most admirable. Should anyone try to persuade them to concentrate on Christian books, they dismiss these as being of no concern to them.

What a disaster! Christians have even forgotten their mother tongue. You can hardly find one in a thousand among them who can compose a simple letter in good Latin, while those who have mastered written and spoken Arabic are countless. Indeed, some can write poetry in Arabic. They even excel the Arabs in that regard.

I mentioned the cinema and fiction as the second factor that helps to introduce Western values indirectly into our community. On its own, this factor is not strong unless coupled by a sense of defeatism among Muslims.

In *al-Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun stated a maxim that became world famous. This concerns the influence of the victor over the vanquished. I may summarise it as follows: The vanquished will always try to emulate the victor in his dress, transport and weapons and how to make and use these. Indeed the vanquished emulates the victor in all situations... If two communities are geographically close and one of them is superior to the other, the weaker one will import much of the stronger's habits and practices.

Abdullah al-Ujayri's book *Yanbuoo al-Ghiwayah al-Fikriyyah* tackles this subject in an interesting and appealing way. In his Introduction, the author says that many of the erroneous ideas that have been floated in our times are due to a combination of two things: the dominance of foreign culture and the lack of submission to Allah and His Messenger. He then adds:

When you reflect on the different 'intellectual trends' that have swept through the Muslim community in recent history, you will realise the impact of dominant cultural patterns on the formation of concepts and ideas. You can then explain the attempts to give an Islamic guise to some Western or Eastern ideologies. When socialist ideology was on the rise, a socialist reading of Islam was presented, and when military values became predominant, Islam was given a military outlook. As the democratic political pattern gained ground, Islam was seen from a democratic angle. It is only natural then that when liberal philosophy is in vogue, Islam will be given a liberal colour. Today, liberal values are sweeping the world and creating a general liberal mode. Indeed, this liberal mode is like a pressure cooker which produces an increasing conviction requiring the adoption of some or all these liberal values. Islamic religious texts are then interpreted in the light of such liberal values and concepts in an attempt to revise the Islamic outlook so as to fit liberal values.

It is certainly important to analyse liberal concepts and explain the problems and wrong ways they imply, as well as their incompatibility with many Islamic values. However, such efforts are bound to be of little effect because these liberal concepts and values have the support of Western civilisation which is predominant in our modern world.

When I discuss protective measures, Allah willing, I will mention that rearranging the major priorities from a human perspective is an important factor in neutralising the effect of this factor. Another very useful work in this area is Ibraheem al-Sakran's book *Sultat al-Thaqafah al-Ghalibah*, or *Hegemony of the Dominant Culture*.

## Type Two: Internal influences

The external factors that contribute to the impact of the attack on Islam and its fundamental principles cannot produce their real effect unless they find a response from the target population. This means that they need to find loopholes and weak points in the target group. I will list here only six of these internal influences.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Lack of certainty

I am not going to discuss this factor at length despite its great importance, because I will be talking about it when I discuss protective measures. I only wish to raise here the following point:

All Muslims agree that attending obligatory prayers on time is the most important practical Islamic duty. Muslims also agree that delaying prayers until their time range has lapsed is one of the most serious sins. The question that arises is: How do we explain the fact that a substantial number of Muslims neglect to offer their obligatory prayers on time?

I claim that lack of certainty of belief is the paramount reason, even though there are other reasons. Most Muslims are free of disbelief and atheism, despite their weak faith, because they have not been targeted by someone who tries to raise doubts in their minds about their faith. Were they to be exposed to some hard questioning about one of the fundamental principles of Islam, however, they may not be able to withstand such an attack. Ibn Taymiyyah gives this beautiful description:

Generally speaking, when people embrace Islam after being disbelievers, or when they are born into Muslim families and adhere to Islamic values, obeying Allah and His Messenger, they are considered Muslims and they have faith in a general way. However, the truth of faith gets

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<sup>2</sup> In my course on dealing with contemporary misconceptions, I identify nine internal influences, but I chose to list here only six for brevity.

into their hearts gradually, if Allah grants them this. Otherwise, many people do not get to the stage of certainty or to jihad. If doubts are raised before them, they may become doubtful. If they are ordered to join jihad, they may not do so. They are neither disbelievers nor hypocrites, but they simply do not have the inner knowledge and certainty that is necessary to prevent doubt. Nor do they have the sort of love of Allah and His Messenger that is dearer to them than their family or property. If such people are spared a trial and die in this condition of theirs, they go to heaven. If, on the other hand, they are faced with a situation that creates doubt and Allah does not grace them with what removes such doubt, they may become doubters and move into a type of hypocrisy.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Psychological problems and social pressures

I have had many discussions with different people about belief in Allah and often in situations whereby my interlocutors have been facing pressures and trials which they found difficult to deal with. It may often happen that a psychological problem or some pressure leads a person to be displeased with their lot or unhappy with Allah's will. Such a person may then deny Allah's existence or accuse Him of being unjust or unwise! This factor is certainly not peculiar to our modern age. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us of people who worship Him but then revert to disbelief as a result of some misfortune that befalls them. He says: 'Some people worship Allah on the border-line [of faith]. If good befalls such a person, he is content; but if a trial assails him, he turns away utterly; thus losing this world and the life to come. This is, indeed, a loss beyond compare.' (22: 11). Ibn Abbas is quoted in al-Bukhari's *Sahih* interpreting this verse as follows: 'A man may come to Madinah. Then if his wife gives birth to a son and his horse gives him a calf, he says: "This is good". If his wife does not give birth and his horse does not give him a calf, he says: "This religion is bad".'<sup>4</sup>

3 Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmoo' al-Fatawa*, Vol. 7, p. 270.

4 Related by al-Bukhari, 4,742.

Ibn Saadi, a fine commentator on the Qur'an, gives the following interpretation of this verse: 'Some people are weak in faith: it has not settled in their hearts and they have not experienced its happy feelings. They might have embraced it out of fear, or through the force of habit. Therefore, it is shaken by trials. 'If good befalls such a person, he is content'. This means that if he continues to have ample provisions and does not experience any adversity, he feels content at having such good fortune, not content with his faith. Allah may spare such a person and may not expose him to trials that test his faith. 'But if a trial assails him', causing him to experience some adversity or suffer the loss of someone who is dear, 'he turns away utterly', which means he abandons his faith. 'Thus losing this world and the life to come.' Losing this world means that he does not gain what he hoped to gain by abandoning his faith. He cannot compensate for his original loss. Thus, his efforts are in vain and he gets only what has always been ordained for him to have. The loss of the life to come is clear, as he is denied entry into heaven and justly incurs punishment in hell. 'This is, indeed, a loss beyond compare.' And it is clearly so'.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. Lack of attention to worship and spirituality**

Whenever a Muslim pays special attention to the depth of faith and nurtures the love of Allah in his heart, totally relies on Him, and purges his heart of grudges, envy and conceit, such a Muslim will experience a sort of unrivalled happiness. Such a person will never entertain a thought of replacing this kind of happiness by any other feeling. The person who does not have such an experience may prefer any other type of attraction.

### **4. Lack of tools for research and documentation**

When critical thinking prevails in a certain society and when the tools of research and study abound in it, it becomes more difficult for alien ideas

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<sup>5</sup> Ibn Saadi, *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman*, pp. 534-5.



to influence it. The reverse is also true. We see this clearly in the fact that a number of misconceptions have been circulated widely, although protection against them needs no more than critical examination or academic study to render them ineffective. We will see that protective measures include the promotion of critical thinking and the strengthening of the tools of research.

### **5. Lack of Islamic knowledge**

I conducted a questionnaire in two of my courses on dealing with contemporary misconceptions, asking about the causes behind this spread of misconception. ‘Lack of Islamic knowledge among young people’ was among the top answers. Such lack of Islamic knowledge increases the possibility of being influenced by raised doubts and misconceptions. This is due to the fact that a good standard of knowledge gives a person a methodological basis to evaluate what he may receive of new information or analysis. By contrast, a person who lacks such a methodological basis is prone to confusion and serious errors of knowledge.

### **6. Time, mental and spiritual emptiness**

I remember a woman who suffered one of the worst cases of obsession I have ever witnessed or heard of. I tried hard to persuade her to follow the methods of getting rid of her obsession, but none was effective. I think she consulted a psychiatrist, but he was not of much help either. I identified for her certain ways of study and acquiring knowledge, so as to fill her time and occupy her mind with, because she had absolutely nothing to do with her time. The result was quicker and better than I expected. Her questions, which used to be poured in quick succession, actually stopped in a very short time. I am not exaggerating and I have no need to exaggerate. What I want to say here is that mental and spiritual emptiness leaves one’s mind and heart receptive to any thought, including that which is evil. A person

whose time is full, and whose mind and spirit are preoccupied with the pursuit of knowledge, action and faith has an effective shield that protects from deviant ideas and nagging thoughts.

### **Type Three: Shortcomings in methodology, advocacy, education and religious discussion.**

Such shortcomings appear in many ways, such as:

1. There is a clear gap between many religious scholars and young people. This gap leads to an imperfect understanding of reality and the mental isolation of each group. What is worse is that it leads to the lack of role models who can play an important part in keeping the young on the right course.

We need only to remind ourselves of the Prophet's personal conduct and how close he was to all sections of society. Imagine the effect of his behaviour on people who recognised his sublime character reflected in his generous heart, forbearance and patience. He won their hearts with his fine manners and good conduct.

2. There is a marked lack of variation in methods of advocacy that are suited to modern society and its development. The Prophet used to vary his address and his methods of imparting information. He used different styles, such as asking questions, drawing figures, giving effective addresses, and employing fine speech, etc. We know that he had the light of revelation and Allah's support. These were more than enough for the task he was given, but he set the example for us. To follow his lead is very important, particularly in our modern world where the media play a very important social role.
3. Another shortcoming is the little room allowed for open discussion where young people feel free to put forward their questions and problems, whatever they may be, with complete impunity.

I often think of a situation that I love to see as a common feature of Islamic advocacy. I think of a large hall, full of young people being addressed by a scholar who is an accomplished debater and who combines broad-mindedness with profound insight and the ability to put his case clearly and convincingly. The audience are invited to express their views, put their questions and explain their worries without restriction. The scholar gives clear answers to their queries like Ahmad Deedat used to do and as Zakir Naik continues to do. It is in such a forum that countless positive messages will reach their audiences. Many misconceptions will be cleared, problems solved and hearts reassured. This is my dream, but will it come true? Will this be soon? How many advocates of Islam are able to undertake this task? Our Lord, help us!

4. Inadequate logical and well proven Islamic discourse. This is one of the most important reasons and is discussed below.

### **Features of the effective religious address on the contemporary intellectual stage:**

I shall mention five features that will make the Islamic address highly effective in the intellectual arena. I am speaking at length on the first feature, which is very important, and I hope that my reader will not, as a result, lose sight of the other features.

#### **The first feature: Giving more importance to rational address**

Some people think that Islamic religious texts do not include rational and logical proofs. This idea makes them give less importance to the evidence given in religious texts, assigning more importance to logical reasoning. They claim that certainty can only be achieved by logical reasoning and rational evidence, not by texts. All this is untrue. Islamic religious texts cite

numerous rational evidence that prove the fundamentals of the faith based on Allah's oneness. Imam Ibn Taymiyyah said: 'The truth is stated by the early generations of Muslims and their scholars who combined knowledge with faith. They state that Allah has given all the rational evidence that people need. No one of those who make such claims appreciate such rational evidence. In fact, the Qur'an sums up all that they provide in the best form'.<sup>6</sup>

Ibn Abi al-Izz, a Hanafi scholar, said: 'My good friend needs only consider the rational methods mentioned by philosophers and theologians. He will realise that all that is correct and valid in them echoes some of the logical proofs the Qur'an states in the clearest and most concise of forms. Indeed, the Qur'anic style is far clearer and more perfect than anything they come up with'.<sup>7</sup>

When we read Allah's book, the Qur'an, and study the Prophet's hadiths, we will recognise that rational address features prominently in them. Take, for example, the Qur'anic verses that state the fact of resurrection after death. Allah says: 'Do they not see that Allah, Who has created the heavens and earth, has power to create their like? He has beyond any doubt set a term for their resurrection.' (17: 99). 'Are they not aware that Allah, Who has created the heavens and earth and was not wearied by their creation, has the power to bring the dead back to life? Yes, indeed. He has power over all things.' (46: 33). This is a clearly convincing logical argument. The pagan Quraysh Arabs admitted that Allah is the Creator of the heavens and earth. Therefore, the argument to refute their claims is that the One Who created the heavens and earth out of nothing is able to create their like. Most certainly, He is able to create lesser beings: 'The creation of the heavens and earth is indeed greater than the creation of man; yet most people do not understand.' (40: 57).

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6 Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmoo' al-Fatawa*, Vol. 3, p. 184.

7 Ibn Abi al-Izz, *Sharh al-Aqeedah al-Tahawiyah*, Vol. 1, p. 76.

Such rational address in the Qur'an includes the following: 'Were they created out of nothing? Were they the creators?' (52: 35). Setting the question in this way makes the human mind consider the possibilities of either case being true. As it will never find any proof to support either case, it begins to look at the third possibility which is stated in the preceding and following verses in the surah. It then concludes that the Creator is undoubtedly Allah. Reference works on this subject include: *Al-Adillah al-Aqliyyah al-Naqliyyah ala Usool al-I'tiqad* by Saud al-Urayfi; *Balaghat al-Ihtijaj al-Aqli fi al-Qur'an al-Karim* by Zainab al-Kurdi, and *Manahij al-Jadal fi al-Qur'an* by Zahir ibn Awwad al-Alma'i.

We also find in the Prophet's sunnah situations where convincing logical argument is most beautiful and appealing. Al-Bukhari and Muslim relate the following hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah: 'A man from the Fazarah tribe came to the Prophet. He said: "My wife has given birth to a black boy". The Prophet asked him: "Do you have camels?" The man said that he had. The Prophet asked: "What colour are they?" The man said that they were reddish. The Prophet said: "Are any of them grey?" The man said: "Some of them are". The Prophet said: "How come they are so?" The man said: "It might have inherited a certain quality". The Prophet said: "And this boy might have inherited a certain quality".'

### **Addressing people's minds**

People's minds are addressed in different ways. Some concentrate on the method and style of address, while others seek to make an argument, and some seek to predetermine the limitations of the human mind and its submission to Allah and the divine message.

The first type, which focuses on the method of address, uses various ways to alert the mind. One of these ways is to ask a question. The Prophet used this method in order to impart certain information. A hadith narrated by Ibn Umar mentions that the Prophet said to some of his companions: 'Tell

me which evergreen tree is like a Muslim?’<sup>8</sup> In a different hadith related by Muslim, the Prophet asked his companions: ‘Do you know who is penniless?’ They said: ‘A penniless person is one who has neither money nor property’. He said: ‘In my community, a penniless person is one who finds himself on the Day of Judgement having performed prayer and fasting and paid zakat. However, he had in life abused a person, levelled false accusations on another, taken away unlawfully some of the property of a third person, killed another and unlawfully beaten up someone else. On the Day of Judgement, he will pay this person and that person out of his own good deeds. If his good deeds are exhausted and he has not yet repaid what he owes, some of their bad deeds will be transferred to him and he will be thrown in hell’.

Another method is the use of analogy and setting example. The point of giving an example is to draw a logical analogy. Take for example the often asked question: ‘How can we believe in Allah when we cannot see Him?’ An example drawn from our modern time cites the ‘electron’ in answer. Scientists treat the electron as a scientific reality although they never see it. They only see its effect. Likewise, we believe in Allah without seeing Him. We only see His works.

A different method is to use the skills of delivery and persuasion. Advocates of Islam and scholars who give speeches and khutbahs should acquire such skills. Even a person who is gifted in this area may benefit by learning some additional skills. Yet another method of presenting information to addressees is to make sure of starting with acceptable introductions and proceeding from these to establish the result one wishes to state. This is hugely important. To give an example: we may state at the beginning

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<sup>8</sup> The hadith mentions that they gave different answers, but the Prophet told them that it is the date tree, as its benefits are enjoyed throughout the year, and its fruit continues to be used all the year round. A Muslim is always ready to assist others and do good at all times.

that the Qur'an was revealed for all mankind, not only for the Prophet's generation and his companions. We proceed from this to establish that the verses that require believers to obey the Prophet apply to us and that we cannot implement them unless we follow the authentic sunnah and hadiths.

All the foregoing come under the first method of addressing the human mind. The second type aims to refute the arguments of opponents. There are several methods of doing so, such as highlighting the logical or methodological contradictions in an opponents' argument. For example, an opponent may cite a hadith to support his rejection of the sunnah. This is an essential contradiction. The sunnah includes all that the Prophet said, did or approved. Every report quoting his words or action or approval is a hadith. Therefore, rejecting the sunnah as a source of Islamic legislation means rejecting all hadiths. To use a hadith as evidence in support of rejecting the sunnah is to use what one does not consider to be valid. This means self-contradiction.

Another method is to highlight the essential falsehood attendant on an opponent's argument. For example, atheists and agnostics who deny resurrection and man's accountability in a life to come may be asked about the fate of dictators who kill thousands or millions of people: will they be punished after they die? Will their victims gain redress for what they suffered at their hands? Atheists deny resurrection, which essentially means that there will be no difference between the oppressor and the oppressed, and this is false. Indeed, the oppressor will be better off, because he will have enjoyed his life which, according to him, is the only life. The victim, however, was deprived of the chance to enjoy life.

The third method of addressing minds is to speak about the mind as a source of knowledge. This requires speaking about the sphere within which it works, and the relationship between mind and religious text, and its attitude to matters that are beyond the reach of human faculties of

perception, etc. This helps to place the human mind in its proper place and allows it to function well in both understanding and evaluation.

### **The second feature: Clear awareness of the questions being asked and the nature of counter arguments**

A scholar or an Islamic advocate may be unclear about the subject he needs to discuss when he addresses his congregation, or on social media. Keeping aware of what young people are asking or debating will remove all such lack of clarity. There are always new ideas and plenty of thoughts. When a person follows what is being discussed and evaluates it, he will know what to say and when to say it. If he notices that a particular religious question is becoming the subject of exchanges on social media, he may address it after pinpointing the essence of the debate concerning it. He will find his audience listening attentively, eager to know the truth and appreciating sound contributions.

### **The third feature: Know your addressees**

It is very important to know the type of audience one is addressing and their different levels. Further, one must be aware of what appeals to young people and what makes them turn away.

### **The fourth feature: Argument is countered by argument, not by hurling abuse. Opponents must be fairly treated**

A markedly negative effect is often produced when doubts raised about religious fundamentals are met with hurling abuse at the person raising them or placing him in a certain category, without citing clear and convincing evidence to explain that his argument is wrong. We live at a time that has set a certain standard for what is acceptable to young people. Therefore, we need to understand that in a debate, we do not discuss a speaker, but rather

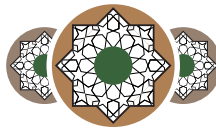


what he says. The focus of argument must be the information provided, not who provides it. This may not always be true, but wherever it is possible it should be followed because it is more effective.

Being fair to those who disagree with us and maintaining good manners with them make us more influential in the field of debate. It is very important in this regard not to accuse an opponent of bad intention simply because he expresses an erroneous view or makes an invalid observation. However, there remain some irritating exceptions that may lead to a loss of temper. Perhaps the nearest example is provided by those who claim to follow the Qur'an only.

### **The fifth feature: A genuine desire to help people see the truth**

A true and genuine intention, coupled with enthusiasm and sincerity in the presentation of the Islamic message to people so that they may benefit by it will always be reflected on the advocate's face. It also gives the audience a feeling of self-importance. Above all, Allah will help those with genuine intention by making their word well received and acceptable.





# How to Deal with Contemporary Intellectual Misconceptions



To deal properly with the onslaught of misconceptions we need to address three areas: the provision of protection for those who have not, as yet, been influenced by them; the administration of a cure for those who have fallen victim to them; and a proper debate with those who raise such misconceptions.

I shall address all three areas through methodological rules for each. Thus we will have:

**One:** Rules to protect from contemporary intellectual misconceptions;

**Two:** Rules to deal with such doubts and misconceptions after they have been taken up;

**Three:** Rules for the dialogue and debating skills to argue with those who raise such doubts and misconceptions.

## One: Rules to Protect against Contemporary Intellectual Misconceptions

### The first rule: The consolidation of belief in the fundamentals of Islam

Having closely followed the questions raised by young people, I am convinced that it is necessary to give particular attention to present the

fundamentals of Islam in a logical way that strengthens faith, consolidates certainty and protects hearts from the evil of doubt. Unless a believer is a firm believer in these fundamentals, assured at heart of their truth, and knows their proofs, doubt and uncertainty may easily creep in. Although the Qur'an gives this issue ample space and despite its great importance, it is not given sufficient care. Hence, it is not surprising that a large number of young people in our Muslim society are affected by those attacks that aim to raise doubts about Allah, His Book or His Messenger (peace be upon him). As this protective rule is particularly important, I will discuss some of the practical measures that strengthen it.

### **Ways to strengthen certainty:**

1. Reviving reflection on Allah's universal signs as an act of worship.

The Qur'an clarifies the relationship between such reflection and understanding the great truths. Allah says: 'They remember Allah when they stand, sit and lie down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth: "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. Limitless are You in Your glory".' (3: 191). When they reflected, they realised that the way the heavens and earth have been created provide clear evidence that nothing in the universe is created in vain or haphazardly.

Moreover, contemplation and reflection on man and his soul, as well as the universe at large leads to firm certainty of the truth of the Qur'an: 'We shall show them Our signs in the wide horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth.' (41: 53). This verse makes a person who reflects pause to consider it time and again. Allah censures those who refuse to reflect on His signs, as He says: 'We have set up the sky as a well-secured canopy. Yet they stubbornly turn away from all its signs.' (21: 32). I hope that modern civilisation does not prevent us from the act of worship that reflects on the sky, stars, the human soul, animals and other types of Allah's creation.

There are several ways of reviving and spreading reflection as an act of worship, such as:

- i. Publishing relevant visual and written material that encourages reflection. Much of the visual material showing the wonders of the universe, man, animals and the sea helps to reflect on Allah's signs. The late Mustafa Mahmood used to show such material on his television programme, and they had good appeal.
  - ii. Organising competitions for the best productions and research papers in this area.
  - iii. Organising tests of knowledge or competitions for summarising earlier research papers in this area.
2. Encouraging deep thinking about Allah's revelation as an act of worship, and strengthening the bond with the Qur'an. Allah revealed the Qur'an to guide people to the purpose of their creation, give them a clear, true concept of Himself, inform them of resurrection, reckoning and reward, and provide clear evidence of all this. The Qur'an will continue to be an effective means to remove doubt, confirm certainty, and encourage belief, as it addresses the hearts and minds of those who, with Allah's help, choose the way of goodness. At present, efforts are continuing to encourage people to practise this act of worship of deep thinking and reflection on the Qur'an. The Taddabur and Tafsir centres are two bodies that are doing good work in this field. May Allah bless their efforts.
3. Encouraging reading those books that highlight the evidence proving the truth of the fundamentals of Islam. Scholars of old and recent times wrote in this field. Many early scholars, such as al-Khattabi, al-Rummani, al-Baqillani, al-Jurjani and many others wrote on the inimitability of the Qur'an. A wider field focuses on the proofs of prophethood. On this subject we have numerous books including those written by Abu Nuaym al-Asbahani, Justice Abd al-Jabbar and al-Bayhaqi, etc. I am adding

here some books by contemporary authors as they may be included in programmes for group reading, or in competitions to summarise a book, etc.

- *Al-Naba' al-Azim* by Muhammad Abdullah Draz, [published in English under the title *The Qur'an: an Eternal Challenge*]. This is a beautiful book discussing the truth of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is written in fine style and clear expression that affect the reader's emotion. Another work by the same author is *Introduction to the Qur'an*.
- *Barahin wa Adillah Imaniyyah* by Abd al-Rahman Hasan Habannakah al-Maydani.
- *Nubuwwat Muhammad min al-Shakk ila al-Yaqin* by Fadil al-Samurrai.
- *Al-Adillah al-Aqliyyah al-Naqliyyah ala Usool al-I'tiqad* by Saud al-Urayfi. This is a large book of high standard.
- *Kamil al-Surah*, the second volume.

4. Giving due importance to the discussion of Allah, His attributes and oneness in our discourse advocating Islam.

The theme of the 'oneness of Allah's Divinity' has been given due importance in religious studies in our society. This produced good results in making people well aware of this theme. However, the equally important theme of the 'oneness of the Lord', which should take precedence, has not been given the attention it deserves. Yet the Qur'an attaches much importance to the discussion of Allah's names, attributes and deeds. The first Qur'anic revelation was: 'Read in the name of your Lord Who created; [He] created man from a clinging cell mass. Read and your Lord is the Most Bountiful One.' (96:1-3). There is pressing need at present to discuss this theme and include it in all forms of our advocacy address.

5. Giving due attention to heart worship in all fields.

The Prophet Abraham was devout and relied totally on Allah. He was full of certainty about his belief. Therefore, when his people tried to argue with him about Allah, Mighty and Exalted, he said to them: ‘Do you argue with me about Allah, when it is He Who has given me guidance?’ (6: 80). They could not understand what he had felt to so fill his heart with knowledge, certainty and light. He would not exchange the happiness he derived from faith for anything on earth. Would anyone barter away security for fear or reassurance for confusion? Hence, he asks in the next verse: ‘Which of the two parties has a better right to feel secure, if you happen to know?’ (6: 81).

A famous statement by one well-known devout person of the early Muslim generations said: ‘Had kings and princes known the happiness we experience, they would fight us with swords to take it for themselves’. Would anyone who experiences such feelings be affected by misconceptions? Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, received Prophet Muhammad’s letter calling on him to embrace Islam. Heraclius questioned Abu Sufyan, the Quraysh leader about the Prophet and his status. At the time, Abu Sufyan was hostile to the Prophet. One of the questions Heraclius put to Abu Sufyan was: ‘Does anyone who embraces his faith subsequently turn away from it in disgust?’ Abu Sufyan said: ‘No’. Heraclius commented: ‘Such is faith. When its happiness is felt at heart, no one will reject it’.

Protection from doubt, misconception, disbelief and atheism will not be completely achieved by a heart which has not experienced the happiness of faith, because such a heart will not feel the great loss it incurs by abandoning that faith. By contrast, a person who has experienced faith and its happiness will never barter it away for anything. Therefore, strengthening faith and consolidating the bond with Allah, relying on Him, and our feelings of love of Allah and hope in Him are among the most important means of protection from doubts and misconceptions. Hence, we ask: how much importance do we attach to this issue? Do we give it its due value? Is it

not clearly stressed in the Qur'an and in the Prophet's address, as well as scholars' addresses?

Undoubtedly, many misconceptions originate when faith is weak and when a person has not experienced the feelings of happiness it generates. Therefore, we need to review our faith and ensure that it is firm in our hearts, manifested in our action and our sincere submission to Allah. All these are elements of effective immunity that help us to resist the intellectual onslaught that is aimed at Islam and its fundamental principles. Ibn al-Qayyim's book, *Madarij al-Salikin*, focuses on this area. Many devout people have accepted this book and Ibn al-Qayyim includes much of their discourse in this book.

6. Stories of new converts to Islam have a marked effect, giving a feeling of reassurance, particularly when we note that they come from different backgrounds, countries and specialisations. Their stories show that they have embraced Islam on the basis of a conviction leading them to adopt what they realised to be the best way. This despite the persistent efforts that try to distort the image of Islam and Muslims. Nevertheless, an increasing number of people from the East and the West flock towards Islam.

What is particularly interesting in their stories is that they often highlight some meanings that may escape us. They read the Qur'an with an open mind, eager to understand Allah's word. They set it against their previous state of disbelief and sense of loss. I clearly felt this as I watched some episodes of Fahd al-Kandari's television show, *The Qur'an is My Guide*. It is one of the best programmes in this field. I recommend showing it in family and school programmes to enhance people's certainty of faith.

### **The second rule: Developing a critical mind**

A critical mind is that which examines what is being said. It does not



accept a claim that is not accompanied by clear evidence. It rejects invalid evidence and does not overlook logical contradictions. One of the most important factors that helped spread many of the misconceptions that have affected a wide section of our young people is the absence of an examining mind and critical thinking. Therefore, it is highly important to encourage the adoption of critical thinking that is able to distinguish information that cannot be accepted. This is exceedingly important in enhancing immunity against raised doubts and misconceptions that cannot have firm basis.

Muslim scholars have given due attention to examining information before accepting it. The clearest example is seen in the field of hadith scholarship, as scholars established a whole discipline of checking every narrator. Appearances counted for little in their approach, as they checked different versions and narrations, dismissing what did not have a continuous and reliable chain of transmission. They identified lying reporters and those who were unreliable or confused. It is this thorough method of examination of every report attributed to the Prophet that makes the Prophet's sunnah clear and authentic. Muslim scholars also paid much attention to the principles of proper and fruitful debate. They set the rules that differentiate acceptable arguments from rejected claims. They set details for what proper examination requires, and wrote books on the rules of debate.

This is totally different from a doubting approach that is always ready to say: 'Perhaps', or 'How do we know? Or 'May be'. A critical mind is not one that is quick to reject whatever is said; it is rather one that is clear of the basis and evidence that determines whether a particular piece of information should be accepted or rejected. Undoubtedly we need courses, lectures and training on how to properly use critical thinking. These must distinguish proper critical thinking from the negative way that doubts most, if not all things. We can train our children in critical thinking by applying it to what they hear in school and from friends. Thus, they can analyse such information and reports and evaluate them. A critical mind is further

strengthened by learning the methods and skills of academic research, as it needs to know the sources of information and how to deal with them to check and verify. Therefore, we need to organise courses on research and reference to reliable sources, including checking the authenticity of hadiths on the internet and in relevant books.

### **The third rule: Checking the religious basis**

What I mean here is the study of the different disciplines of Islamic studies, including the Islamic creed [i.e. *aqeedah*], Fiqh, legal theory [i.e. *usool al-fiqh*], Hadith terminology, Arabic language and Qur'anic disciplines [i.e. *uloom al-Qur'an*]. This is exceedingly important because it gives a student a firm basis of knowledge to rely upon. Without such a basis, one does not have a clear stand.

To make good use of this protective rule, we need to present the different disciplines of Islamic studies in an easy way that young people can grasp and understand. To this end, we need to run short courses on these disciplines, using easy, modern language and visual aids. Whoever undertakes this task should bear in mind that they are fulfilling important work in protecting young people against contemporary intellectual misconceptions.

One good effort in this regard is made by Dr Amir Bahjat who has prepared excellent courses in Fiqh and its basic principles. These courses are available on YouTube and entitled *Tanbeeh al-Faqeeh* and *al-Tareeq ila Usool al-Fiqh*. An important aspect the present stage requires is that religious studies should pay particular attention to confirming the fundamental principles of Islam. Such studies should not be limited to discussions and explanations of normal subjects. We should add what confirms the validity of the principles that govern such questions that need to be studied and explained. The assumption that both speaker and audience accept the validity of the explained principles might have been true in the past, but the present time is different. Instead, we are at a time when numerous questions are raised

and aimed at the fundamentals. Therefore, students of Islamic studies must not confine themselves to understanding Fiqh terminology, or the principles and rules set by scholars of legal theory or Hadith. They must combine all this with knowledge of what outlines their basis and confirms their validity and truth.

It may be suggested that a student of Islamic studies is not affected by questions raised about fundamental principles. Hence, there is no need for what we have just said. In answer, we may say that the student himself may not be influenced by the misconceptions and doubts others may raise, but he still needs to know the proofs and to be aware of the truth of the fundamentals so that he can answer whatever questions or objections are put to him. The only situation where he does not need to know all this is when he decides not to interact with people but rather stay away from them. One way of achieving this goal without problems is to have a proper introduction to each discipline before going deeply into it. Such an introduction should prove the validity of the discipline being studied and the reasons for studying it. It should also outline the negative effects that its absence is bound to produce.

### **The fourth rule: Defining sources of knowledge and the attitude to each of these sources**

What are the sources we rely upon to formulate our knowledge? What are the limits of each of these sources? Do they overlap? Which are the sources that are free of error? Which are the sources of legitimate knowledge acquisition that may be right or wrong?

All these questions are important for young people. When proper answers are given to them in a proper way, they set the mind in proper order and define its approaches to what it relies upon in gaining knowledge. Thus, it becomes one of the most important ways of protection in the present time. One of the main reasons for contemporary intellectual confusion is the

imperfect attitude to sources of knowledge. Many atheists, particularly in the West, adopt a negative attitude towards the sources of human knowledge, apart from the senses and experiment, considering these the only real bases for gaining knowledge. Thus, they reject the logical evidence that proves Allah's existence if it does not rely on the senses or does not fall within the framework of experimental science. They also reject revelation which is transmitted by true information based on prior logical evidence. Many of the debates that take place between believers and disbelievers refer to questions that relate to knowledge. Therefore, it is important to have a clear understanding of epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, and its different branches.

Anyone who wishes to have a general idea of knowledge, its nature and sources may refer to a lecture by Abdullah al-Ujayri entitled, 'An introduction to the theory of knowledge'. This lecture is useful for beginners to formulate a general idea of this theory and what relates to it, as well as the nature of knowledge in Islam. One may next refer to Abd al-Rahman ibn Zaid al-Zunaydi's book *Masadir al-Maarifah fi al-al-Fikr al-Dini wal-Falsafi*, or 'Sources of knowledge in religious and philosophical thought'. Next comes Abdullah al-Qarni's book *al-Maarifah fi al-Islam* or Epistemology in Islam. It is an excellent book but may be rather difficult for beginners and intermediate students. We may then refer to Abdullah al-Daajani's book on Ibn Taymiyyah's attitude to knowledge, entitled *Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemological method*. This is a well written and useful thesis but it may also be rather difficult for beginners and intermediate students.

The answers to these questions enable us to distinguish between what is an infallible religious source and what is liable to error. No error occurs in the Qur'an or the sunnah. Likewise, when it is confirmed that Muslim scholars unanimously agree upon a certain matter, it admits no error. As for individual scholars, no one's views on all matters are considered to be immune to error, even though he happens to be Abu anīfah, Mālik ibn Anas, al-Shafi'i or

Ahmad ibn Hanbal (may Allah bestow mercy on them all). This important rule incorporates the question of submission to religious text and its basis. Important works on this subject include: Abdullah al-Ujayri's *Yanboo' al-Ghiwayah al-Fikriyyah* and Fahd al-Ajlan's *al-Taslim li al-Nass al-Shar'i*.

### **The fifth rule: Non-specialists should not expose themselves to misconceptions**

A person who specialises in answering misconceptions should be aware of the details and history of such misconceptions, as well as who spreads them. Such a person may need to read some of their books, or look into their websites and blogs, so as to be able to refute their arguments. A non-specialist may be taking a serious risk by delving into the realm of misconceptions. I am not referring to learning the answers to the main misconceptions, but to reading their books, or spending time reading their tweets and their pages on social media. Some people may do so in order to 'know what others have or say', or simply to waste time or satisfy their curiosity, or even to 'acquire a general idea', etc. I know some people who looked into atheist blogs with a good motive but who were, however, exposed to serious negative impact which they neither expected nor wanted. This reminds us of early scholars' statements warning against listening to 'deviant ideas' because, as al-Dhahabi said: 'Hearts are weak, and misconceptions have appeal'.

### **The sixth rule: Reading books that answer misconceptions, provided that the following conditions are observed:**

1. The misconceptions should be contemporary and wide-spread; or, in other words, they are serious.
2. One should choose a book that mentions the misconception in general terms and answers it in detail. The opposite approach is unsuitable.

Some writers portray the misconception in great detail, adding its basis and how it arose. This is useful for specialists. As we are speaking here about protection for non-specialists, we say that it is not useful for them to read the detailed reasons and evidence leading to a particular misconception.

3. The answer should be valid and well argued. This is known through specialist scholars.

Books that are useful in refuting current misconceptions and may be read for protection include Mustafa al-Sibaie's *al-Sunnah wa Makanatuha fi al-Tashri' al-Islami*, and the two volumes of the book entitled Kamil al-Surah.

### **The seventh rule: Setting the order of the ultimate objectives according to Allah**

Many contemporary questions about Islam have come about because those who raise such questions set the ultimate objectives in the wrong order. Under 'ultimate objectives' I set the great human issues such as: worship, stability, freedom, civilisation, self-fulfilment, satisfaction of desire, earnings, etc. We may mention in particular two of these ultimate objectives, each of which is given top priority according to certain groups of people. These are 'the worship of Allah as He wishes to be worshipped', i.e. Allah is at the centre, and 'ensuring affluence and absolute freedom for man as he wishes', i.e. man is at the centre. Those who put man at the top of their priorities will still give this sphere preference when it is in conflict with Allah's rules and commandments. Such people assign the highest importance to what contributes to man's wellbeing, freedom, choice and desires, even though they may be bad and in conflict with sound human nature or with Allah's orders. A holder of this view may consider Islamic rules odd because they give highest priority to the implementation of Allah's rules and laws, as also to worshipping Him. Hence they make the

criteria for distinction between people their piety and obedience of Allah and decide that they are wrong because such is inconsistent with man's central position. Therefore, the problem here is the wrong order of the ultimate objectives.

Thus, we see that many of the questions raised against some Islamic rulings relating to disbelievers, such as the payment of *jizyah*, i.e. tribute, and the punishment for apostasy are due to this wrong order of priorities, even though they may be given a different colour. Let me be frank: the issues that I find hardest to answer are those which are due to the wrong order of priorities given by those who raise them. Most of them are unaware of the origin of the problem in their minds. They cling to some aspects of the argument, thinking it to be the origin of the problem when it is not. Hence, the answer to their questions requires a good deal of preparation that involves the adjustment of the order of ultimate objectives.

Ibraheem al-Sakran's book, *Ma'alat al-Khitab al-Madani*, is of special importance in this regard.

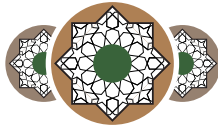
### **The eighth rule: Strengthening group programmes that are intellectually and emotionally useful**

Joining group programmes of interest, at family or friends' level, will give a young person useful enrichment, both intellectually and emotionally. It will stop many types of negativity from taking up position among his priorities. Such programmes will give individuals a chance to discover their abilities, and provide a feeling of assurance and identity. This will act as a psychological check against embracing false ideas. It is particularly important to organise some useful family programmes that include a measure of debate and discussion, such as a programme of group readings, and discussion of what has been read. The same may be said about educational clubs run by reliable teachers who are committed to strengthening the Islamic identity. All such programmes are very

## How to Deal with Contemporary Intellectual Misconceptions

useful in shaping intellectual immunity and protection against current misconceptions.

It is very interesting to remember, as we mention the effect of good company in experiencing the happiness of faith, the hadith that says: ‘Three qualities: whoever combines them will experience the happiness of faith... and that he loves a person only for Allah’s sake...’<sup>1</sup> Whoever experiences happiness of faith will never abandon it to sink into the misery of disbelief and doubt.



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<sup>1</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 16.



# Rules for Dealing with Entertained Misconceptions



*T*he previous rules sought to protect against misconception before such set in. Should, however, someone be facing a misconception, then more methodical rules that help in dealing with it properly are needed.

## **Rule One: The use of critical thinking and verification in dealing with information and ideas**

No piece of information deserves even the slightest consideration unless it meets the minimum degree of academic verification. If it is just floated with no identified source, then the correct attitude is to dismiss it outright. On the other hand, a piece of information may be correct, but citing it in evidence in a particular case is incorrect. Therefore, one must check what is said and look at it carefully. Certainly one must not feel uneasy because someone said something that cannot withstand proper examination. Here are some real examples:

1. The hadiths narrated by Mu‘awiyah are rejected because he is maligned on the basis of the claim that the Prophet cursed him. This claim is false, and as a result the claim and the ruling based on it are false.
2. Defaming Abu Hurayrah on the basis of Umar accusing him of theft. The story of this accusation is untrue.
3. Doubting the sunnah because of the story that Umar burnt some scrolls

containing hadiths. This is often cited but it is untrue.

4. Detracting from Abu Hurayrah's position because of the hadith that says: 'Make your visits infrequent to increase your love'. The whole story is an unconfirmed claim.

All four are examples of claims made on the basis of untrue reports. The falsehood of all these reports is well established in the relevant books of hadith. They do not meet the even the minimum conditions of acceptability. Therefore, they fall. A different type of claim is based on true texts, but when we examine the claims based on them we realise that they are wrongly used. Here are some examples:

1. Allah says in the Qur'an: 'No single thing have We left out of the Book.' (6: 38). This statement is cited in support of rejecting the sunnah. The error is that the 'book' the verse refers to is the Preserved Tablet which is with Allah, not the Qur'an. As such, the correct Qur'anic statement cannot lead to the claimed conclusion. Another Qur'anic statement is cited in this connection: 'We have bestowed from on high upon you the Book to make everything clear'. (16: 89) We will discuss how these people use this statement when we discuss the misconceptions raised about the sunnah.
2. Citing the hadith whereby the Prophet ordered that his statements not be written down to prove that the sunnah does not constitute valid evidence.<sup>1</sup> The information is correct according to many scholars, but it does not lead to the alleged conclusion, because an order not to write does not mean a negation of the validity of evidence. There are certain ways to make clear that reports may not be taken as evidence, and these ways do not include refraining from writing them. [Scholars make clear

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<sup>1</sup> The hadith is related by Muslim and narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri quoting Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him): 'Do not write anything from me. Whoever has written something from me other than the Qur'an should wipe it off. Narrate from me; there is no harm'.

that the order not to write the Prophet's hadiths was valid only in the initial period, so that there was no chance of his statements might be mixed with the Qur'an which was written down as it was revealed. When his companions learnt the Qur'an and were clear about it, he made no objection to writing the hadiths. Indeed, there were cases when he ordered its writing. On the other hand, the validity of the hadith as evidence for Islamic rulings is confirmed in the Qur'an].

Other flaws that may be identified through critical thinking include the contradictions involved in citing a misconception as evidence. An example is given by the very hadith that orders that nothing other than the Qur'an should be written down. The flaw is different from that cited in the previous paragraph. Those who cite this hadith in support of their argument are actually relying on something they themselves deny having evidence status.

### **Rule Two: Ask specialists**

It is observed that some young men and women who are influenced by atheistic or irreligious misconceptions are unwilling to ask scholars about the misconceptions that occur to them. We mentioned earlier that concealment is one of the main features of the contemporary onslaught seeking to raise doubts and misconceptions about Islam. Some may be justified in their reluctance to ask, fearing that they will be rebuked, rather than listened to and met with understanding. Their reluctance may be confirmed by the attitude of some scholars, but generalisation may actually be an exaggeration. There are many scholars who will listen with an open mind and heart and deal with questions in an enlightened way.<sup>2</sup> There is certainly need to nurture mutual trust between parents and children, teachers and students. Scholars and advocates of Islam must show real willingness to receive young people's questions. They must make them

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<sup>2</sup> [www.almohawer.com](http://www.almohawer.com) is one of the best resources for the discussion of misconceptions.

feel welcome to ask any question, because a feeling of trust is the key for intercommunication. When trust is lost, the questions will be put to the wrong people.

We must not forget that when we mention specialists we are talking about people with knowledge and the ability to answer doubts and misconceptions. We are not talking about amateurs and writers who are not well versed in the relevant disciplines. Allah says in the Qur'an: 'If you are unaware, ask those who are endowed with knowledge.' (16: 43).

### **Rule Three: Revision of earlier efforts to respond to the same problem**

There is hardly any question or problem relating to Islam and its fundamentals that has not previously been raised and answered. This applies in particular to certain areas, such as Allah's will, the validity of the sunnah as evidence, etc. Young people often ask this question, which is one of the most frequently raised in relation to the Islamic creed: 'How to reconcile Allah's perfect knowledge with the punishment of disbelievers?' The question has been dealt with by many scholars. Other frequently asked questions include: the purpose of the existence of evil, and the creation of Satan. Some raise questions about the hadith mentioning that the Prophet was for some time under the influence of a magic spell. Furthermore, some mention what they consider to be contradictory reports of the False Messiah. Similar questions are frequently raised in contemporary circles.

Therefore, it is important when one encounters a misconception relating to a particular area to refer to earlier efforts that treat the same misconception. Very often, they will find the right answer. Specialists may be asked for guidance on the best books that treat questions relating to a particular field. There are also works that deal with questions on a variety of subjects, such as the *Bayan al-Islam Encyclopaedia*.

### **Rule Four: Looking at what is equivocal in the light of what is precise and clear**

The question of what is equivocal and what is clear and precise is one of the important issues in understanding the Qur'an. It marks the difference between those who are firm in knowledge and those who have doubts. Allah says: 'He it is Who has sent down to you the Book, containing verses which are clear and precise – and these are the essence of the Book – and others are equivocal. Those whose hearts have swerved from the truth pursue that part of it which is equivocal, seeking to create dissension and trying to give it an arbitrary meaning.' (3:7). Ibn Kathir summarises the meaning of this verse very clearly. He says: 'Allah mentions that the Qur'an contains some verses that are clear and precise which form its essence. These verses are clear and no one may misunderstand them. There are other verses in the Qur'an which may be equivocal to most or some people. When we look at the equivocal in the light of what is clear and precise, we are well guided. Taking it in the opposite way, we find ourselves at the wrong end. Allah says of the precise verses that they are 'the essence of the Book', which means that they are the source of clarity when there is any doubt. The other verses are 'equivocal' which means that they may be consistent with the precise ones, or they may be taken, from the point of view of wording and construction, but not from the point of view of their message, to have a different meaning'.<sup>3</sup>

This leads us to a very important matter, which is the need to review all the relevant texts that apply to a certain issue, and not to be selective. A text may be equivocal and its meaning can only be clarified by reference to clear and precise texts on the same point. A Christian may tell us that the Qur'an indicates the multiplicity of deities. He may cite in support of his allegation the verse that says: 'It is We Ourselves who have bestowed this reminder from on high, and it is We who shall preserve it intact.'

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3 Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim, Vol. 2, p. 253.

(15: 9). He says that the verse uses the plural form in several words: We, Ourselves, etc. In response we explain that although these pronouns are plural in form, they also signify a glorification of an individual, and we know that monarchs use what is termed as ‘the royal we’, stressing the importance of their positions. When we look at this question as it is clearly and precisely expressed in the Qur’an, we realise that Allah’s oneness is emphatically stressed, as Allah says: ‘He is the One and only Allah.’ (112: 1). ‘So believe in Allah and His messengers and do not say, “[Allah is] a trinity!” Desist, for that will be better for you. Allah is only One Allah.’ (4: 171). The claims of such a person are thus seen to be false.

### **Rule Six: Studying the negatives of the ideas that are contrary to the Qur’an and the sunnah**

A person who has faced some problems in a state of belief will be grossly mistaken if he imagines that he will find satisfactory answers in a state of atheism. If, as a believer, such a person could not find satisfactory answers to ten questions, his unanswerable questions will be multiplied manifold when he moves to a state of disbelief. The difference is that answers remain strong and convincing under faith, but they are much weaker in the opposite condition, if answers are given at all. The question about evil is a good example. Some people like to call it ‘the evil problem’. It is indeed a problem, but only for disbelievers. For religious people, belief in the Day of Judgement, reckoning, reward and punishment means that everyone who is unfairly killed or deprived of their rights will have justice and that wrongdoers will be punished. What answer is given by a person who does not believe in the Day of Judgement to the questions: What is the ultimate end of oppressors throughout history? Are the rights of those they treated unjustly buried with them in their graves?

Another relevant question is: Who created the universe? And for what purpose? Without faith, the answers to these questions appears haphazard,

without basis. Indeed, an atheist will cling to any flimsy assumption in trying to give an answer. There are many other questions, such as: how do we interpret the fine system of the universe? Why does it appear to be run according to very accurate rules? How could a chance put together fine and accurate hereditary information into a microscopic container, the nucleus? And how does such information become active and translate itself into the true characteristics of a real person?

The same applies to those who deny the sunnah because they find some problems with it. They will say that they confine themselves to the Qur'an. The first thing they will have to encounter is the Qur'an itself which commands that they obey Allah's Messenger and warns against disobeying him. These people will confront real problems when they read these texts. They will also find that many rulings that have been unanimously accepted and implemented by Muslims are not stated in the Qur'an. This leads them to ask further questions and face more problems. In reality they do not get rid of problems by denying the sunnah. They simply move from lesser to greater and more complex problems.

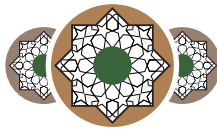
### **Rule Seven: Negative thoughts must not be treated as misconceptions**

It is natural that a believer may entertain negative thoughts or obsessions that disturb his belief. These may even bring about something that disturbs the believer's mind regarding Allah, His will or some other religious aspect. These negative thoughts or obsessions are not, however, evidence of weak faith or hypocrisy. Even Allah's Messenger's companions, scholars and devout people have not been immune to them. Believers should simply pray to Allah to spare them such thoughts and to give them refuge against Satan. They should try to shut their minds to them.

When believers deal with such negative thoughts and obsessions in this way, they do not constitute a problem; indeed, they may bring them reward

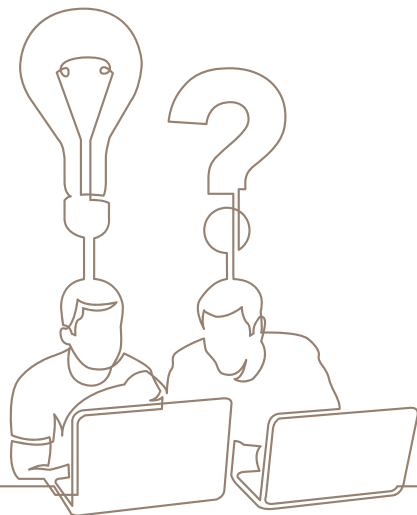
from Allah. The real problem is that some of us do not know how to deal with them. We respond to every irritating thought and this may lead us to a situation of misery and worry that spoils everything in life. What is worse, is that some who experience obsessions may have a negative reaction which makes them feel averse to purification and prayer, abandoning both, or makes them feel averse to religion as a whole.

Obsessions are different from misconceptions. The latter are dealt with by giving the relevant answers. If the answer is good, clear and to the point, the misconception is cleared. Obsessions do not have answers to dispel them. An answer may be repeated a hundred times, but the obsession remains. It will only disappear if ignored or countered. A misconception normally has a definite source: a video, a book, some friends, etc. Obsessions, on the other hand, are the result of thoughts that are entertained within oneself. Very often, they are felt at the time of worship. Even after following these rules, a misconception may leave an effect that is hard to eradicate. Or, a misconception may be too hard for one to answer. The solution in this situation is a sincere and persistent supplication to Allah for help and removal of doubts and their replacement with what clears worry and gives certainty.





# Rules of Debate with Holders of Misconceptions



## *The first rule (prior to the debate): Review of the attitude of the other party and their available visual and written material*

One important factor of success in debating with people who raise misconceptions is to have prior knowledge of their views, the fundamentals they rely on and the most important evidence they cite. All this will help in preparing our answers and ensure that we are not surprised by something we find difficult to address on the spot. Putting oneself in such a situation may make one appear in a weak position despite being right. None appreciates the importance of this rule better than those who have argued with such people.

## **The second rule: Agreement on a common basis for the debate**

One party may cite a true piece of evidence, but the other party rejects it because he does not recognise this sort of evidence. This leads to a conflict and wastes time. Had the debate started with an agreement on the sources of evidence that are admitted in the debate, it would facilitate matters. However, such an agreement may not be necessary in every debate, and it may be difficult to achieve in some cases. Generally speaking, it is useful and it saves time and effort. For example, you may be in debate

with an atheist and you cite some initial logical evidence, such as the law of causality. However, he immediately replies that he only believes in material evidence and does not accept logical arguments.

### **The third rule: Establishing the issue of contention**

Sometimes, the two parties to a running debate realise that they are on the same side, but they had misunderstood each other. This frequently happens on social media where debates are often characterised by tension and very quick response. Therefore, it is useful for the debaters to understand each other at the beginning, establishing the issue of contention and proceed towards a clear goal.

Unfortunately, some scholars may speak about a certain misconception or problem without being clear about the issue of contention, or the objection raised by the other party. Hence, their response does not clear the problem. This reflects poor appreciation and narrow vision. It is very important to be clear about what is in contention and the issues of discussion, so that they can be treated in a direct and useful way.

### **The fourth rule: Make a careful check of what the other party says and identify the problems it involves**

Anyone who does not base his argument on a solid methodological basis is bound to reflect some problems and contradictions. When these are pointed out to him and those who follow him, his error will be clear and his position becomes weaker. Therefore, a careful examination of the other party in a debate and trying to identify his starting point and method of finding proof and evidence will assist in finding out his contradictions and poor evidence, as well as where he may contradict his own principles, let alone other principles.

### **The fifth rule: Do not take a merely defensive attitude**

A defensive attitude is weaker than being on the attack. It is particularly so when the response of the one who defends the truth is not particularly solid. Moreover, those who raise doubts and misconceptions, whatever line they follow, adopt some creeds that are seriously questionable. It is important that such problems as they have should be pointed out and explained to people. This can be done through asking questions about these problems and asking their advocates for satisfactory answers. Atheists and disbelievers generally often try to raise questions about Islam, but do not give us a balanced presentation of the basis of their thoughts and concepts. This gives the audience an impression that their stand is strong, while the one who defends the truth appears weaker, unless he is endowed with a fine style and solid argument like the late Ahmad Deedat showed.

### **The sixth rule: Refuse invalid premises**

If we accept invalid premises, our opponents will impose on us wrong conclusions which we may not accept. Therefore, we must not accept such premises in the first place. For example, some atheists may put this question: ‘Do you agree that whatever exists is brought into existence by someone or something?’ If you say: ‘I agree’, they will say: ‘Allah exists: who brought Him into existence?’ The point here is that the premise should not be accepted, because it is erroneous. The correct premise is: Whatever happens is the result of something that makes it happen. Allah, Mighty and Exalted, did not come into existence. Hence, we cannot put questions about Him like: who created Him, or who brought Him into existence.

### **The seventh rule: When you claim, provide your evidence, and when you quote, be accurate**

Adud al-Din al-Igi said in *Adab al-Bahth*: ‘If you say something that transmits information, then be accurate if you are quoting someone else,

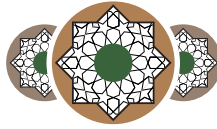
and provide your evidence when you say something of your own accord'. This rule sums up an important aspect of the area of debate. It means that a claim cannot be accepted unless it is accompanied by evidence. On the other hand, when one quotes a scholar, a writer, a group or any source, one must prove the accuracy of one's quotation. Otherwise, one's statement has no value. A proper application of this rule will provide young men and women with solid immunity to current misconceptions.

In this context, we must differentiate between 'correct quotation' and 'reference'. For example, some people cite certain historical events to criticise and even abuse some of the Prophet's companions. If you ask them for proof, they would say that it is included in al-Tabari's book on history. They may even mention the volume and page where the information is to be found. In fact, this is no proof of accuracy. It is merely a reference to a certain source. We need to refer to al-Tabari's book to make sure of the basis of his reporting the story. This means checking the chain of transmission of the story: is it an authentic one or not? Or does the story have a chain of transmission in the first place? The point here is that al-Tabari did not require any authentication of what he included in his history book. Therefore, reference to al-Tabari's history is not a proof of accuracy, but a mere reference to a source that is subject to examination to prove accuracy.

### **The eighth rule: Refuse selective citing of text evidence and insist on reviewing all relevant texts**

This is one of the most important rules. Selective evidence is always preferred by those who raise doubts, atheists and missionaries. To give a few examples, some try to prove that Judaism is a true faith citing the verse that says: 'Say: Bring the Torah and recite it.' (3:93). They ignore all the other verses that show the Jews as disbelievers. Another example is that some people quote the verse that says: 'You cannot guide aright everyone

whom you love. It is Allah who guides whom He wills.’ (28: 56). They cite this in support of the claim that man has no choice in life, but rather is subject to a superior will. They do not look at other verses that clearly state that man exercises his own will and makes his choices, such as the verse that says: ‘The truth [has now come] from your Lord. Let him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it.’ (18: 29). On the other hand, those who reject the sunnah cite in support of their claims the verse that says: ‘We have bestowed from on high upon you the Book to make everything clear.’ (16: 89). They ignore all the Qur’anic verses that order us to obey the Prophet (peace be upon him).





# Observations for Whoever Defends Islam



## **One:** The importance of refuting misconceptions.

Allah says in the Qur'an: 'Do not obey the disbelievers, but strive most vigorously against them with this Qur'an.' (25: 52). Ibn Taymiyyah said: 'The one who refutes the claims of deviant people is engaged in jihad. Yahya ibn Yahya used to say that the defence of the sunnah is of greater value than jihad'.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, to state the truth in all clarity and refute all false concepts are the tasks assigned to all prophets. Furthermore, Allah Himself answers those who denied Him and criticised His faith, legislation and messenger. He says: 'They say: "The Lord of Grace has taken to Himself a son!" Indeed you have said a most monstrous falsehood, at which the heavens might be rent into fragments, and the earth be split asunder, and the mountains fall down in ruins! That people should ascribe a son to the Lord of Grace, although it is inconceivable that the Lord of Grace should take to Himself a son.'" (19: 88-92). Allah also says: 'The disbelievers ask: "Why has not the Qur'an been revealed to him all at once?" Thus [it has been revealed] so that We might strengthen your heart with it, and We have imparted it to you by gradual revelation. Whenever they come to you with an argument, We shall reveal to you the truth and the best explanation.' (25: 32-3).

**Two:** It is important to remember that in any debate, we are defending Islam, not putting our own ideas forward. This means that Islam should be

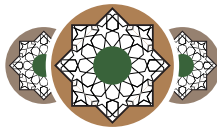
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1 Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmoo' al-Fatawa*, Vol. 4, p. 14.

presented as it is, observing the way Islamic advocacy should be conducted and presenting the most important and essential principles.

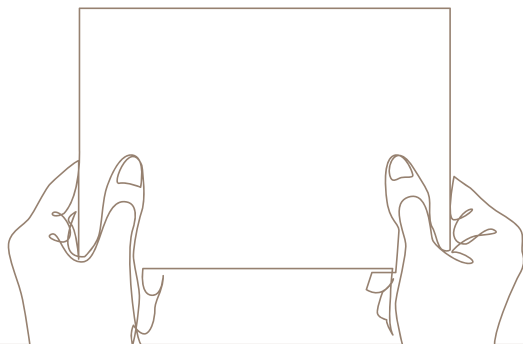
**Three:** An advocate of Islam should conduct his efforts well, but must remember that he is not responsible for people's reactions. He simply exerts his efforts knowing that some people will not respond to the truth, as Allah makes clear in the Qur'an.

**Four:** An advocate of Islam should take care to reflect Islamic manners and values, so that he himself presents a good example. This is useful in reducing the effects of misconceptions. A fine moral example by a religious person is an exercise in silent advocacy, which can be very effective. Allah says to the Prophet: 'Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would surely have broken away from you.' (3: 159).





# A General Map of Current Misconceptions<sup>1</sup>



*C*ontemporary misconceptions and doubts raised by atheists, disbelievers and rejectors of the sunnah against Islam and its fundamentals are of two main types, and each type includes several classes of misconception. [The following is a general classification of misconceptions and a brief discussion of each will follow].

## **The First Type: Misconceptions levelled at the very essence of Islam. These are of four classes:**

**Class One:** Misconceptions about Allah: His existence, perfect attributes and the purpose of His actions. These misconceptions fall under two headings. The first includes misconceptions about proving Allah's existence. The main misconceptions under this heading are:

1. The question: who created Allah?
2. Objections to the evidence confirming Allah's existence, such as the rejection of the principle of causality.

<sup>1</sup> This is not a comprehensive survey of all current misconceptions. Instead, I have listed most of what is circulated. The classification is discretionary and may be corrected or improved upon. This book provides answers to most misconceptions mentioned in this map.

3. The claim that the laws of nature show that there is no need to suppose that Allah exists.
4. Citing some recent scientific theories, such as those theories about evolution or a multiverse and some aspects of quantum physics as an alternative to belief in Allah's existence.

Under the second heading we find misconceptions about Allah's perfect attributes and about the purpose of His actions. The main misconceptions under this heading include:

1. Why have we been created; and why are we ordered to worship Allah?
2. Why does evil exist in the world?
3. Are prayers really answered by Allah?
4. Why are disbelievers punished in hell forever?
5. How to reconcile divine justice with Allah's will and the concept that people's actions are already written?

**Class Two:** Misconceptions about the Qur'an. These fall under two headings. Under the first heading doubts are raised about its source and its being revealed by Allah. The second heading includes claims that the Qur'an contains errors. Such alleged errors are of three kinds: linguistic, scientific and the presence of contradictions between different verses.

**Class Three:** Misconceptions about Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and these fall under two headings: raising doubts about his prophethood, and misconceptions about certain events during his lifetime. The main things that come under criticism in his life are his marriages to Aishah and to Safiyyah, as well as his multiple marriages. Also, the situations involving the Qurayzah Jews and the Urani people are severely criticised.

**Class Four:** Misconceptions about Islamic legislation. The most important ones in this class are:

1. Legislation concerning women and the claim that Islam is unfair to women.
2. Legislation concerning jihad and the claim that Islam practises violence.
3. Slavery and the punishment for apostasy, and the claim that Islam denies freedom.
4. Punishments for adultery and theft, and the claim that Islam is cruel.

This does not mean that some Muslims reject any of these rulings, but there are people who use them to attack Islam and its basis.

**The Second Type: Misconceptions aiming to criticise the essential principles of Islamic law, but not the essence of Islam. They are divided into five classes:**

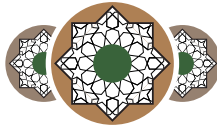
**Class One:** Misconceptions about the Prophet's sunnah. These come under several headings. Under the first heading we encounter misconceptions about the validity of the sunnah and that the Qur'an is sufficient with no need for the sunnah. The second heading raises misconceptions about the validity of hadiths narrated by single reporters, while the third heading covers misconceptions about the narrators of the hadiths. Misconceptions concerning the history of the sunnah and its writing and documentation come under the fourth heading while the fifth heading covers misconceptions about the hadith discipline and the methodologies of scholars of hadith. Heading number six includes misconceptions about particular hadiths, alleging that they are contrary to reason, the physical world, the Qur'an, modern science or to other hadiths.

**Class Two:** Misconceptions about the methodology of understanding religious texts.

**Class Three:** Misconceptions about the Prophet's companions.

**Class Four:** Misconceptions about unanimity as a source of rulings.

**Class Five:** Misconceptions about mandatory punishments, i.e. *hudud*.



# A Look at the Main Current Misconceptions



*I* will discuss the main misconceptions in the same order of their mention in the general map, pointing out that the discussion here is brief. Readers who want to go deeper should consult other reference works. However, some of what I mention in answering these misconceptions is sufficient. As said earlier, current misconceptions are of two types: some are raised to undermine the essence of Islam while others try to undermine the fundamental principles of Islamic law but not Islam itself. The first type branches out into several classes that we have already mentioned. The first class includes misconceptions about belief in Allah and His perfect actions. Before answering the problems in this area, I will mention two main principles that form the basis of response to any objections. The first principle includes the evidence confirming Allah's existence and the second focuses on the purpose of Allah's actions.

## **Evidence confirming Allah's existence**

### **One: Human nature**

Human nature points to the presence of the Creator in three ways. The first is that all humans have essential prior knowledge which they neither studied in a book nor learnt at school. Such knowledge is born with them and implanted in their minds. We are speaking here of principles such as:

when something occurs, someone or something must have caused it to happen. Also, each part of something is smaller than the whole of that thing. Such knowledge proves the existence of Allah in two ways. The first is the identification of evidence. We look at the world around us, humans and other creations. We recognise that they occur and happen. Our essential prior knowledge tells us that since every happening must have some cause for it to happen, therefore, the universe and all creation in it must have a creator, and this creator is Allah. Secondly, the very existence of such prior and natural knowledge indicates that it has been placed in man by someone, since it did not come about through learning or acquisition. Again, this confirms the Creator's existence.

The second way human nature indicates Allah's existence is the innate need to worship, or the necessary acknowledgement of the need to believe in the Creator. Human nature feels this need to acknowledge the presence of a power beyond the perceptible realm and that this power can give him what is beneficial and protect him from harm. He needs to believe in such a power which he implores for help, particularly when facing difficulties. All communities throughout human existence and in all areas established places of worship. They addressed their worship to different beings, including the sun, planets, fire and statues, hoping that their worship would bring them benefit and spare them harm. All this is due to the fact that by nature, man needs to believe in a deity who will fulfil his spiritual needs and aspirations. However, man's environment may contribute to a blurring of his vision as to the true objective. Therefore, he will believe in deities which he will logically recognise to be false. Different prophets were sent to various communities, but the essence of their message was not the provision of proofs confirming Allah's existence, because most communities accepted this generally, even though some people needed to be reminded of that essential fact. The essence of the message of all prophets was to call on people to believe in Allah's oneness and to address all worship to Him alone. Their address was a reminder of this essential

truth, so as to revive in people their innate belief, not to plant something of which they had no idea. Take for example the following verse: ‘Said the messengers sent to them: “Can there be any doubt about Allah, the Originator of the heavens and earth? He calls you, so that He may forgive you your sins and grant you respite for an appointed term”.’ (14: 10). This is to remind the addressees, not to give them a concept that was unknown to them.

Some groups of people deny this natural need, but it is undoubtedly implanted in human nature. Denying its existence is due to arrogance or to the corruption of nature through some external influences. Allah says in the Qur’an: ‘Set your face steadily towards the true faith, turning away from all that is false, in accordance with the natural disposition which Allah has installed into man. Nothing can change Allah’s creation.’ (30: 30). The Prophet said: ‘Every child is born with pure nature, but its parents make it a Jew, a Zoroastrian or a Christian’.<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah said: ‘Acknowledgement of the Creator is both natural and needful in people’s minds. Some, however, suffer what may corrupt their nature and they will need to consider and contemplate so that they will realise’.<sup>2</sup>

It may be asked: Can nature be corrupted? What evidence do we have in practice to support this claim? The answer is that some people do really deny basic logical principles, believing only in the senses. This has led them to say things that were ridiculed even by children. For example, one of them was asked this question: a 20-story building has ten windows in every story. How does one window compare to the whole building: is it larger or smaller? He said that he could not tell until he had seen the building and looked at it. Only then could he give an answer.

By reference to one whose primary logical knowledge has been impaired due to some doubt or erroneous idea that corrupted his natural response, we

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1 Related by al-Bukhari, 1,385.

2 Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmoo’ al-Fatawa*, Vol. 16, p. 189.

can say that it is possible that the natural sense that confirms the Creator's existence may suffer some impairment. Primary logical knowledge is also natural. Indeed impairment of human nature with regard to recognising Allah's existence is more likely than in the case of primary logical knowledge, because of the more numerous misconceptions that affect the one than the other. Instincts and moral values represent the third way nature indicates the existence of the Creator. In man and animal there are natural instincts that are not acquired from society or the environment. They are present in man and animal without any effort on their part. We see some animals immediately find the teat of their mothers to suckle. The mother makes no effort to guide the baby to it. Likewise, when a woman puts her newborn on the breast, the child knows how to suckle. The same applies to other instincts, such as the attraction between man and woman, the sexual instinct, the love of one's child, etc. Abd al-Wahhab al-Misiri wrote some beautiful thoughts about the reasons that made him abandon his materialist outlook. One of the more important factors was his observation of the great attachment between his wife and their daughter. He thought that the attachment far exceeded normal material causes. He wondered: could it all be due to enzymes?

Other instincts given to man include fine moral values, such as stating the truth, justice, the rejection of oppression, murder, torturing children, etc. It is not possible to explain the existence of goodness in man as the result of random events. It can only be understood as part of the design of the Creator Who created man and showed him the two ways of good and evil.

## **Two: Creation**

This evidence looks to what happens. When something occurs, the mind naturally looks for the one who caused its occurrence. The evidence takes the following order: 1) The universe happened, and everything around us came into being after they were not there; 2) Whatever occurs is caused by something; 3) Therefore, the universe and all it contains are the work of a Creator who brought them into existence.



The principle that ‘whatever occurs has someone or something that causes its occurrence’ is practically recognised by all people, even though some may say that they do not. We always look for the cause of anything that has newly happened. Doctors search for the causes of a disease that was unknown, and they spend a lifetime researching the causes, acknowledging the logical principle of causality. Psychologists and sociologists undertake research to find out the causes of psychological and sociological problems. You see a very young child turn when it hears some sound, looking for its source. Ibn Taymiyyah said: ‘It is essentially known that whatever occurs must have someone or something that causes its occurrence. This is naturally known even to children. A child who is hit by someone it cannot see will say: ‘Who has hit me?’ If this child is told that no one has hit it, its mind will not accept that the hit came about by itself, without someone doing it’.<sup>3</sup>

In view of all this, if we listen to our own nature, we will not need more than looking at the world around us and the different types of creation and let our reason make its natural and necessary conclusion of acknowledging Allah as the Creator of all. Allah says: ‘Were they created out of nothing? Were they the creators?’ (52: 35). ‘Does not man remember that We earlier created him, when he was nothing?’ (19: 67). That the universe came into existence at one time is no longer a difficult issue. In scientific circles few, if any, continue to think that the universe was always there and did not come into existence. Atheist scientists no longer deny this as a consequence of their denial of Allah. They tend to explain the origin of the universe differently from the religious explanation.

A detailed discussion of the scientific evidence that the universe came into existence at some time is beyond the scope of this book. It may be studied in any relevant book of science under the heading of the expansion of the universe, or the second law of heat dynamics. Abdullah al-Ujayri’s book, *Shumoo‘ al-Nahar*, is an important book work that discusses Allah’s existence and the evidence of human nature and reason.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *ibid*, Vol. 5, p. 215.

### Three: Perfection

So far, the human mind has confirmed the existence of the Creator on the basis of the evidence that creation occurs and all created beings have come into existence. There is now other evidence that makes things absolutely clear and puts an end to all doubt. These beings do not just merely come into existence; they are made in the best of forms. Indeed, their perfection is beyond human ability and cannot be emulated. The human mind will then cry out that such perfection cannot come about by mere chance, or in a haphazard way. It must be the work of Allah, the All-Wise Who knows all and is able to accomplish what He wills.

Aspects of perfection and fine balance in the different species are too numerous to reckon. To explain them would take a great voluminous work. The more we reflect on man, animal, earth and what it contains, and the wider world, the more convinced we are that such perfection could never have come about by chance.

One of the best ways of strengthening one's belief in Allah is to reflect on His creation and the perfection they demonstrate. Documentary programmes give us a rare chance for better reflection and contemplation. We can also benefit through scientific books that speak about the functions of each part of our bodies, the cell and its components, DNA, etc. All these show that miraculous perfection appears in all Allah's creation. Allah says in the Qur'an: 'We shall show them Our signs in the wide horizons [of the universe] and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that this [revelation] is indeed the truth.' (41: 53). He also says: 'On earth there are signs for those with sure faith, and in yourselves too: can you not see?' (51: 20-1). One very useful book in appreciating the perfection of creation is *The Evidence of Allah in an Expanding Universe* compiled by forty American scientists.

## Four: Care

This evidence strengthens the two previous ones, namely, creation and perfection. It reasserts the existence of the Creator, Who is All-Wise, All-Knowing and bestows abounding grace on His servants. Although this evidence may be considered as part of the perfection of Allah's creation, it deserves to be treated separately, as it concerns the relation between man who is created in the best form and other creatures which are perfectly created. Although they all demonstrate such perfection, they are made to benefit man who uses them to get what he needs of food, medicine, transport, grazing, fighting, building and in various industries. Care is taken of man in a planned way, starting with the provision of a suitable place for him when he is a mere pregnancy. When a child is born, its needs of nourishment are provided in its mother's breast. Further care is provided through the love of its mother. After that, plants and animals are made subservient to him in a way that meets his needs. Earth is made suitable for him to live on, and the sea to travel through. Minerals are placed in earth and made possible to extract. The world around him, including the sun, the moon and planets are made suitable to man's needs, as also the succession of day and night. Furthermore, man is given the ability to understand the world around him and to build life on earth. Aspects of care go far beyond all this, and they can be appreciated through contemplation and reflection.

### Allah's Actions, Wisdom and Justice

Answers to those questions relating to Allah's attributes and justice, as well as the purpose of His actions are not complete unless we accept a number of beliefs based on clear proof. I will mention these in the proper order.

**One:** A total belief in Allah. We have already mentioned some of the evidence proving His existence.

**Two:** Belief in His absolute perfection, in Himself and His actions. This is based on what we see of the perfection of His creation. It is normal to base

our judgement of people on some of their qualities. A painting gives us a clear idea as to whether it is done by an expert, professional painter or by a beginner who still has much to learn about this form of art.

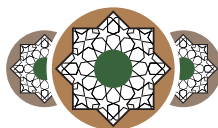
**Three:** Acknowledgement that a created being has limited ability, knowledge and wisdom, while the Creator's ability, knowledge and wisdom are absolute and limitless. Man continues to learn what he did not know. A later expert corrects what was formerly thought to be absolutely true. We discard what was upheld and we build on what was destroyed. A new theory may invalidate what was accepted as true. All this is due to the fact that man has limited power and knowledge. On the other hand, the Creator has produced what human beings cannot produce and determined what they cannot refuse. Every particle in the universe, in the parts we know and those we do not know, is subject to His will. He listens to and answers supplication, supports the oppressed and destroys their oppressors, gives provisions, takes away authority from, or assigns it to whomever He wills, doing all these at the same time. The actions of the Creator are attendant on His absolute knowledge while those of a created being are based on his limited knowledge. Therefore, objections to the Creator's actions by those who are created cannot be based on solid ground. Man's inability to understand what relates to other created beings is certainly clear. It stands to reason that such inability is even greater in relation to the Creator. We cannot understand Allah's nature or attributes. We know of Him only what He has chosen to tell us.

Four: Belief that Allah has sent messengers and given them revelations to enable people to know their Creator and the purpose of their creation. He supported His messengers with what confirms their true status, including their fine morality, true speech, fine conduct, absence of people's doubt in them, in addition to some miraculous signs He has given them to reassure others of their status. No one knows the answer to those questions relating to the purpose of Allah's actions better than Allah Himself. He has stated such answers in His Book which He revealed to His Messenger in order

to provide people with guidance and light. True knowledge in this area comes only from the divine source, not from limited human knowledge. Understanding all the above truths makes our belief in, and acceptance of what the Qur'an and the sunnah say about the purpose of Allah's actions a proper attitude based on reason. Such acceptance is not then an avoidance of the truth, but is based on rational proof. Here is a practical example:

Suppose that you pick up a mobile phone handset made by a company which is famous for its products, such as Apple or Samsung, and you discover that it has a part or an application which you cannot determine its use. Certainly you will not say outright that it is useless and serves no purpose. On the contrary, you will try to find out what it is for and why the company added it to your phone. You take this attitude because of your prior knowledge of that company's products and that it does not just put things in there for no particular purpose. This great universe has been built with perfect order, and the created beings that live in it are created in perfect shapes and forms. The entire system of creation is most perfect and has no flaw or defect. They all indicate that their Creator is perfect in knowledge, power and wisdom. Is it right, then, to say about anything that we might not understand its purpose that it is useless and serves no purpose? No right mind will accept that. The analogy, then, is certainly correct.

Having stated these two preliminary notes on Allah's existence and perfection, we will deal with all misconceptions about Him and the purpose of His actions in their light. It is wrong to deal with any question about Allah's wisdom and purpose in isolation from the main principles we have outlined.





# The First Type Misconceptions levelled at the very essence of Islam



## Class One

### Misconceptions about Allah's existence and the purpose of His actions

*The first part* includes misconceptions about Allah's existence. We shall discuss four such misconceptions, beginning with the question: Who created Allah?

Very often, atheists respond to the evidence proving Allah's existence by throwing in the question: Who created Allah? This question is essentially false and cannot be accepted. It is akin to equally false questions, such as: Does man's pregnancy last nine months as a woman's pregnancy? What is the weight of a certain temperature? This question about the Creator is delivered in terms that cannot be, and which mean that He should be a created being. The Creator cannot be created so as to ask about who created Him. Another problem with the question is that it is based on equating the Creator with His creation, and equating the rule, 'Whatever occurs must have something or someone to cause its occurrence', with the statement, 'Whatever exists must have someone that brings it into existence'. Both equations are false.

This question is also false because it leads to the conclusion that the universe does not exist. The question, 'Who created the Creator?', has no more

validity than either, ‘Who created the Creator’s creator?’, or ‘Who created the Creator’s creator’s creator?’, and so on. To follow this sequence means that the universe does not exist, because if the existence of the Creator of the universe depends on the existence of the creator before him, and the existence of this one depends on the existence of the one before, and so on, this means that the creator who created the universe did not exist. This sequence means that there is no ‘first’ creator where the sequence stops and who starts the process of creation. The sequence is infinite, and the universe would not occur unless there is a first source without a beginning.

We can then appreciate the uniqueness of the Qur’an and the grace Allah has bestowed on us as He sent us His final Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him). One of the fine names of Allah mentioned in the Qur’an is ‘the First’, and it occurs in the third verse of Surah 57, Iron. A hadith related by Muslim mentions that the Prophet used to say in his supplication: ‘My Lord, You are the First and there was nothing before You’. This shows the wisdom of the Prophet as he dealt with this misconception. An authentic hadith quotes the Prophet: ‘Satan may come to any of you and say: “Who created this? Who created that?” until he says: “Who created your Lord?” If one reaches this point, one should seek Allah’s refuge and desist’.<sup>1</sup> This hadith makes clear that the very question is wrong and thinking about it will not lead to a positive result. The only proper way is to go back to what Islam states about Allah’s attributes.

Ibn Taymiyyah said: ‘If a man reaches the ultimate end, he must stop. If he is to seek something else, he must desist. The Prophet orders us to stop and seek Allah’s refuge from the obsession of sequence, just like everyone who attains the final purpose and reaches the absolute end must stop’.<sup>2</sup> The rule that says: ‘Whatever exists must have someone who brings it into existence’ is wrong. The correct approach is ‘Whatever occurs must have someone

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 3,276.

2 Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar’ Ta’arud al-Aql wal-Naql*, Vol. 3, pp. 314-5.



or something to cause its occurrence'. This universe has occurred and, therefore, someone must have caused it to occur.

### **The second misconception is the claim that natural laws are enough as an answer**

Some atheists repeat a claim that has no supporting evidence. In fact, all evidence contradicts it. They say that the accurate laws that operate in nature make it unnecessary to assume that it was created. The universe originated itself according to these laws of nature. This claim is deceptive and overlooks a very important truth, which is that the laws of nature describe and explain but do not create or originate anything. Take for example business transactions. They have accounting rules. Does anyone suggest that these rules can create a shop or a store? By the same token: can the laws of mechanics manufacture a car? Is it not true that the manufacture of a car requires workers who implement these laws?

Does a law like the law of gravity originate something, or explain a fact? That a law explains a particular phenomenon does not remove the fact that there is a cause which originates that phenomenon. Our knowledge of the laws by which an aeroplane can fly and land does not mean that no one makes the aeroplane. Moreover, this claim by atheists ignores an essential and reasonable question, namely: Who set these laws? Who made the universe operate according to them?

### **Three: Darwin's theory of evolution**

I do not propose to discuss in this brief setting a theory that has occupied the leading position in the continuing religion-versus-science debate and remains one of the most important explanations atheists provide for the great variety of living species, while denying the existence of the Creator. This is stated by Antony Flew, the world famous atheist of the twentieth century who converted to belief in Allah, the Creator, towards the end of

his life. Some people adopt this theory as an infallible belief, and consider it the only proper explanation of the emergence of living organisms, as opposed to belief in a superior creator. Scientific circles, which prefer materialist explanations, continue to endorse this theory and give it greater importance.

The conflict between the main figures of physical science and the church in the last few centuries became polarised and each side stuck determinedly to its own view, giving their widely different explanations of existence. Physical scientists dismissed the views of the church as scientifically unacceptable. This attitude makes the claim that physical science circles are neutral rather questionable. Evolutionary theory has not attained the status of a scientific fact. Moreover, its evidence varies in strength according to the type of evolution under discussion. The evidence of evolution within the same species is stronger than evolution between different species.

Criticism of the theory of evolution is not limited to religious circles. A number of scientists pointed out some serious flaws in the theory and highlighted a number of problems facing it. One of these is Michael J. Behe, a professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. His book, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, received much praise. The author started with Darwin's own admission in *The Origin of Species* that the possibility of proving the existence of a complex organ which has not come about through multiple, small and successive adaptations will totally undermine my theory. Behe explains in his book the great complexity of the single cell, confirming what Darwin said.

Other Western scientists criticise the theory of evolution from a scientific perspective. Dr Jonathan Wells, an American biologist, is well known for his book *Icons of Evolution*. The Arabic translation of this book, prepared by the Baraheen Centre, says in its Introduction: 'The main message of the *Icons of Evolution* is to highlight two ideas. The first is that experts

of physical science can use science in an ideological, oppressive and exclusive way whenever they feel the need to do so. The other idea is that physical science itself can become, through its theories and supporters, a set of legends with icons, tales and special symbols’.

There are other books by scientists who take a critical attitude to the evolutionary approach and try to give a different scientific explanation of the origin of man. One very important book in this area is *The Design of Life* by William A. Dembski and Jonathan Wells. In their refutation of the atheist approach, some Muslim scholars try to reconcile the evolutionary theory with Islam. They think that the evolution of species has been scientifically proven beyond doubt. However, they reject the principle of natural selection which the atheist Darwinists uphold. These Muslim scholars say that evolution is designed, which means that Allah, the Creator of everything, devised the law of evolution. Some of them ask: who can stop the Creator from creating whatever He creates by way of evolution?

This approach appears in conflict with Islam most clearly in respect of Adam’s creation. The Qur’an is clear in stating that Allah created Adam outright, without parents. This means that Adam was not the result of the evolution of a previous species that was similar to man. Allah says: ‘The case of Jesus in the sight of Allah is the same as the case of Adam. He created him of dust and then said to him: “Be”, and he was.’ (3:59).

#### **Four: The multiverse assumption**

The following is a part of a discussion between Richard Dawkins, the most prominent advocate of atheism in our time, and Steven Weinberg, an American theoretical physicist and Nobel laureate in Physics who is also atheistic. Dawkins was hoping to hear something that confirmed the theory of multiverse.

Dawkins: Having accepted the word of physicists that there is an element

of fine tuning, I think there are three possible explanations. One would be Allah, which I said is not an explanation at all. One would be the multiverse and then, anthropically, with hindsight, we have to be sitting in one. The third which I attributed to you.

**Weinberg: Oh, no!**

Dawkins: Possibly wrongly. The third is what I call the macho physicist who says: we just don't understand why these things are the way they are; one day we will, if and when we have a theory to explain everything. But it sounds that I have misrepresented you.

Weinberg: I don't think that one should underestimate the fix we are in; that in the end we will not be able to explain the world; that we will have some sets of laws of nature that we will not be able to derive on the grounds of simple mathematical consistency because we can already think of mathematical inconsistent laws that cannot explain the world as we know it. And we will always be worked with the question: why the laws of nature are what they are rather than some other laws? I don't see any way out of that.

The fact is that the cosmos of nature are suitable for life, which is clearly true. We observe that.

Dawkins: The final idea which I think that most physicists at least have some time for is the multiverse theory.

Weinberg: No one has constructed a theory in which that is true. It is not a speculation. The theory would be speculative, but we don't have a speculation in which that theory is mathematically realised, but it is a possibility.

Dawkins: And the fact that the cancellation is so precise means that the number of the universes in the multiverse we need to postulate in order to anthropically be comfortable with will be very large.

Weinberg: It must be at least 10<sup>56</sup>, or if you think you have some idea of the fluctuations of even shorter distances, I think you would say 10<sup>120</sup>. In fact, this is a little disturbing.

The multiverse theory is tenaciously held by some atheists as a way that allows them to explain the existence of this great universe, without acknowledging Allah, the Creator. I have included the above discussion between Dawkins and Weinberg to show that this theory remains scientifically unstable. Indeed, a number of atheist physicists do not subscribe to it, like Steven Weinberg.

It is clear that an atheist is prepared to attribute the existence of the universe to anything other than admit that it is the work of Allah, the Creator of all. Weinberg need not have entertained his disturbing calculation.

## **The second part: Misconceptions about the purpose of Allah's actions**

Numerous questions are asked about this subject, but the most important of these are the following four questions:

1. Why have we been created and why are we commanded to worship Allah?
2. Why does evil exist in our world?
3. Why is there delay in answering prayers, and why do some prayers remain unanswered?
4. How is divine justice reconciled with Allah's will and the prior writing of people's actions?

We said earlier, when we discussed the purpose of Allah's actions, that this cannot be understood without prior belief in a number of things which I outlined. These should be borne in mind, because the answer to these questions is based on them.

## The first question: Why has Allah created us? Why does He want us to worship Him when He is in no need of us?

Before answering this question, it is important to revisit the preliminary principles we mentioned in discussing the purpose of Allah's actions. Every question about the purpose of Allah's action cannot be separated from those preliminaries. We may add the following answers in brief:

**One:** The creation of the universe and what it contains is most amazing. It fills us all with wonder. Man cannot produce anything comparable to Allah's creation, even in the smallest living beings that have a spirit. Flies are the simplest such beings, and that they are in existence makes the universe more complete. Everything in the universe testifies to the perfection of the One Who has produced it, perfect as it is.

**Two:** When we look at the perfect order that operates in the universe and the precision noticed in all its aspects, we conclude that it is all for a clear purpose, determined by divine wisdom. It cannot be the result of a random occurrence.

**Three:** It is a logical conclusion that the purpose behind such creation should be consistent with the perfection of the Creator of these great things that testify for the majesty, wisdom and perfection of their Creator.

**Four:** The perfection of the Creator of the universe and the completeness of the purpose of bringing His creation into existence require that He makes Himself known to His creation, planting into their nature what points to Him and revealing to them, in whatever way He chooses, details that inform the created beings of their Creator.

**Five:** The only relationship that can exist between these small and weak beings that have been perfectly created and their great and majestic Creator is one of submission, gratitude, praise and glorification. This is what Allah requires of His creation.

A question is raised here: Is it not true to say that Allah does not need us or our worship? The answer is that it is certainly true, but we are always in need of Him. A follow-up question is: What is the connection between the two. The answer is: Allah has created us and He gives us what we need for our lives. He controls our lives, and this means that He is in no need of us. We need Him, and worship is the practical translation and manifestation of this natural relationship. If we do not worship Him, we meet His kindness with ingratitude and arrogance. Allah does not order us to give Him something He needs, but He orders us to do what the nature of the relationship between Him and us necessitates. This is the meaning of telling us that He is in no need of anything in all the worlds, and telling us at the same time that He is not pleased with disbelief by His servants.

The first statement, that Allah is in no need of all the worlds, tells us that He is perfect while we are imperfect. The second statement lays down what this entails. The point is that our existence is made complete by His existence. Anyone who insists on being complete and self-fulfilling contradicts both logic and practical necessity. Such contradiction, which is grossly impudent, incurs a suitable punishment. To leave it unpunished is to permit the worst travesty of the greatest truth in the universe. As such, it would condone the worst type of injustice. True justice does not permit this. At this point we need to reflect on the meanings of the following three verses of the Qur'an: 'Had the truth been in accord with their desires, the heavens and earth, together with all that lives in them, would surely have been in utter corruption.' (23: 71). 'Say: "Does any of your partners [whom you associate with Allah] guide to the truth?" Say: "Allah alone guides to the truth. Who is more worthy to be followed: He that guides to the truth, or he who cannot find the right way unless he is guided? What is then amiss with you? How do you judge?"' (10: 35). 'We have not created the heavens and earth and all that is between them otherwise than in accordance with the truth.' (46: 2).

In conclusion, it is useful to reflect on the following verses and understand

their message: ‘We have not created the heavens and earth and all that is between them in mere idle play. Had We willed to indulge in a pastime, We would indeed have found one near at hand; if ever We were to do so! Nay, but We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it crushes the latter, and behold, it withers away. But woe to you for all your false claims. To Him belong all those who are in the heavens and earth. Those that are with Him are never too proud to worship Him and never grow weary of that. They extol His limitless glory by night and day, tirelessly. Or have they taken for worship some earthly deities who can restore the dead to life? Had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than Allah, both would surely have fallen into ruin! But limitless in His glory is Allah, Lord of the Throne, and exalted is He above all that they attribute to Him! He cannot be questioned about whatever He does, whereas they shall be questioned.’ (21: 16-23).

### **The second question: Why does evil exist in the human world?**

Those who raise this question find it difficult to reconcile the existence of evil with Allah’s attribute of mercy. In this context, the only attribute of Allah they mention is mercy. They overlook his other attributes of infinite wisdom, might and greatness. Over time, this question has frequently been discussed, both from the philosophical and religious points of view. Extensive research has also been conducted on this issue. I will mention a few brief rules which will enable us to understand the question of evil. Before that, however, we need to put some questions to atheists: Has your denial of Allah put an end to evil in the world? Have massacres stopped? Have floods subsided and have we seen an end to earthquakes and the eruption of volcanoes? Besides, tell us about tyrants who killed thousands or millions of people: will they be punished after they die? Will those who suffered injustice at their hands be given justice?



The real problem with regard to the question about evil is faced by atheists and disbelievers who do not believe in life after death. Conversely, a believer who is certain that people's actions will be reckoned and there will be reward and punishment in an afterlife is not so faced. In his view of the question of evil, a believer stands on solid ground and has a clear and coherent perspective. His attitude is not based on emotions and feelings that are unsupported by evidence. We may describe its outline as follows:

**One:** Allah has given man free will which enables him to choose good or evil. To be held to account for the use of his will is a requirement of justice. When man chooses, by his own will, to kill, this is his own evil action, not Allah's.

**Two:** We cannot understand the wisdom behind the presence of evil in this life unless we believe that this life is incomplete and represents a test. It is not the place where mankind receive their dues for what they do. Whatever evil or disasters take place in it is part of this general condition that Allah wanted this life to be. Yet some people continue to look for reward and punishment in this world, and when they do not find them they protest against Allah. These people do not understand Allah's purpose of making this life the way it is.

**Three:** One of the constant laws Allah has established for this present life is subjecting people to tests. This is His way that will never change. It is consistent with His attribute of wisdom. A test is often the way a believer purges himself of what is unbecoming. After the test, he is as pure as pure gold that has been subjected to very high temperature. Tests often make people turn back to Allah, purge them of sin and spare them all punishment in hell.

**Four:** Some aspects of wisdom are implied in what we may consider to be evil, and these may not be readily apparent at first sight. For example, Moses accompanied al-Khadir on his travels and saw him doing outrageous

deeds. They were on a ship and al-Khadir made a hole in it. Moses could not understand why he did this. He said to him: ‘Do you want the people on board to drown?’ (18: 71). Later, al-Khadir told him the reason for his action. The ship belonged to some poor people who went to sea to earn their living. They were subject to a tyrant ruler who confiscated all seaworthy ships. Al-Khadir decided to slightly damage it, to ensure that the tyrant ruler would not confiscate it. It would remain with those poor people.

The same applies in our own lives. We may aspire to something, feeling that we will be very happy to have it, but when we actually have possession of it we discover that it is not as we thought. Indeed, we wish that we did not have it at all. How often do a couple try hard to have a child, and when a child is born to them, the child becomes the source of all their troubles and misery? They wish that they had never had a child. This shows that our own ideas of what is good or evil are not necessarily true. Allah does not create anything that is totally evil. We may initially judge something to be evil, but when we examine it more carefully, we find that it has some good aspects. What good it has may not appear in this present life, and it may be delayed to the life to come, where it may produce something far better.

### **The third question: Why does not Allah answer some of people’s prayers?**

**One:** Allah tests His servants, but no one tests Allah. A person who appeals to Allah to find out whether He will answer his prayer is in disobedience of His orders. How can he expect his prayers to be answered?

**Two:** Allah answers the prayers of many people, and this is something we see within our own lives and everywhere around us. The proper question to ask is: Why has the answer of my prayers been delayed? This requires us to review our situation and find out where we err and mend our ways. We should also exert more effort in drawing closer to Allah, feeling assured that what He gives us is better than what we wish for ourselves.

**Three:** We have clear and logical evidence confirming beyond doubt that Allah exists and that His knowledge and wisdom are perfect and complete. When some people put this problem of unanswered prayers against that clear and compelling evidence, the logical necessity requires any rational person to give more weight to the stronger evidence, and to endeavour to understand the problem in the light of the clear and straightforward. This is taken for granted.

**Four:** We need to try to understand the purpose of delaying answering our prayers. The fact that man's knowledge is limited means that man's scope and wishes are also limited. Everyone realises that the fact that some of their prayers were not answered was the better alternative for them.

**Five:** Imam ibn al-Qayyim said: 'Supplication and seeking refuge are like a weapon. The effectiveness of a weapon does not depend only on its sharp edge, but on the person using it. When the weapon is perfect and free of defect, held in a strong arm and there is nothing to prevent its use, the weapon will be effective against the enemy. If any of these three elements is missing, the effect is reduced'.<sup>3</sup>

**Six:** All texts that are relevant to an issue must be considered. To have a partial look is wrong. It is Allah Who says: 'Pray to Me, and I will answer you'. Yet, He Himself said: 'We shall test you'. Anyone who thinks that supplication may put an end to testing people simply applies one text and ignores another. An authentic hadith says: 'The supplication of any of you is answered, so long as you do not hasten it'. This hadith explains an important thing about the conditions of answering prayers, which is not to hasten it.

Atheists deny Allah's existence on the basis that prayers remain unanswered. We may, for argument's sake, say that He may not answer prayers, but this does not necessarily mean that He does not exist.

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3 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Al-Da' wal-Dawa'*,

### **The fourth question: How to reconcile Allah's will with punishing disbelievers**

The question of Allah's will is one of those questions that can be explained by religion itself. The mind adds its own contribution through what it realises of man's will and the decisions one takes in one's different affairs. Confusion in this area occurs when the concept of divine will is related to compulsion. This is wrong. Allah makes clear that every human being has a will and is able to choose its actions. This is the crux of accountability. Had man's will not been real, there would have been no purpose of sending messengers or revealing messages. Allah sent His messengers to remind people. Those who respond to the reminder are rewarded and those who reject it are punished. If mankind were devoid of a will that is addressed by all these reminders, promised reward and warned against punishment, the whole thing would have been absurd, and Allah is far above all that.

The human will belongs to the 'causes' Allah has made operative in this world. Allah is the Creator of these causes who determines their operation. It is He Who made marriage the cause of child birth, fire the cause of burning, and the lack of water the cause of quenching thirst. Likewise, He made will the cause of action, and made man's actions the cause of admittance into heaven or suffering punishment in hell. All these causes are not independent of Allah's will. Indeed, they operate within His will. He can stop any of them at any time He chooses, as He did when He stopped the fire from burning Abraham when his people tried to harm him.

Divine will is closely related to divine wisdom, which we cannot appreciate in full. Ali, the caliphate said: 'Divine will is one of Allah's secrets'. Therefore, the proper attitude to divine will is to accept what Allah has told us about His will and the choice He has given to man, as well as the fact that man has his own will. This acceptance is based on prior belief in Allah. Since belief in Allah is based on definitive logical evidence, then acceptance in this area is based on original logical evidence, but Allah knows best.

## Class Two

### Misconceptions about the Qur'an

These misconceptions are of two kinds. The first aims to raise doubts about its being Allah's word. Since the proofs of the Qur'an are closely related to the proofs of prophethood, I will discuss both together under Class Three.

**The other kind:** the allegation that it contains errors, and these alleged errors are of three types: linguistic, scientific and contradictory.

**The first type: linguistic or grammatical errors.** I will mention four replies to all the linguistic errors alleged to occur in the Qur'an.

Firstly: The ultimate objective of those who raise these doubts is to say that the Qur'an was Muhammad's own invention and composition, and that it is not revealed by Allah. Had it been revealed by Allah, it would have been free of error. We say in reply: even if the Qur'an was as you say – and this is certainly untrue – it would be free of any grammatical error, because the Quraysh's spoken dialect at the time set the correct pattern of Arabic. This applied whether the speaker was Muhammad, Utbah ibn Rabi'ah or al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah. If we have a text correctly attributed to Abu Jahl, it cannot contain a grammatical error.

Secondly: The rules of grammar were set after the revelation of the Qur'an. They were formulated on the basis of the Arabic address used at the time and earlier. This means that the rules of grammar were based on the Qur'an, Arabic poetry prior to Islam and in the early Islamic period, as well as any texts that date back to that period. Grammarians cite the Qur'an and poetry to confirm grammatical rules, not the reverse.

Thirdly: Different Arabian tribes spoke different dialects and these had some grammatical differences. Linguists called these dialects 'languages'. They did not deal with these as errors, but considered them variants in Arabic. For example: some Arabian tribes dropped the case markers in dual

names and adjectives, giving them all the same form, although attaching the case markers is the standard rule in Arabic. Muhammad Abd al-Hamid said that dropping the case markers of the dual form is according to ‘the language of Kinanah, the tribes of al-Harith ibn Kaab, al-Anbar, Hujaym and certain branches of Rabi‘ah’. Differences of grammar are discussed at length by linguists. They show that these are matters of detail that do not affect the standard rules of Arabic grammar.

Fourthly: The grammatical mistakes alleged to be in the Qur’an relate to some of the simplest rules of grammar. In fact these rules are taught in primary schools. Is it possible that the Qur’an, which is acclaimed as a text of surpassing literary excellence could include such mistakes? Such an allegation is absolutely unreasonable. For example, they claim that there is an error in verse 69 of Surah 5, where the case marker of the word ‘Sabeans’ is wrong. The same statement occurs in two other verses, 2: 62 and 22: 17, and in both cases there is no problem with the case marker attached to this word. So the alleged error is not due to any lack of knowledge. The matter here is one of meaning and it is well explained by commentators on the Qur’an, who show that the usage here is perfectly in line with the rules of Arabic grammar.

### **The second type: Scientific errors**

One misconceived allegation raised against the Qur’an is that it contains statements that are contrary to scientific discoveries. This shows that it is not the word of Allah. Had it been the word of Allah, it would have included no such error. They give the example of what the Qur’an says about Dhul-Qarnayn: ‘when he came to the setting of the sun, it appeared to him that it was setting in dark, turbid waters.’ (18: 86). They say: How is it possible that the sun could set in dark, turbid waters on earth, when natural science tells us that the sun is much larger than the earth and it is far away from it. Indeed, its orbit does not overlap with that of the earth, let alone allow it to enter the earth. Absurd as it is, this misconception has

troubled some young people. Moreover, some Arab atheists and Christians continue to harp on it. It is answered in more than one way:

Firstly, Allah has not told us that the sun sets in turbid waters, but He describes how Dhul-Qarnayn saw it: ‘it appeared to him that it was setting...’. This is how he saw it. It is as we say: ‘The moon rose from behind the mountain’. In reality, the moon is far away from the earth, but the way we see it rising or setting appears to us to happen behind the mountain.

Secondly, many commentators of past generations, before the age of satellites and magnifiers, explained that the verse speaks of what appears to the onlooker, and does not describe the reality. Ibn Kathir (died 774 AH, 1373 CE) commented on this verse: ‘He saw the sun setting into the open sea. This is how it is seen by everyone who is by the sea shore. It appears to be dipping into it, while in fact it does not move away from its orbit’.

In his commentary on the Qur’an, al-Qurtubi (died 671 AH, 1273 CE) quotes other scholars: ‘This does not mean that he reached the sun at its setting and rising points, so as to physically touch it. It is far above the earth and does not converge with it. It is too big to set into some water spring on earth. Indeed, it is many times bigger than the earth. What is meant is that Dhul-Qarnayn reached the end of inhabited land to the West and then to the East and it appeared to his eyes as though it was setting in turbid waters, as when we are on level land, we see it sinking into the ground’.

Commenting on the same verse, al-Baydawi (died 685 AH, 1287 CE) said: ‘He might have reached the sea shore and saw it as such, as in his line of vision there was nothing except the water. Therefore, the verse says, “it appeared to him”, and did not say, “it was setting in dark, turbid waters”.’ In al-Jalalayn’s commentary: ‘That it was setting in turbid waters is how it appeared to the eye. The fact is that the sun is greater in size than the earth’. As we see, this was very clear over the centuries.

Another example of a Qur’anic statement they claim to be contrary to modern science is: ‘It is He Who has spread out the earth.’ (13: 3). They allege that it is contrary to the recent discovery that the earth is circular in shape. This betrays great ignorance. That the earth is circular has been known for a very long time. Muslim scholars stated that it has been accepted as a fact by all scholars. Ibn Hazm (384-456 AH, 994-1064 CE) said: ‘No Muslim scholar who deserves to be considered an imam ever denied that the earth is circular. None has ever said a word contrary to this. Indeed, proofs of this are plentiful in the Qur’an and the sunnah’.<sup>4</sup> As for the claim that it contradicts the Qur’anic verse, it was answered many centuries ago. In his commentary on the Qur’an, al-Razi (543-606 AH, 1149-1210 CE) said: ‘If they claim that the statement, “It is He Who spread out the earth”, is contrary to the earth being circular, we reject this, because the earth is huge and every stretch of a circle of great magnitude is seen as if it is flat’.<sup>5</sup>

### The third type: Contradictory verses

Atheists and those who raise doubts about Islam sometimes allege that the Qur’an contains verses that are mutually contradictory. Since contradiction is a flaw, the Qur’an could not be the word of a perfect deity. This argument is based on a false premise, which is the presence of mutually contradictory verses in the Qur’an. This is untrue, and all the examples they quote have clear and simple answers. In fact, the claim of contradiction is obviously due to ignorance of the meanings of Arabic vocabulary, particularly when they are used in a general or particular sense. The claim of contradiction also betrays ignorance of the different texts that relate to the same subject, as some texts explain others.

Commentators on the Qur’an have paid particular attention to the clarification of the verses that may appear to be contradictory. Whatever you hear about contradiction in the Qur’an is clearly answered in books

4 Ibn Hazm, *Al-Fisal*, Vol. 2, p. 78.

5 Al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, Vol. 19, p. 4.



of commentary. Indeed, some scholars devoted complete books to this question. One of the best works that tackle it is daf' *Iham al-Idtirab an Ay al-Kitab* by Imam Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti. An example of alleged contradiction in the Qur'an is stated by an Egyptian young man who openly states that he is an atheist, propagating his atheism in the media. I was filled with sadness because these examples, which have been extensively discussed and well explained, are taken as an excuse for people's apostasy. What can we say? If Allah wants to put anyone to test, we shall not be able to avail him anything against Allah.

The example cites the following verses and claims contradiction between them: 'When a good thing happens to them, some [people] say, "This is from Allah", whereas when evil befalls them, they say, "This is from you!" Say, "All is from Allah." What is amiss with these people that they are in no wise near to grasping the truth of what they are told? Whatever good happens to you is from Allah; and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.' (4: 78-9). The question such people ask is: how one verse says that both good and evil things are from Allah in one verse while the next verse says that the evil stems from ourselves?

Those people allege that this is clear contradiction. Had there been any contradiction in this clear and superior book, it would not have occurred in two consecutive verses. To make such a claim is to betray naivety. Praised is Allah Who says in the same surah, only two verses later: 'Will they not, then, try to understand the Quran? Had it issued from any but Allah, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction!' (4: 82). It is as though this verse is meant to say to anyone who imagines that these two verses are contradictory that there is absolutely no contradiction in the Qur'an.

To understand these verses we say that the first verse refers to the fact that the disbelievers used to blame the Prophet for any misfortune that befell them. If they were without rain and this caused their meadows to dry up,

which is the evil referred to in the first verse, they would blame the Prophet for it, saying that his bad omen brought it upon them. Allah says to them that both situations of fertile and unfertile produce come from Allah. The second verse tells people that whatever good befalls them is by Allah's generosity and kindness, while any evil that happens to them is due to their own deeds. All of it though is by Allah's will. Commentators say that this verse is addressed to all Muslims, not only to the Prophet.

Thus, the second verse gives the same meaning as the one that says: 'Whatever misfortune befalls you is the outcome of what your own hands have done; but Allah forgives much'. (42: 30). Thus, there is no contradiction between the two verses. Whatever happens is from Allah in as far as it is determined. At the same time, our evil actions are among the causes of the misfortunes that happen in the world.

### Class Three

#### Misconceptions about the Prophet

These misconceptions may be divided into two groups: the first is to raise doubts about his prophethood and the other is to criticise particular issues in his life and the way he behaved on some occasions. Among the best known of these are his marriages to Aishah and Safiyyah, his several marriages, the fate of the Qurayzah Jews and the case of the Urani men.

Answer to the first group should prove his prophethood with logical and textual evidence. Scholars have addressed this issue, but many of them tended to lean towards material miracles, preferring these to other evidence. In fact, using both types of proof, i.e. the logical and the textual, gives a stronger argument. The Qur'an mentions logical evidence confirming and proving the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Several scholars stressed that the evidence confirming his prophethood is varied

and not limited to material miracles. These include al-Ghazali in *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* and Ibn Taymiyyah in *Sharh al-Asbahaniyyah* and *al-Nubuwwat*.

It is important to remember that people's response to such evidence varies, enabling some to achieve certainty with one type while others need to have evidence of both types. All fair people agree that together, the various types of evidence available are sufficient to give any person complete certainty that Muhammad was a prophet. Here are some such proofs.

### **One: His truthfulness and morality**

'It is well known that a person who claims to be Allah's messenger is either one of the best people who abides by a high standard of morality or one of the worst people of loose morality. How can the best be confused with the worst? Every liar who made a false claim of being a prophet was seen by all around to combine ignorance with falsehood, sinful behaviour and a follower of Satan. By contrast, every truthful person who said that he was a prophet demonstrated knowledge, truthfulness, goodness and fine behaviour that was obvious to all'.<sup>6</sup> Another scholar said: 'Prophethood is claimed by a person who is either the most truthful or the worst liar of people. The two cannot be confused even by the most simple of people, because their behaviour will tell and make their reality known. A truthful person is distinguished from a liar in many ways, even when the discourse is of ordinary matters. This applies even more clearly when the issue is a claim to prophethood'.<sup>7</sup> These quotations give us a valid logical argument. When a person says that he is a prophet, he is making a claim which may be true or false. It is not difficult to distinguish whether a claim is true or false when it is a very serious one. It is not possible for deception to be carried on for a long time in such matters.

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6 Ibn Taymiyyah, *Sharh al-Aqeedah al-Asbahaniyyah*, Vol. 1, p. 138.

7 Ibn Abi Al-Izz, *Sharh al-Tahawiyah*, p. 109.

When we consider the personality of Muhammad and his actions and behaviour, we conclude that he could not have made a false claim to prophethood. Friends and foes testified to his great morality, fine manners, honesty in addition to his renowned truthfulness known since he was an adolescent. When we go through the books authored by enemies of Islam who raise doubts about the Prophet, we find that they criticise certain attitudes and base their false accusations on these. They do not choose events that relate to his truthfulness. This implies acknowledgement that he spoke the truth. Before prophethood, Muhammad lived for many years among his people in Makkah and they nicknamed him '*al-sadiq al-amin*', which means 'the truthful, the honest'. When he was commanded to declare his message, he stood on al-Safa, a small hill close to the Kaabah and said to his people: 'Were I to tell you that a force is about to attack from behind this mountain, would you believe me?' They said: 'We never knew you to tell a lie'. He said: 'I am here to warn you about an impending grave suffering'.<sup>8</sup>

At one stage, false rumours circulated accusing his wife, Aishah, of adultery. He was much troubled by these rumours and felt their considerable impact. What did he do in this case? Had the Qur'an been his own work, would it not have been easy for him to coin some verses declaring her innocence? People would have believed him. Why did he consult his companions, seeking their advice? Why did he address the people stating that the one who was the prime culprit, Ibn Ubay, had insulted his family? Yet he did not attribute any of this to Allah, until revelation was given him some time later declaring Aishah's innocence.<sup>9</sup>

Abu Sufyan was the chief of the Quraysh and led its battles against the Prophet. One day he was in southern Syria when he was summoned to meet Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor, who was eager to learn some first-

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8 Related by al-Bukhari, 4,971.

9 The full story is related by al-Bukhari, 2,518.

hand information about Muhammad. Heraclius asked Abu Sufyan several questions about Muhammad. One of these was: ‘Did you normally accuse him of lying?’ Abu Sufyan said: ‘No’. Heraclius wisely said: ‘I asked you if you accused him of lying before he started his claims and you said that you did not. I know that he would not consistently refrain from lying to people then start to fabricate false things about Allah’.<sup>10</sup>

On the day Ibraheem, the Prophet’s son, died, there was a solar eclipse. People said that it was a sign of grief for the death of the Prophet’s son. What was the Prophet’s reaction to their assertions? Did he accept or endorse them? Or did he remain silent? He did neither; instead, he addressed them to correct this false belief, saying: ‘The sun and the moon are two of Allah’s signs. They are not eclipsed because of the death or the life of anyone whomsoever’. He added his guidance to offer a special prayer and seek Allah’s forgiveness and to give charitable donations.

Another thing that testifies to the Prophet’s truthfulness is the fact that he delivered the Qur’an in full, although it contains verses of remonstrance addressed to him personally. Here are some examples of these: ‘He frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him. How could you tell? He might have sought to purify himself’. (80: 1-3). ‘May Allah forgive you [Prophet]! Why did you grant them permission [to stay behind] before you had come to know who were speaking the truth and who were the liars’. (9: 43). ‘Prophet, why do you prohibit yourself something that Allah has made lawful to you in your desire to please your wives?’ (66: 1). ‘You stood in awe of people, whereas it was Allah alone of Whom you should have stood in awe’. (33: 37). Would Muhammad have delivered these verses if he was not truly a messenger of Allah? What would have compelled him to say such words which people will continue to recite for as long as human life continues?

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<sup>10</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 7.

## Two: The Qur'an as Proof

The Qur'an, which the Prophet recited to people, is the best and most important proof of the Prophet's true status. Muhammad was an unlettered person, who could not read or write, and he never composed a line of poetry. Yet he delivered the Qur'an to people, presenting a challenge to all mankind, saying that they could show him as false if they produced a book similar to the Qur'an, or ten surahs like it, or even one surah like it. They preferred to raise armies to fight him rather than try to produce a single surah like the Qur'an. They had all the right incentives to accept the challenge, including a bitter hostility towards the Prophet and a keenness not to appear in a powerless position. Moreover, they had all the means that enabled them to match any type of human speech, because they were very eloquent and appreciated fine expression. Despite all this, they were unable to meet the challenge. The Prophet went to them in their own meeting places to recite to them what Allah says: 'If all mankind and the jinn were to gather together for the purpose of producing the like of this Qur'an, they would not produce anything like it, even though they pooled their resources together for the purpose'. (17: 88).

He also said to them: 'If you are in doubt as to what We have revealed to Our servant, then produce one surah comparable to it and call upon all your witnesses, other than Allah, if what you say is true. But if you fail, as you will certainly do, then guard yourselves against the fire, fuelled by men and stones, prepared for the disbelievers.' (2: 23-4). He does not only challenge them. He tells them that they will not be able to meet the challenge and that it is better for them to spare themselves the punishment of hell, because it is true. Their inability to meet the challenge proves the truth that the Qur'an is Allah's revelation, not the word of any human being.

The Qur'an states news of the future, and its statements are clear, specific and without hesitation. No false claimant could risk fabricating such statements because failure to happen would show him to be a liar and would

induce his followers to abandon him and his cause. Besides, the Prophet did not need to say such things to his followers after they had accepted his message and believed in him. If he needed to make any such prediction, he would have made them in an indefinite style, suggesting a probability rather than a certainty. This applies if Muhammad was the author of the Qur'an. But the Qur'an is Allah's Book. Hence, it is no wonder that it makes the following promise, clearly and categorically, confirming it beyond doubt: 'If anyone thinks that Allah will not give him victory in this world and in the life to come, let him stretch out a rope to the sky and then cut himself off; and then let him see whether his scheme will remove that which has enraged him'. (22: 15). The verse makes a clear promise that victory will be granted to Allah's Messenger in this present life as well as in the Hereafter.

Another example is the Qur'anic statement: 'It is We Ourselves Who have bestowed this reminder from on high, and it is We Who shall preserve it intact'. (15: 9). The 'reminder' in this context refers to the Qur'an, and the verse uses several ways of asserting its import, making clear that the Qur'an will definitely remain immune to any alteration or distortion. This information is given about the future. This promise has been fulfilled despite the successive waves of attack against Islam and Muslims ever since the time of the Prophet until the present time.

Another piece of information about future events given in the Qur'an is the following: 'Defeated have been the Byzantines in the lands close-by; yet despite this their defeat, they will gain victory within a few years. All power of decision belongs to Allah before and after. And on that day the believers will rejoice in Allah's support. He grants support to whomever He wills. He is the Almighty, the Ever Merciful'. (30: 2-5). Questions that could have been raised include: What if no such war broke out? What if there was to be a war but the outcome would be another defeat for the Byzantines? What if the Byzantines achieved their victory earlier or later than the time stated in the Qur'an? [What actually happened was that the Byzantines

achieved victory and regained territories the Persians had occupied in the earlier battle after less than ten years, as the Qur’anic expression clearly implied. On the same day the Muslims achieved victory in their first major battle against the disbelievers, the Battle of Badr. This is what the above-quoted Qur’anic verses refer to of the believers’ rejoice.]

The Qur’anic proof of prophethood includes the stories of earlier communities. This is strong evidence, because at the time of the Prophet, the Arabs had no knowledge of the stories of earlier prophets and their peoples. Followers of earlier divine religions had some accounts of those prophets. The Qur’anic accounts of the histories of those prophets agree in part with what the earlier scriptures provide. This agreement is a point that confirms the prophethood. The Qur’an gives some details that are not found in the books of earlier religions, and at times, it corrects their errors. How could an unlettered person who lived all his life in Makkah give all these accounts, in beautiful style, free of ambiguity and drawing clear lessons? A man who might have studied all that had been told about these histories could not have given such clear accounts, let alone an unlettered man who never read a written sheet.

Indeed, Allah highlights this situation in connection with the Qur’anic historical accounts. At the end of Moses’ story, He says to the Prophet: ‘You certainly were not present on the western side of the mountain when We issued the commandments to Moses, nor were you one of those who witnessed [those events]. But We raised up many generations, and long was their span of life. Nor did you dwell among the people of Madyan, reciting Our revelations to them. Rather, it is We Who send messengers. Nor indeed were you present on the slopes of Mount Sinai when We called out [to Moses]. Rather, it is an act of your Lord’s mercy so that you may warn people to whom no warner has come before you, so that they may perchance reflect’. (28: 44-6). As He concludes the account of Noah and his people, Allah says to the Prophet: ‘These accounts of things that have passed We now reveal to you. Neither you nor your people knew them



before this. Be, then, patient in adversity; for the future belongs to those who are Allah-fearing'. (11:49).

There are other aspects of the Qur'anic evidence confirming Muhammad's prophethood, but I will leave these for now, due to space limitations.

### **Three: The legislation, beliefs and values as proof**

Scholars of fiqh, hadith and history as well as commentators on the Qur'an and the hadith have not exhausted the treasures of the Qur'an and the sunnah, despite having been engaged in this task for over fourteen centuries. Large libraries are unable to even accommodate all that scholars have written about just one area of Islamic religious study, namely fiqh rulings. You may find hundreds, if not thousands, of books dealing with one area of the faith, all relying on the texts of the Qur'an and the sunnah delivered to us by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

It is not the quantity that is important in this respect; the quality, validity, perfection and comprehensiveness of the texts and what is written about them are far more important. The value of all this appears much greater when we remember that the message of the Prophet was delivered in just 23 years, during which he shouldered the very heavy responsibilities of advocating his message among his people, addressing the pilgrims from different tribes, trying to redress the difficulties encountered by the weaker elements among his followers in Makkah, arranging their migration to Abyssinia, then moving out to Madinah where he assumed the responsibilities of the ruler, judge, imam and army commander, in addition to looking after his nine wives and their homes. He led around twenty military expeditions which claimed the lives of many of his companions, including one of his uncles and one cousin, as well as his loved servant. How could he devise such a complete legislative system, unless it had been revealed to him by Allah?

Reflect, if you will, on the texts of the Qur'an and the sunnah that speak

of Allah's attributes and glorify Him. These alone are sufficient to tell us that the one who delivered these texts was a Prophet and a Messenger of Allah. Human thought may spend much time reflecting on Allah and His attributes, but it cannot achieve the greatness that is embodied in the Qur'an and the sunnah about Allah. This tells us that both come from Allah, because no one knows Allah better than He knows Himself.

Reflect on the first surah in the Qur'an, The Opening, the verse known as the Verse of the Chair, which is verse 255 of Surah 2, The Cow, as well as Surah 112, Purity of Faith. Consider, how could any human mind describe Allah in the same way as these few verses? Here is a translation of these verses:

“In the Name of Allah, the Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds, The Lord of Grace, the Ever-Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone do we worship and to You alone do we turn for help. Guide us on the straight path, The path of those on whom You have bestowed Your favours, not those who have incurred Your wrath, nor those who have gone astray.” (1: 1-7).

“Allah: there is no deity but Him, the Ever-Living, the Eternal Master of all. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that can intercede with Him, except by His permission? He knows all that lies open before them and all that lies hidden from them; whereas they cannot attain to anything of His knowledge save as He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Most High, the Most Great.” (2: 255).

“Say: He is Allah, the One and only Allah the Eternal, the Absolute. He begets none, nor is He begotten, and there is nothing that could be compared to Him.” (112: 1-4).

In the field of manners and morality and the perfect set of values given

in the Qur'an and the sunnah, no one may fail to realise the beauty, completeness and suitability of the Islamic system. It ensures improvement of the individual and society. I refer to some aspects of this in the first volume of my book *Kamil al-Surah*. The late scholar Muhammad Abdullah Draz wrote a large book on the Qur'anic Moral Code. Hadith anthologies devote large chapters to social and moral behaviour. Indeed, this is an area addressed in separate books by scholars of hadith. One invaluable book in this field is *al-Adab al-Mufrad* by Imam al-Bukhari which is an anthology of 1,329 hadiths.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Four: Miracles as proof**

A large number of reports confirm that a number of natural laws were overruled at the hand of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These reports have been stated by persons known for their integrity and accuracy and transmitted through continuous chains of reporters of similar category, going up to the Prophet's time. Scholars have devoted complete books to these reports and they called them *Dala'il al-Nubuwwah*, or Proofs of Prophethood. Such reports include that people in the Prophet's mosque heard a sorrowful sound coming out of a tree branch which the Prophet used to lean on when he addressed the people on Fridays. The branch delivered this sound when the Prophet no longer leaned on it, because he had had a platform made for himself to stand upon when he addressed the people. Another report mentions that trees moved to screen him when he needed to relieve himself. Other reports mention that a small quantity of food was greatly increased when he needed to feed a large number of his companions, and water sprang through his hand to provide his companions with what they and their mounts needed to drink. Many other cases have been reported, and reference may be made to al-Bayhaqi's *Dala'il al-Nubuwwah* and the chapters devoted to this subject in hadith anthologies.

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11 An English translation with a full commentary is published by the Islamic Foundation, Leicestershire, England.

Such multiple reporting of events cannot be denied unless we reject a true report as a source of information. Scholars in all types of religious, social and scientific specialities speak of historical facts relating to their area of speciality which they have learnt through true reporting. The question is: if a true report is an acceptable source of information in these areas, is it not similarly acceptable when it tells us of miraculous occurrences taking place through the Prophet? Indeed, the reports of such miracles conform to the requirements of acceptance more than other reports that are widely accepted, such as the superiority of certain people in particular fields, as, for example, Aristotle being excellent in logic, Hatim al-Ta'i being exceedingly generous and Avicenna being a master of philosophy.

When we add the evidence of miracles to the earlier proofs, the matter becomes even clearer, and doubt smaller and smaller.

### **Five: Announcements by earlier prophets**

Allah has told us that both Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them) gave the news that Muhammad would be a messenger sent by Allah. He says: 'Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah and the Gospel that are with them'. (7: 157). Allah also mentions that Jesus said: 'Children of Israel! I am Allah's messenger to you, [sent] to confirm the Torah revealed before me, and to give news of a messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad'. (61: 6).

Allah has also told us that the people of earlier religions altered their sacred books, but the distortion did not affect all that Allah had revealed to them. Parts of the truth remain with them. What is amazing is that the distortion was not confined to the time before Prophet Muhammad, but continued after that and it is seen in the Arabic translations of the Bible. Despite all this alteration, Muslim researchers and scholars have highlighted some texts in the Bible that speak of a messenger who would come after Jesus,

and other texts that describe the community or the city of this messenger. They cite other texts in which the Prophet is mentioned, but that have been distorted in translation. Take the following example:

I did not say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you...

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears; and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus gives here a description of the one who comes after him, stating that he does not speak of his own accord, but will transmit what he hears and will tell of future events. This description reminds us of what Allah says in the Qur’an about Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): ‘He does not speak out of his own fancy. That [which he delivers to you] is nothing less than a revelation sent down to him’. (53: 3-4). Allah also instructs Prophet Muhammad: ‘When We recite it [i.e. the Qur’an], follow its recitation’. (75: 18).

A number of researchers including Dr Munqidh al-Saqqar, who specialises in this area, say that the word ‘Advocate’ in the above quotation is not a proper translation of the original which more accurately means ‘the one deserving much praise’, which suggests that here the Prophet’s name is given as Ahmad or Muhammad, both of which mean ‘worthy of praise’.

Makkah is mentioned in the Bible in the same pronunciation used in the

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12 The Gospel, John, 16:5-14.

Qur'an, which is Bakkah. Psalm 84 includes:

Happy are those who live in your house,  
Ever singing your praise Selah  
Happy are those whose strength is in you,  
In whose heart are the highways to Zion.  
As they go through the valley of Baca  
They make it a place of springs  
The early rain also covers it with pools,  
They go from strength to strength....<sup>13</sup>

This last line is given in the Arabic translation of the Bible as 'they go from mountain to mountain'. Some researchers suggest that this refers to the hajj ritual of walking between the two hills of al-Safa and al-Marwah, which are close to the Kaabah, but Allah knows best.

Elsewhere in the Bible it is stated that light will come out of the Paran Mountains, which are the Makkah mountains. It says:

This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of Allah, blessed the Israelites before his death. He said:

The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us, He shone forth from Mount Paran.

With him were myriads of holy ones; at his right, a host of his own.

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13 The author gives here three different Arabic translations of this part of Psalm 84, I am giving here an English translation, rather than translating the Arabic translation into English. One of his main points is the mention of Baca as a name of a place, and the same word is mentioned in the Qur'an, referring to Makkah.

Indeed, O favourite among peoples; all his holy ones were in your charge;

They marched at your heels, accepted directions from you.<sup>14</sup>

And yet another reference says:

O Lord, I have heard your renown, And I stand in awe, O Lord, of your work.

In our own time revive it; In our own time make it known; In wrath may you remember mercy.

Allah came from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of his praise.<sup>15</sup>

Dr Munqidh al-Saqqar said: ‘The places that mention Paran in the Bible indicate that Paran is in the south of the Palestine desert, but the Torah also mentions that Ishmael ‘lived in the wilderness of Paran’.<sup>16</sup> It is well-known in history that he lived in Makkah in Hijaz. Muslims consider the text to be a prophesy that Jesus will rise in Seir in Palestine, then Muhammad will rise at Mount Paran, when he would come with thousands of his pure followers, supported by Allah. All this applies to Prophet Muhammad for the following reasons:

1. Mount Paran, or Faran in Arabic, is Mount Makkah where Ishmael lived. The Torah says of Ishmael: ‘Allah was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt’.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Deuteronomy; 33:1-3.

15 Habakkuk; 3:2-3.

16 Genesis, 21:21.

17 Genesis, 21:20-1.

2. That there is an area called Paran in southern Sinai does not exclude the possibility of another area being called by the same name. That was the area where Ismael lived. It is reported that an area in the land of Adom, which is in present day Jordan, is called Seir. This name refers to this area in several places in the Bible. Yet this did not stop the same name from being used in reference to a mountain in the middle of Palestine, to the west of Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup>

We may ask those who insist that Paran refers to the one in Sinai: What is that blessed light that appeared from that mountain which is totally unrelated to any important event in history?

3. The objection that the text uses the past tense is unacceptable. The past tense is frequently used in the Bible to refer to future events.
4. Why is Mount Paran mentioned in particular if it is a mere reference to the glory of Allah being spread all over the universe, as suggested by some Jewish writers? Certainly Allah's glory does not stop at Mount Paran or Mount Seir.
5. That the reference here is to the prophesy of thousands of saints, who are called in some translations as 'pure angels', meaning pure followers as the word 'angels' is used in the sense of 'followers', as we see in the Book of Revelation: 'Michael and his angels fought against the dragon...'<sup>19</sup>. When did Paran see thousands of pure ones other than at the advent of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions?
6. The claims of the Muslims are supported by what is mentioned in the Book of Habakkuk: 'Allah came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. The brightness was like the sun: rays came forth from his hand, where his power lay hidden. Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. He stopped and shook the earth; he looked and made the

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18 Joshua, 15:10.

19 Revelation, 12:7.



nations tremble'.<sup>20</sup>

'The text makes clear that a powerful prophethood will shine like a bright light and that the *adhan*, or call to prayer which this prophet teaches will fill the horizon with Allah's glorification. As editors of the Bible mention, Teman is a Hebrew word which means 'the south'. Hence, the Catholic text of the Torah says: "Allah comes from the south and the holy one comes from Mount Paran". Since the addressees were in Palestine, the promised revelation was thus to come from the south, meaning Arabia. The holy one will then be sent to Mount Paran. All this confirms that the holy one who will shine at Mount Paran is the Prophet of Islam. All the descriptions of the prophet of Paran apply to him and do not apply to any other prophet'.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Second Group: Misconceptions about certain events in the Prophet's Life**

The most prominent of these misconceptions are the Prophet's marriage to Aishah, the execution of the Qurayzah Jews and his marriage to Safiyyah. As regards his marriage to Aishah, people object because she was so young at the time of her marriage. The answer to this is as follows:

Firstly, the happiest person in this marriage was Aishah. In fact, the reports of the love and companionship between her and the Prophet provide the best example to emulate between married couples. Therefore, what is feared when there is a large age gap between a couple, especially in relation to harmful psychological and physical effects on the young wife, never occurred in this blessed marriage.

Secondly, the acceptability or otherwise of marriage at this age is a matter of social tradition. Had there been any defiance of norms in this marriage,

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20 Habakkuk, 3:3-6.

21 Munqidh al-Saqqar, Hal Bashshar al-Kitab al-Muqaddas bi Muhammad?, pp. 84-7.

the first to denounce it would have been the Quraysh disbelievers, the Jews and the hypocrites. These groups would never have missed a chance to criticise the Prophet. As we have seen, they were quick to do so when they circulated the false story that accused Aishah of adultery. Many verses in the Qur'an mention the abuse levelled by the disbelievers and the hypocrites at the Prophet. They accused him of being a sorcerer, a poet, a soothsayer, and that he was helped by other people and that he was being taught by a human being, etc. Allah also mentions that they questioned the facts that he ate food and walked in the market places, and that he listened to all people, etc. Yet, Allah mentions nothing about any criticism or abuse of the Prophet, by his enemies, concerning this marriage. The sunnah and historical reports do not mention any criticism of this marriage although they mention much of what they used to say about the Prophet.

Thirdly, a woman may attain puberty at the age of nine, which means that she can get pregnant and give birth. Had the matter been the mere marriage to a young girl, the Prophet could have completed the marriage shortly after the contract was made, when she was six. He delayed the marriage for three years, until she was ready. Until recently, the Western world approved the marriage of young girls at an age which they now consider illegal and unacceptable.

It is somewhat ironical that illegitimate sexual relations below the age of consent are not as strongly criticised in the West as marriage at a young age. Yet in many countries, it is acceptable at an early age, norms varying from one place to another. Some people, however, are not reassured until they learn that some Western countries used to allow marriage at the age of eleven, twelve and thirteen. Their reassurance is due to Western pressure, because some of us feel that the West sets the standards of acceptability or otherwise. In fact, we do not need all this, but having various arguments is useful because people's criteria differ.

Finally, some try to defend Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) by

rejecting the authentic hadith that mentions Aishah's age at the time of her marriage. They cite some reports which suggest that she was eighteen or around that when she became married. I have discussed some of the questions relating to this issue in an article which responds to Adnan Ibraheem's view of her age. A better and more comprehensive discussion than this article is Fahd al-Ghufayli's book, *al-Sana al-Wahhaj fi Sinn Aishah ind al-Zawaj*.

**The Qurayzah Jews:** Non-Muslims and atheists who try to call the Prophet's character into question often repeat the allegation that he killed the children of the Qurayzah Jewish tribe, and so they accuse him of brutality. This story is answered as follows:

One: It is necessary to explain the reason for the fate of the Qurayzah tribe. It came about as a result of their treacherous alliance with the enemy during one of the hardest periods and most serious threats faced by the Muslim community. Their treason occurred at the time the Confederate tribes laid siege to Madinah. The Qurayzah were bound by a peace treaty with the Prophet and the Muslims, but they violated that same treaty and which is described most vividly and accurately by Allah Himself: 'They came upon you from above and from below you. Your eyes rolled [with fear] and your hearts leapt up to your throats, and confused thoughts about Allah passed through your minds. That was a situation when the believers were sorely tested and severely shaken'. (33: 10-1). They even threatened Muslim women and children in Madinah. They deserved no lesser punishment than the death penalty.

Two: The Prophet did not kill the Qurayzah children. He forbade killing women and children, and so the sentence applied to men only. As quoted in the hadith related by al-Bukhari and Muslim, the sentence passed by Saad ibn Muadh, whom they accepted to be the judge in their case, ordered 'the killing of their fighters'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 638 and 3,804.

Three: The violation of the treaty was by the entire tribe: some directly and the rest by tacit acceptance. Therefore, the punishment applied to all.

**The Prophet's marriage to Safiyyah:** Those who circulate this misconception allege that the Prophet consummated his marriage to Safiyyah on the day her husband was killed, without waiting for her to observe the mandatory waiting period. This is all false and contrary to what al-Bukhari and Muslim relate, and yet it is frequently circulated by those who raise misconceptions about Islam. Many people are influenced by their allegations, due to the lack of serious examination of reports. As mentioned in al-Bukhari's *Sahih* anthology: '[The Prophet] took her with him, and when we reached al-Rawha', she became lawful to him and he consummated his marriage to her'.<sup>23</sup> As related by Muslim, the hadith clearly states the end of her waiting period.

Besides, all that is reported from Safiyyah is her being happy with this marriage and her delight at being the Prophet's wife. She related information about him and his hadiths. She would even visit the Prophet during his stay in the mosque during Ramadan and sit with him talking about different matters.<sup>24</sup> It may be said that had she had any objection, would it not be reported? An alternative answer might also be given in a recounting of a marriage proposal made by the Prophet but which was declined by the lady in question. Al-Bukhari relates in his *Sahih* on al-Awza'i's authority: 'I asked al-Zuhri about the woman who sought refuge from him. He said that Urwah informed him, from Aishah that 'When al-Jawn's daughter was brought to Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) and he drew close to her, she said: "I seek refuge with Allah from you". He said: "You have sought refuge with One who is great. Return to your family"'.<sup>25</sup>

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23 Related by al-Bukhari, 356 and 2,235.

24 Related by al-Bukhari, 1,930.

25 Related by al-Bukhari, 5,254.

## Class Four

### Misconceptions about Islamic Law

We continue our discussion of misconceptions of the first type, which are aimed at the essence of Islam. We mentioned earlier that they are divided into four classes, and now we will be discussing the fourth class which includes misconceptions about Islamic law and legislation. The main problems raised in this connection focus on three main areas: 1) the allegation that Islam is unfair to women; 2) the allegation that Islam encourages bloodshed and terrorism, because of it calls for jihad; and 3) the allegation that Islam is brutal in the punishments it legislates.

#### Firstly: Treatment of women

Those who raise this kind of misconception cite a number of Islamic laws which they claim to show that Islam is unfair to women. The fact is that they do not understand Islamic legislation and its purpose, and they cite some wrong habits or traditions which are practised by some Muslims but attribute these to Islam as a whole, either mistakenly or on purpose. Muslim scholars have discussed all misconceptions about women and the way Islam treats them. They answered all these questions in articles, research papers, books, seminars and lectures. Scores of written, audio and video material are available in this area.

One problem that continues to be raised despite its being fully discussed and answered is the question of women's inheritance. I discussed this question myself fully in the second volume of my work, *Kamil al-Surah*. Although I do not like to repeat myself, I am outlining this question and its answers here because it is often highlighted in Western discourse. They always say that it is unfair that a woman is given half the share of a man. This is answered in several ways:

**One:** Inheritance takes place in different situations. In some situations, a

woman is given more than a man, and in some she takes an equal share. In certain cases, a woman inherits but a man in the same situation does not. In other cases, her share is less than a man's share. Take the case of a woman whose heirs are her only daughter and her husband. In this case, the daughter takes a bigger share than that of the husband. If a man dies, leaving behind his parents and children, his parents inherit equal shares, as Allah says: 'As for the parents [of the deceased], each of them shall have one sixth of what he leaves behind, in the event of his having a child'. (4: 11). This is so, although the same verse mentions the rule that a woman's share is half that of a man, as Allah says: 'The male shall have a share equal to that of two females'. (4: 11). Yet they overlook this, either unwittingly or on purpose. Another case where a woman inherits an equal share to that of her brother is stated as follows: 'If a man or a woman has no heir in the direct line, but has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall inherit one-sixth; but if there be more, then they shall share in one-third'. (4: 12). This last Qur'anic statement discusses the case of siblings through the mother, not full brothers and sisters.

**Two:** In other cases, a man inherits a share which is double that of a woman. However, Islam requires every Muslim man to pay a dowry to his wife when he marries her. It is also his duty to support his wife throughout his life, even though she may be rich. Does he not deserve to have a larger share of inheritance so that he is able to fulfil his duties?

**Three:** The whole criticism in this area is that it is different from what they have established and advocated of absolute equality between males and females. This total equality is in conflict with the nature of both, and as such it is unfair. Islam, on the other hand, makes equality the basis of its legislation in all areas, except where such equality would be contrary to the woman's nature or to what is more suitable for her. For example, Islam forbids men to wear gold, while women are allowed to have gold jewellery because by nature a woman loves to wear jewellery. The Qur'an and the sunnah emphatically urge people to join the jihad, when it is a duty, but

all this applies to men, not to women. Imam al-Bukhari relates a hadith narrated by Aishah: ‘I requested the Prophet’s permission to go on jihad, but he said: “Your [i.e. women’s] jihad is the hajj”.’ Ibn Battal says: ‘This hadith narrated by Aishah confirms that jihad is not a duty for women. However, the Prophet’s words, “Your jihad is the hajj”, does not mean that they may not volunteer to join a jihad campaign. It simply says that it is not a duty incumbent on women’.<sup>26</sup>

When we look at the conditions of those who advocate absolute equality between men and women, we find that the reality does not confirm their claims in all areas. The number of women who assume the position of ‘head of state’ is insignificant compared with the number of men. Is this because they know that men are better at this type of work? Or is it because principles are totally overlooked when high position is at stake? Or is it because the whole claim of total equality is bogus?

From another point of view, when we cast a total and a critical look at what those people say who claim that Islam is unfair to women we find big holes in their address and we conclude that they engage in a major deception. This tactic has several facets to it, including:

1. They confuse Islamic rulings with the practices or traditions of some Muslims who are unfair to women. For example, a woman’s father or guardian may force her to marry someone she dislikes. They blame Islam for this because that person is a Muslim. The fact is that Islam prohibits such action. An authentic hadith quotes the Prophet as saying: ‘A previously married woman may not be given in marriage unless her consent has been given, and a virgin is not given in marriage until she grants permission’. People asked: ‘Messenger of Allah, how does she give permission?’ He said: ‘She remains silent’.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Commentary on al-Bukhari’s *Sahih*, Vol. 5, p. 75.

27 Related by al-Bukhari, 5,136.

2. They ignore all aspects of respect and honour Islam gives women which they are not given under any other system or anywhere else in the world. This is best seen in the honour due to mothers. A person who recites the Qur'an realises that the rights Islam lays down for mothers are second only to the rights of Allah and His Messenger. Allah's commandment to be dutiful to one's parents is joined to the commandment to believe in Allah's oneness: 'Your Lord has ordained that you shall worship none but Him, and that you must be kind to your parents'. (17: 23). As we are urged to show gratitude to Allah, we are also urged to be grateful to our mothers: 'Be grateful to Me and to your parents'. (31: 14). Imam al-Bukhari relates in his *Sahih* the following hadith: 'A man asked the Prophet: "Messenger of Allah, who is most entitled to my good companionship?" The Prophet said: "Your mother". The questioner asked: "Who comes next?" The Prophet said: "Your mother". The man asked again: "And who next?" The Prophet said: "Your mother". The man said: "Who next?" The Prophet said: "Your father".'<sup>28</sup>
3. They do not mention the special rulings applicable to women, in order to make things easier for her, while they remain stricter for men, allowing for the difference between the two sexes. For example, a woman may wear gold and silk, but a man is prohibited from doing so. The man must look after his wife, paying for her living expenses for life, even though she may be rich, while a rich woman is not required to look after her husband financially. According to scholars, a man is duty bound to attend the congregational prayers in the mosque, while women are not similarly required.

The *jizyah* [i.e. tribute] is taken from non-Muslim men living under the protection of the Muslim state, but no such tribute is payable by non-Muslim women. Ibn al-Qayyim says in his book devoted to this subject: 'Tribute is not payable by a child, a woman or a mad person. This is the view agreed by the founders of the four schools of Fiqh and their followers'.

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28 Related by al-Bukhari, 5,971.



Ibn al-Mundhir said: ‘I do not know that any other scholar disagrees with them’. In his book, al-Mughni, Abu Muhammad ibn Qudamah says: ‘We are unaware of any scholarly disagreement on this question’.<sup>29</sup>

4. They ignore the different negative effects that result from the non-implementation of Allah’s legislation concerning women. An example of these is the fact that millions of pregnancies are aborted every year because of the illegitimate relations causing such pregnancies. Do they not have the right to life? On what basis are they killed?

### **Secondly: Misconceptions about jihad and fighting**

This is one of the most sensitive and frequently discussed areas for non-Muslims. We cannot discuss all its aspects in this short presentation, but we may highlight some methodological points that refer to errors or deception by those who raise doubts about Islam, using the subject of jihad.

**One:** Their conception of jihad and its status in Islam on their knowledge of today’s so-called ‘jihadist’ or armed groups that claim to be Islamic. Such a conception is neither methodological nor scholarly. The right approach is that such groups are judged according to Islam, not the reverse. Islam may not be judged on the basis of the action of any individual or group. What we mean by judging according to Islam is that their actions are examined and evaluated on the basis of the texts of the Qur’an and the Prophet’s statements, directives and guidance applicable to fighting. Whatever is consistent with these texts and guidance is acceptable, and what is at variance with them should be attributed to their perpetrators, not to Islam.

The question that we, for our part, want to put to those who raise doubts is: Do they judge atheism as a criminal and terrorist creed, in the light of the actions of atheist communists who committed ghastly crimes in recent

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<sup>29</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ahkam Ahl al-Dhimmah*, Vol. 1, p. 149; Ibn Qudamah, *al-Mughni*, Vol. 9, p. 338; Ibn al-Mundhir, *al-Ijmā’*, p. 62.

times? Or, does the judgement criteria differ when judgement is to be passed on non-Muslims?

**Two:** They do not appreciate, or they ignore all aspects of mercy and compassion that are incorporated in the rulings applicable to jihad in Islam. For example, Islamic law, which is based on the texts of the Qur'an and the sunnah, includes instructions on the following points:

- i. A clear text prohibiting intentional killing of women and children;<sup>30</sup>
- ii. A clear text ordering the cessation of fighting if opponents retract their disbelief;<sup>31</sup>
- iii. A clear text permitting disbelievers or followers of earlier divine religions to continue to practise their religions if they pay the tribute;<sup>32</sup>
- iv. A clear text forbidding treacherous action against anyone;
- v. A text praising Muslims for giving food to captives of war ahead of Muslim soldiers;
- vi. A very clear text strictly forbidding the disfigurement of the bodies of dead enemy soldiers;<sup>33</sup>
- vii. A text ensuring the security of disbelievers who seek Muslim protection, allowing them to listen to the Qur'an and ensuring their safe conduct until they reach their place of safety.<sup>34</sup>

All these are important and high values that must be observed by Muslims in war, while we do not find any similar values observed by non-Muslims.

30 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3,015.

31 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 25; Also, 6,872 [the case of Usamah ibn Zayd when he killed a man in battle after the man declared his belief in Allah's oneness. The Prophet severely censured him for doing so.]

32 The Qur'an, 9: 29; Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 3,159.

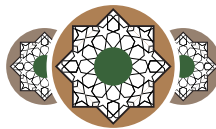
33 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, 2,474.

34 The Qur'an, 9: 6.

Three: They forget the millions of people killed by non-Muslims in recent and past history. Were they to apply the standards by which they judge Muslims to the faiths, states and creeds to which those armies belonged, they would be silenced by their embarrassment before uttering a word of criticism against Muslims.

I may add a word saying that there is a world of difference between the objectives of war in Islam and those of other parties. It is unfair to equate fighting for a religion Allah has revealed and ordered its followers to defend and fighting for a distorted faith or a false man-made creed. Islam does not fight to exterminate disbelievers or to subject them to a tyrannical rule. It fights to ensure freedom for the divine faith, save people from hell and giving people completely free choice of faith. In order to ensure this, it must remove those tyrants and oppressive regimes that deny people their freedom of choice. The fact that some situations in history went beyond this clear principle does not make it invalid. It simply shows that those who transgressed went wrong and deserved Allah's censure.

We thus conclude our discussion of the main misconceptions that are raised to criticise the essence of Islam, all of which have been discussed within the framework of the first type of the misconceptions.





## Type Two

# Misconceptions Raising Doubt about Islamic Fundamentals



We mentioned at the outset that the ‘fundamentals’ refer to rulings and texts that the Sunni Muslims have agreed to uphold, not the ones on which they differ. Many of the current questions about such fundamentals are concerned with five headings: the sunnah, scholars’ unanimity, the methodology of understanding texts, the Prophet’s companions, and mandatory punishments.

### Class One

#### Misconceptions about the Prophet’s Sunnah

Misconceptions about the sunnah are the most frequently-circulated doubts raised about the fundamentals of Islam. Indeed, many other misconceptions are based on these. Hence, in most cases, you will find that a person who has some problems with the sunnah also has problems relating to several other areas, such as mandatory punishments, information related to the realm beyond our perception, miracles, torment in the grave, etc. On the other hand, a person who has studied the validity of the sunnah, accepted the answers to the problems raised about the sunnah, and understood the relationship between logical and textual evidence, as well as the relationship between experimental science and religious texts knows the main answers to the great majority of the misconceptions raised about the fundamentals of Islam. The problems raised about the sunnah and its status as a basis for religious rulings come under six headings:

### One: Its status and the sufficiency of the Qur'an

Those who raise doubts about the status of the sunnah and advocate that the Qur'an is sufficient cite several Qur'anic verses in support of their claim. One such verse says: 'No single thing have We left out of the Book'. (6: 38). They ask: 'Do you want anything clearer than this verse to tell you that, as we have the Qur'an available, there is no need for the sunnah?'

The answer is that 'the Book' in this verse does not mean the Qur'an, but refers to the Preserved Tablet which is with Allah. This is evidenced by the general context of the same verse whose full text is as follows: 'There is not an animal that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its wings but are communities like your own. No single thing have We left out of the Book. Then to their Lord shall they all be gathered'. (6: 38). This is similar to the verse that says: 'There is no living creature on earth but depends for its sustenance on Allah; and He knows its habitation and its resting-place. All this is in a clear record'. (11: 6). The means of sustenance, the habitations and resting places of every living creature are recorded in the Preserved Tablet, not in the Qur'an.

For argument's sake, we may accept that the 'Book' means the Qur'an in the verse that says: 'No single thing have We left out of the Book'. (6: 38). Still, this does not mean that the verse negates the status of the sunnah as evidence in support of rulings. This will be clearly seen in the comment on their second piece of evidence.

**The second evidence:** The Qur'anic verse that says: 'We have bestowed from on high upon you the Book to make everything clear'. (16: 89). They say that since the Qur'an clarifies everything, what need is there for the sunnah? The answer to citing this verse is that one aspect of how the Qur'an makes everything clear is that it orders us to follow the Prophet and warns against disobeying him. This is stated in scores of places in the Qur'an, and they are stated in general terms which cannot be taken as limited to what he delivered of the Qur'an. Therefore, to disobey the Prophet is to disobey the Qur'an.

In his commentary on the Qur'an, al-Baydawi gives the following explanation to this verse: 'The word "everything" in this verse refers to all religious things, as it makes them clear, either in detail or in general, referring them to the sunnah or to analogy'.<sup>1</sup> In *Ruh al-Maani*, al-Alusi explains the meaning of this Qur'anic statement. He says: 'That the Qur'an "makes everything clear" is seen in the fact that it states some and refers others to the sunnah, since it commands us to follow the Prophet and says of him: "He does not speak out of his own fancy". (53: 3). It also urges us to follow the unanimous views of scholars, as Allah says: "But as for him who, after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him... follows a path other than that of the believers – him shall We leave to that which he himself has chosen".'<sup>2</sup> (4: 115). In *Fath al-Qadir*, al-Shawkani says: 'That the Qur'an makes everything clear means that it states many rulings and refers us to the sunnah for the rest'.<sup>3</sup>

**The third evidence:** They cite the verse that says: 'Am I to seek for judge anyone other than Allah?' (6:114). They tell us that as we follow the sunnah, then we are actually taking someone other than Allah as a judge and this falls under associating partners with Allah. Hence, many of them label Sunni Muslims as disbelievers and idolaters because they follow the Prophet's sunnah. I am not mentioned mere imagination or legend. I am speaking of what is very real and most astonishing. By the way, those who reject the entire sunnah and everything other than the Qur'an are some of the strangest and most narrow-minded of people. I do not like to use such a description of people with whom I differ, but I have nonetheless encountered the strangest attitude from these people. They demonstrate an obstinate conviction of their false idea. One of them, who exhibited a great degree of ignorance, challenged me for a *mubahalalah*. Anyway, the answer to their argument based on this verse is as follows:<sup>4</sup>

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1 Al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil*, Vol. 3, p. 237.

2 Al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Maani*, Vol. 14, p. 214.

3 Al-Shawkani, *Fath al-Qadir*, Vol. 3, p. 187.

4 A *mubahalalah* is a way to settle matters after an inconclusive debate about a ma-

1. In the Qur'an, Allah gives us clear instructions to appoint judges who rule among people on the basis of justice. One such verse says: 'If you have reason to fear that a breach may occur between a [married] couple, appoint an arbiter from among his people and an arbiter from among her people'. (4: 35). It should be noted that the Arabic text of this verse uses for 'arbiter' the word hakam which is the same word used for 'judge' in the verse used as the basis of their argument, 'Am I to seek for judge anyone other than Allah'? (6: 114). The Qur'an calls for appointing judges and arbiters to rule on matters in different cases, as in: 'adjudged by two persons of probity among you'. (5: 95). 'Allah commands you... whenever you judge between people, to judge with justice'. (4: 58). How can they reconcile these verses with their understanding of the verse that says: 'Am I to seek for judge anyone other than Allah'? (6: 114). If Allah requires people to appoint an ordinary Muslim man who follows the Prophet as an arbiter in a situation of family discord, can following the Prophet and obeying his orders be considered an act of idolatry? How ill they judge!
2. To obey the Prophet is to obey Allah, as He says in the Qur'an: 'He who obeys the Messenger obeys Allah thereby'. (4: 80). Allah gives express and clear instructions to refer disputes to the Prophet for judgement. He says: 'If you are in dispute over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day'. (4: 59). 'But no, by your Lord! They do not really believe unless they make you judge in all disputes between them'. (4: 65).
3. According to Ibn Kathir and other Qur'anic commentators, this verse which says, 'am I to seek for judge anyone other than Allah', means

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for issue of faith. It is based on the Qur'anic verse that says: 'If anyone should dispute with you about this [truth] after all the knowledge you have received, say: Come. Let us summon our sons and your sons, our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves; then let us pray humbly and solemnly and invoke Allah's curse upon the ones who are telling a lie'. (3: 61)



someone to judge between you and me. Ibn Ashur said: ‘The meaning of this verse is: I do not seek anyone to judge between you and me other than Allah Who has judged you as hostile enemies’. Other commentators express the same meaning.

So far, we have answered their main arguments. Now we need to establish the validity of the sunnah as a source of legislation. Here we have plenty of evidence from the Qur’an, the sunnah, the unanimity of scholars and the continuous and consistent practice of Muslims over successive generations. I will refer only to the most important evidence and in brief. I have explained these more fully in my book, *Afi al-Sunnah Shakk?* [i.e. Any doubt about the sunnah?].

Many verses in the Qur’an give the order to obey the Prophet and to refer disputes to him. They make clear that it is forbidden to disobey the Prophet. The point here is that we are addressed by the Qur’an in the same way as the Prophet’s companions were, and this includes the verses that state the commandment to obey the Prophet. We cannot implement these verses except through following the authentic reports that state what he ordered and confirmed. In his book, *Jima‘ al-‘Ilm*, Imam al-Shafi‘i says: ‘Can you find a way, for yourself or anyone who lived before or after you and did not see the Prophet, to fulfil what Allah has commanded of obeying the orders of His Messenger, except through what is reported of him?’

Confirmation of the validity of the sunnah as basis for rulings is also stated in the Qur’anic verse: ‘If you are in dispute over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day’. (4: 59). As Allah, Mighty and Exalted, says: ‘If you are in dispute over anything’, this includes everything. In this case, ‘refer it to Allah and the Messenger’. What is meant by referring it to Allah is to refer it to Allah’s Book. This is understood by everyone. Referring it ‘to the Messenger’ means putting it to him during his lifetime, and referring to his sunnah after he has passed away. This is unanimously agreed upon by all scholars.

Imam Ibn Hazm said: ‘The proof that this reference means reference to the Qur’an and to what is reported to us from His Messenger is that the Muslim community unanimously agrees that this statement is addressed to us and to everyone who is created and given body and soul, of jinns and humans, until the Day of Judgement’.<sup>5</sup> Imam Ibn al-Qayyim said: ‘People are unanimous that reference to Allah means reference to His Book, and that reference to the Messenger is to refer to him personally during his lifetime and to his sunnah after he had passed away’.<sup>6</sup>

### Evidence from the sunnah

This sort of evidence is useful for those who accept some of the sunnah and reject some. They have a hesitating attitude towards it. Others who reject the sunnah completely do not benefit from this evidence, except in debate. If such a person cites a hadith to support his argument that the sunnah has no validity, we reject his argument [because of the inherent contradiction in it]. We tell him that we accept all the sunnah and if he accepts a part of it, he must accept the rest. Authentic texts confirming its validity are numerous. One such evidence quotes the Prophet: ‘Let me not find any of you reclining on his couch: he is informed of some order of mine, either requiring something or prohibiting another, but he says: “We do not know. We will follow what we find in Allah’s Book”.’<sup>7</sup> This hadith has an authentic chain of transmission and it relates to the question in hand. It makes clear that we must accept and implement what is reported from Allah’s Messenger other than the Qur’an.

In his *al-Musnad* anthology, Imam Ahmad relates a hadith in which al-Miqdam quotes the Prophet who says: ‘I have been given the Book and a similar volume with it. I have been given the Book and a similar volume with it. There may soon be someone who goes to his couch having had his

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Hazm, *al-Ihkam fi Usul al-Ahkam*, Vol. 1, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *I’lam al-Muaqqi’in*, Vol. 2, p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> Sunan Al Tiridhi (2663), Sunan Abi Dawud (4605), Sunan Ibn Majah (13)

meal, and he says: “Stick to the Qur’an: whatever you find permissible in it, do it; and whatever you find prohibited in it, refrain from it”.<sup>8</sup> The chain of transmission of this hadith is acceptable. [Needless to say: ‘a similar volume’ refers to the sunnah, which means all authentic hadiths]

### Evidence of unanimity

There are plenty of cases of unanimity on this question. Practical unanimity, which means scholars’ continuous reference to the sunnah for issuing rulings on all types of questions and for implementing the sunnah, is very clear. I will only add two of the numerous statements by scholars on this point:

1. Commenting on the Qur’anic verse that says: ‘If you are in dispute over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day’, (4: 59). Imam Abd al-Aziz al-Kinani said: ‘There is no disagreement on this between scholars or believers: if we refer something to Allah, it is to His Book, and if we refer it to His Messenger, after he passed away, then it is a reference to his sunnah. Only disbelievers have doubts about this’.<sup>9</sup>
2. Ibn Abd al-Barr al-Qurtubi of the Maliki School of fiqh said in the Introduction to his book, *al-Tamhid*: ‘Scholars of fiqh and hadith in all regions are, to the best of my knowledge, in complete agreement that a report by a reliable single person is acceptable and must be implemented once it is confirmed and not abrogated by a different hadith or unanimous agreement. This is the view of all scholars of fiqh in every generation, from the time of the Prophet’s companions up to our present day. The only exceptions are al-Khawarij and some deviant groups: these are a mere handful that does not constitute disagreement’.<sup>10</sup>

8 Al Imam Ahmad (131/4)

9 Al-Kinani, *al-Haydah wal-I’tidhar*, p. 69.

10 Ibn Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhid*, Vol. 1, p. 2.

This unanimity is to accept and implement the sunnah when reported by single reporters, let alone the mutawatir hadiths. The mutawatir grade means ‘a hadith reported at every stage of transmission by a number of people who cannot be imagined to agree to a lie’.

## **Two: Doubts about the acceptability of ahad hadiths**

Linguistically speaking, ahad means ‘by single persons’, but according to hadith terminology it refers to all hadiths that do not attain the mutawatir grade. This means that the term ahad refers to a hadith that may be narrated by one or two or three reporters at every stage. The most important questions raised about this type of hadith are two objections, with the second based on the first:

It is generally stated that ahad reports only indicate supposition, and

The claim that acting on the basis of supposition is criticised.

When they put their argument forward, they say: The ahad reports indicate supposition and all action based on supposition is condemned in the Qur’an. Therefore, acting on the basis of ahad reports is condemned by the Qur’an.

This argument is based on two preliminaries, and proving either one to be invalid is sufficient to make the whole argument collapse. If all the foregoing has not yet convinced you that both preliminaries are invalid, proving that either one is invalid is sufficient. This is what I propose to do here.

The first point suggests that all ahad reports only indicate supposition is incorrect, from both the legal and the practical points of view. Legally, the Prophet used to call on all communities to accept Islam, proving its truth, delivering his message to them by individuals from among his companions. Such a conclusion allows no possibility of doubt or leaving the matter in any status other than complete certainty. From the practical

point of view, all of us, including those who agree or disagree on the point in question, arrive at certainty in numerous situations on the basis of reports by single persons and without any measure of *tawatur* [i.e. several reporting]. Examples are countless, including news of marriages, deaths, births, success, failure, making profit, incurring a loss, sustaining an injury, etc. Our acknowledgement that we gain certainty by such single reporting is sufficient to negate the statement that all *ahad* reports only indicate supposition. The authentic *ahad* hadiths that transmit the *sunnah* imply either certainty or a strong probability, according to the status of different narrators, the chains of transmission and various other indications that relate to each hadith.

The second preliminary, which says that ‘acting on the basis of supposition is criticised in the Qur’an’ makes an incorrect generalisation. The Arabic word used in the Qur’an to indicate ‘supposition’ is *zann*, and it is used in different senses. The Qur’an condemns one type of it and praises another. In the first case, we have the verse that says of disbelievers: ‘They follow nothing but surmise, but surmise can never take the place of truth’. (53: 28). The Qur’an praises believers ‘who know that they shall meet their Lord and to Him they shall ultimately return’. (2: 46). In both these verses, the word *zann* is used, but in the first one it is used in the sense of ‘surmise’ while in the other ‘certainty’ is intended. Hence, the different translation. That the second verse means certainty is absolutely true. Had they had any doubt about their ultimate meeting with their Lord, their *zann* or supposition would be of no use to them. Al-Qurtubi comments on this verse: ‘According to the majority of scholars, *zann* in this verse means certainty. The same applies to other verses in the Qur’an where *zann* is used, such as: ‘I certainly knew that one day I would have to face my account’. (69: 20). ‘And when those who were lost in sin will see the fire, they will realize that they are bound to fall in it, and will find no way to escape from it’. (18: 53). In both these verses, the word *zann* is used for ‘I certainly knew’ and ‘they realize’. Imam al-Shanqiti mentions several Qur’anic verses where *zann* is used to indicate certainty,

and then he comments: ‘The word *zann*, as used in all these verses, indicates certainty. Arabs use this word to indicate either certainty or doubt’.<sup>11</sup>

To equate the knowledge or the strong probability that may be gathered from authentic hadiths with the surmise of the disbelievers – which the Qur’anic verse censures – is undoubtedly wrong. Shaykh Ibn Uthaymin discusses the verse that says: ‘They follow nothing but surmise, but surmise can never take the place of truth’. (53: 28). He says: ‘The term “surmise”, or *zann* in the Arabic text, means a false supposition. It does not mean the stronger of two probabilities. We should be clear on this, for the word *zann* may be used to mean an unconfirmed thought, a stronger probability or a certainty’.

Moreover, in the Qur’an, Allah requires us to accept witnesses’ testimonies, and witnesses are single reporters. Those who reject the sunnah either consider their testimony to provide certainty, and in this case they contradict the first of the two above-stated preliminaries, or they consider the testimony to provide uncertainty but which is nevertheless acceptable, and this contradicts the second preliminary. What is certain to have been legislated by Allah cannot be censurable in any way.

Ibn Hazm said: ‘The entire Muslim community is unanimous that a report by a reliable single person, narrating from the Prophet (peace be upon him), is acceptable. Moreover, all Muslims have accepted reports by a single person’.<sup>12</sup>

I include other arguments in response to those who raise doubts about the acceptability of the ahad hadiths in my book, *Afi al-Sunnah Shakk?* [i.e. Any doubt about the sunnah?]

11 Al-Shanqiti, *al-Adwa*, Vol. 4, pp. 141-2.

12 Ibn Hazm, *al-Ihkam*, Vol. 1, pp. 113-4.

## Class Two

### Misconceptions about the Unanimity of Scholars

Some of those who deny that the unanimity of scholars, i.e. *ijma'*, is a valid basis for arriving at rulings concerning matters to which no Qur'anic or hadith text applies go as far as to conclude that the Muslim community has approved what is wrong over a period of fourteen centuries. This conclusion contradicts what Allah clearly stated describing the Muslim community as the best of all nations, and that it is the middle community which is qualified to be the witness against all other communities. It earns this status because of its truthfulness and pursuit of justice. How can this be consistent with the passage of century after century and the Muslim community continuing to agree to what is false? How can it remain unaware of what is right and the upholding of it?

Even from the purely logical point of view, this is practically impossible. All religious rulings are based on the Qur'an and the sunnah. All cases of unanimity among scholars are based on some express or implied evidence in the Qur'an or the sunnah. Those who exercise scholarly discretion, i.e. *ijtihad*, to arrive at rulings use the same ways of deduction and construction from the Qur'an and the sunnah, albeit with personal differences in the perfection of these ways and methods. However, the total body of such scholars include all these ways at all their different levels. Therefore, when they agree to some conclusion, it must be the right conclusion. Can anyone imagine that all eminent scholars who are qualified to exercise reasoning and deduction [i.e. *ijtihad*] misunderstand a text? Is it possible that the right understanding became clear only after fourteen centuries of the Islamic calendar? We have to bear in mind that the early scholars were closer to perfection in their mastery of the means of reasoning, particularly because their command of Arabic was better and clearer, as Arabic was still pure, unaffected by foreign influences. Moreover, the first generation of such scholars, i.e. the generation of the Prophet's companions, had an important

factor of distinction that was unavailable to all others, namely, the Prophet's companionship and living at the time the Qur'an was revealed. Therefore, they were more qualified to understand the Qur'anic and sunnah texts. However, ijihad and scholarly discretion has always been open to others. How can they all agree to a misunderstanding of a text, considering that no external factors have occurred to influence the understanding of texts relating to most issues where contemporary researchers differ with old unanimity? These are purely theoretical cases of Islamic law, such as the punishment by stoning, the punishment for apostasy, etc. What were early scholars missing which is now available to some contemporary researchers that enables us to consider that those early eminent scholars were wrong and that the contemporary ones are right in their understanding of Qur'anic verses and the Prophet's statements?

I believe that this question merits careful attention but not in the context of personal merit or available resources. I am not speaking here about deducing new rulings, or about a more profound understanding of the meaning of Qur'anic verses. I am not speaking about adding to what the earlier scholars arrived at. I am rather concerned with the issue of judging all past scholars as wrong. The question is further proven by the fact that those who deny the unanimity of scholars claim that a number of the cases they reject and discard contradict some clear Qur'anic statements. They say, for example, that the punishment for apostasy clearly contradicts the Qur'anic statement: 'There shall be no compulsion in religion'. (2: 256). Could the matter be so superficial?

From a different point of view, some people abandon this claim and agree that the Muslim community cannot unanimously agree upon what is wrong. However, they dispute that unanimity ever occurred. This is a question of legal theory and methodology which has further details and different views on what constitute unanimity and its occurrence and acceptability. They do not claim that unanimity itself is invalid. The recorded cases of unanimity



are of different degrees of definiteness and validity. Some others maintain that unanimity cannot take place, and they cite Imam Ahmad's statement: 'Whoever claims unanimity is a liar'. I am quoting hereunder a summary of what I wrote in my book *Kamil al-Surah*, Vol. 2, about this quote from Imam Ahmad:

To take this statement of Imam Ahmad and discard his other statements about the same issue is an exercise of non-objective selectivity. Or at least it betrays ignorance. Imam Abu Dawud said: 'I heard Ahmad when someone said to him that "Reciting the *Fatihah* when one is praying with the imam is excepted from the verse: 'When the Qur'an is recited, listen attentively to it'." (7: 204). He said: "On whose authority did he say this? People are unanimous that this verse refers to what takes place in prayer".'<sup>13</sup>

This is a clear text, authentically reported from Imam Ahmad, claiming unanimity to a religious ruling. Do we apply to him his own statement: 'Whoever claims unanimity is a liar'? Or should we try to understand it according to the meaning that is consistent with his own application? Then again, why should we rely on one statement and discard other statements? Since the matter is selective someone may say that it is better to select the statement that approves of unanimity and discard the one that says that any claim of unanimity is a lie.

There is no doubt that the acceptable approach followed by scholars in dealing with his statement labelling claims of unanimity as lies is to try to understand it in the light of his other statements as well as its own conditions. It must not be taken as a basis to invalidate unanimity. Scholars have said that Imam Ahmad said it, expressing what some *Mu'tazilah* scholars said. In his book, *al-Tahbir*, al-Mardawi said: 'Ibn Rajab said towards the end of his commentary on al-Tirmidhi's book: As for what is reported that Imam

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13 Abu Dawud al-Sijistani, *Masa'il al-Imam Ahmad*, Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, p. 48.

Ahmad said: “Whoever claims unanimity is a liar”, it should be known that he said it in disapproval of what the Mu‘tazilah scholars used to claim of unanimous agreement of what they used to say. They were least aware of the views of the Prophet’s companions and their successors, the *tabi‘in*.<sup>14</sup>

This understanding is endorsed by the continuation of Ahmad’s statement. According to the version narrated by his son, Abdullah, he said: ‘Whoever claims unanimity is a liar. The people might have differed. This is the claim of Bishr al-Marisi and al-Asamm’.<sup>15</sup> A similar statement is given by Ibn al-Qayyim who said: ‘It is not his – meaning Imam Ahmad’s – intention to exclude the possibility of unanimity. Ahmad and other eminent scholars of hadith faced the problem that some people used to reject the sunnah claiming that all people do the opposite. Al-Shafi‘i and Ahmad made clear that such claims were lies and that a sunnah may not be discarded on such basis’.

Another understanding of Ahmad’s statement suggests that it is a case of being cautious in what one claims. A claim of unanimity is difficult to prove. There may be some disagreement of which the claimant of unanimity might be unaware. Therefore, Imam Ahmad suggested that scholars should say: ‘I do not know of any different view on this question’, and similar expressions. They are closer to the truth. However, this does not preclude that a scholar who is well aware of other scholarly views should confirm unanimity if he is certain of it, as Ahmad himself did. Justice Abu Ya‘la said in his book, *al-Uddah*: ‘The apparent meaning of his words is that Ahmad precluded the possibility of unanimity, but the matter is not according to such apparent meaning. He said this as precaution, as there may be some disagreement of which he was unaware. Or he might have said this in reference to people who are not well aware of differences among early scholars’.<sup>16</sup> This second explanation is certainly valid, because a scholar may be unaware of some

14 Al-Mardawi, *al-Tahbir Sharh al-Tahrir*, Maktabat al-Rushd, Vol. 4, p. 1,528.

15 Abu Ya‘la, *al-Uddah fi Usul al-Fiqh*, Vol. 4, p. 1,059.

16 Ibid, Vol. 4, p. 1,060.

different views. However, this possibility becomes a very remote one if scholars of different areas and countries confirm unanimity.

### **Class Three**

#### **Misconceptions about the Understanding of Religious Texts**

One of the major current problems concerning religious texts is the problem of understanding. You find people who say: we believe in the Qur'an and in the sunnah, but whose understanding should we apply? Is there a correct and an incorrect understanding? Why should a religious text not be open to different readings and understandings. Everyone may take what they understand of it, with none calling the other wrong or mistaken!

If you contemplate this statement, you will find that it removes from religious texts their function as clarifying what is right and true. It deprives religious text of being the final arbiter on questions of Islam. A disbeliever may find justification for his disbelief in a religious text he understands in his own way. In the Qur'an, Allah censures anyone who does not judge according to His revelations. How can people judge according to the Qur'an if different people have their different understandings of it? Suppose a judge rules that a fornicator is sentenced to receive 100 lashes, as the Qur'an states. The fornicator may say that he understands the text differently, and adds that the punishment applies to a rapist, or to a married adulterer only.

It should be pointed out that some contemporary people make such claims. They say that forbidden adultery means being unfaithful to one's spouse. An unmarried man and an unmarried woman may have sexual intercourse, provided that they do so by mutual consent and in private. I heard Muhammad Shahroor, who advocates a deviant understanding of the Qur'an, saying just that. What religion, then, will we end up with? What guidance would the Qur'an provide if every text it includes is interpreted

in such a deviant way? This is merely a brief note on this subject. For further details, reference may be made to the first case of discarding texts in Abdullah al-Ujayri's book Yanboo' *al-Ghiwayah al-Fikriyyah*.

## Class Four

### Misconceptions about Mandatory Punishments

Most argument in this area centres on the punishment by stoning and the punishment for apostasy.

#### One: Stoning

Some Muslims deny that Islam legislates the punishment of stoning to death for married adulterers, considering it brutal. Their apparent basis is that this punishment is not mentioned in the Qur'an, while the punishment by flogging is mentioned in Surah 24, Light. They also say that stoning is contrary to some Qur'anic verses. As for brutality, stoning is a punishment, not a reward. Punishments serve as deterrents. In the Qur'an, Allah states a very severe punishment as a deterrent. This is the punishment of cutting hands and legs on alternate sides for 'those who make war on Allah and His Messenger and endeavour to spread corruption on earth'. (5: 34). Yet many of those who claim that stoning is brutal do not object to this punishment.

The punishments set by Allah are determined by His wisdom and knowledge. We have not invented this mandatory punishment, but accepted it as authentically reported from Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him). What a believer is expected to say is: how vile adultery is! It is so wicked that Allah attaches to it a very severe punishment, which is stoning to death. This shows how vile it is. To deny stoning on grounds that it is not mentioned in the Qur'an is inconsistent with following the Prophet (peace be upon him). It is confirmed in authentic sunnah that the

Prophet implemented this punishment for married people who committed adultery. That these reports are definitive is due to the fact that they have been mentioned in different ways confirming the knowledge for everyone who knows the evaluation of reports and the conditions of reporters, which is the basis of distinguishing authentic hadiths from those which lack authenticity.

Sunni Muslims unanimously agree that this punishment is mandatory. Ibn Abd al-Barr said: ‘Followers of the deviant ways of the Khawarij and the Mu‘tazilah do not accept stoning as punishment for any adulterer, whether married or unmarried. For them, the punishment for fornication and adultery is flogging. What they say is contrary to the Prophet’s sunnah and to the way approved of by believers. Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) and the caliphs who succeeded him enforced the stoning punishment. Muslim scholars in all areas, of both schools of reasoning and hadith agree on this, and these are the people of the truth’.<sup>17</sup> Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi said: ‘Stoning is the required punishment for married adulterers... This is the view of scholars generally... We do not know of any dissenters other than the Khawarij’.

Ibn Battal said: ‘Reports from the Prophet confirm that he ordered stoning and enforced it. Do you not know what Ali, the caliphate said: “We enforced stoning as done by Allah’s Messenger (peace be upon him) and Umar enforced the stoning”. Thus, this punishment is confirmed by the Prophet’s sunnah and the action of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. It is generally agreed by eminent scholars including Malik ibn Anas of Madinah, al-Awza‘i in Syria, al-Thawri and a number of Iraqi scholars, as well as al-Shafi‘i, Ahmad, Ishaq and Abu Thawr. The Khawarij and the Mu‘tazilah reject it, arguing that it is not mentioned in Allah’s Book, the Qur’an’.<sup>18</sup>

To deny this punishment claiming that it is contrary to some Qur’anic

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17 Ibn Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhid*, Vol. 23, p. 121.

18 Ibn Qudamah, *al-Mughni*, Vol. 12, p. 309.

verses, such as the one that mentions the punishment of slave women who commit adultery: ‘If after their marriage, they are guilty of gross immoral conduct, they shall be liable to half the penalty to which free women are liable’. (4: 25). They say that ‘free women’ in this case refers to married women. If you claim that married women who commit adultery incur the stoning punishment, then how can the verse be understood, since the stoning cannot be halved? This claim may be refuted by showing the error of interpreting the word *muhsanat* used in the verse as meaning ‘married women’. What it means is ‘free women’. This is very clear when we read the beginning of the verse, as it urges marriage with free women: ‘Any of you who, owing to circumstances, is not in a position to marry a free believing woman may marry a believing maiden from among those whom your right hands possess.’ (4: 25) The punishment of a free, married woman who commits adultery is stoning, and this punishment cannot be halved. If a free unmarried woman commits adultery, her punishment is one hundred lashes. This punishment can be halved, which means that a slave woman who commits adultery is punished by fifty lashes.

I may add that the questions raised about this punishment are more than can be answered in this brief discussion. In the first volume of my work, *Kamil al-Surah*, I answer some further problems. It should be clear, however, that this punishment is hardly ever enforced except on the basis of free and repeated confession, because the conditions of the other way of proving guilt are extremely hard. The one who makes such a confession does so by choice. No one forces him or her to confess. Indeed, the preferred option is to keep the matter secret and repent, not to hasten to make a confession. Moreover, if someone sees a couple committing adultery, he is advised not to report them, but to keep the matter private. The only situation where reporting is advised is that of people who boast about their evil action. Reporting in this case is to deter them and others like them.

## Two: Punishment for apostasy

The main objection to this punishment is that it is in conflict with the Qur'anic verse in which Allah says: 'There shall be no compulsion in religion'. (2: 256). This verse was not unknown to any Muslim scholar, and yet Muslim scholars were unanimous that apostasy incurs the death penalty. Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi said: 'All scholars agree that apostates are punished by death'.<sup>19</sup> This gives us three possibilities with regard to their attitude to this verse: 1) All of them did not understand its meaning; 2) They understood its meaning and were fully aware of it, but they concealed it and deliberately opposed it; and 3) They knew that its explanation does not conflict with the hadith that orders killing apostates. There is no doubt that the last alternative is the right one. This is what every Muslim accepts, and this is certainly what is expected of scholars.

Scholars were certainly aware of this issue. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, the leading commentator on the Qur'an, said: 'All Muslims reported that their Prophet (peace be upon him) required certain people to believe in Islam, giving them no alternative and ruled that they would face the death penalty if they refused. These included Arab idolaters and the ones who rejected the religion of the truth after having accepted it, and reverted to disbelief, as well as others in similar categories. On the other hand, the Prophet did not force others to accept Islam, but left them to continue to practise their faith. He required them to pay tribute, or *jizyah*, and these included the followers of earlier divine religions and similar groups. This makes clear that the verse that says, 'There shall be no compulsion in religion', applies to everyone from whom it is lawful to take tribute. If such people pay tribute and accept to live under Islamic rule, they shall not be compelled to accept Islam'.<sup>20</sup> In his commentary on the Qur'an, Ibn Kathir said: 'A large number of scholars are of the view that this verse applies to the people of earlier scriptures'.<sup>21</sup>

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19 Ibid, Vol. 12, p. 264.

20 Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 4, p. 554.

21 Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Vol. 1, p. 687.

The punishment for apostasy is one of the most important issues that atheists and disbelievers use in objection to Islam. Moreover, many Muslims raise this issue to defend Islam, believing that it is contrary to the principles of tolerance and coexistence which Islam accepts. They may cite some events in the Prophet's lifetime which they consider to support their views. However, in all this they bypass the authentic and clear text quoting the Prophet and defining the punishment for apostasy. Those of them who defend Islam do not deliberately go beyond the Prophet's guidance. In my view, it is important to deal wisely with such Muslims who find this punishment problematic. All aspects of this question should be made clear. We should remember that much discussion has centred on this issue, and there are numerous reports and hadiths that touch on it. These need to be carefully considered by scholars who combine thorough understanding with genuine faith and piety so that they can arrive at what is right in this highly problematic issue. Moreover, insisting on using the word 'mandatory', or *hadd*, in connection with this punishment is likely to add some confusion.

The basic problem with regard to the punishment for apostasy is due to the prevalent culture of our time, which makes man the central being in the universe. This punishment was never the subject of such controversy in Islamic history. Only in recent times has it caused such lengthy debate. Those who reject this punishment do not declare their belief in man's central position, but they cling to some texts which they believe to lead to the rejection of this punishment. They try to weaken other texts for some very flimsy reasons. Thus, an objective observer may feel that they are motivated by some other reason which they may not realise, namely, the pressure surrounding the culture of man's centrality. In past generations when an opposite culture prevailed, giving the central position to Allah, rather than man, this punishment caused no problem.

Anyway, it is not my purpose to respond to all their arguments that lead to the rejection of this punishment. In the first volume of *Kamil al-Surah*, I mention ten objections to the punishment of apostasy and respond to them.



## Class Five

### Misconceptions about the Prophet's Companions

All Sunni Muslims agree that all the Prophet's companions were without blemish. They cite detailed evidence from the Qur'an, the sunnah and the practices and history of the Prophet's companions. This area is one where the unanimity of the Sunni Muslims is most frequently cited. To cite all relevant expressions of unanimity will take too long; therefore, I am citing only a few.

Ibn Abd al-Barr said: 'We have been spared the need to research the conditions of the Prophet's companions because the Muslim people of the truth, who are the Sunni Muslims, unanimously agree that all the Prophet's companions are unblemished in their characters'.<sup>22</sup> Al-Juwayni said: 'The Muslim community is unanimous in its opinion that it is not proper to refrain from giving a verdict of 'unblemished' on the character of all of the Prophet's companions... Perhaps the reason for Allah's approval of the status of unanimity is that the Prophet's companions are the ones who transmitted Islam and its Shariah. Had there been a disruption of the continuity of their reports, Islamic Shariah would have been confined to the Prophet's time and would not have applied to later generations'.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Ghazali said: 'The early generations of the Muslim community and the overwhelming majority of the later generations agree that they were 'unblemished' is well known, as Allah Himself praises them in His Book. As such, this is what we believe about them... What description of character is more accurate than that of the One who knows all secrets, then that of His Messenger? Had there been no such praise of character, the well-known and numerous reports of their situation and attitudes in migration, jihad, readiness to sacrifice their lives and property, unwavering support of the Prophet, even

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Abd al-Barr, *al-Isti'ab fi Ma'rifat al-Ashab*, Vol. 1, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Juwayni, *al-Burhan*, Vol. 1, p. 632.

against their own parents and families, would have been more than enough to give a clear ruling of their unblemished integrity'.<sup>24</sup> Al-'Alla'i said: 'This view, that all the Prophet's companions are unblemished in their integrity, is the one to which all Sunni Muslims subscribe. No heed is to be given to the views of those who follow deviant groups'.<sup>25</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah said: 'All Sunni Muslims agree that the Prophet's companions were of the highest character'.<sup>26</sup> As we said earlier, unanimity on this point is frequently expressed.

Misconceptions in this area are frequently due to citing some of the errors some of the Prophet's companions committed so as to malign and vilify them. People cite in particular what happened at the time of the Battles of the Camel and Siffin. Response to these misconceptions is as follows:

**One:** We do not claim that the Prophet's companions were infallible, but we say that they were the best of people and were people of great integrity. They could make mistakes. Therefore, if any of them is reported to have made a mistake or committed a sin, he is human. This, thus, sorts out many of the errors doubters claim and answers the questions they raise.

**Two:** Most of what the doubters of the characters of the Prophet's companions report claiming that the Prophet criticised some of them, or what happened between them at the time of the Battles of the Camel and Siffin is inaccurate. The great majority of such reports lack authentic chains of transmission. Therefore, according to the rules of dealing with misconceptions, anyone who cites such reports should first of all prove the correctness of what they report before asking us to respond and clarify. This is an important rule. Anyone who examines what those who circulate of misconceptions about the Prophet's companions will find is that most of what they rely on collapses when subjected to the conditions of accuracy set by scholars of hadith. In this respect, it is not surprising that deviant

<sup>24</sup> Al-Ghazali, *al-Mustasfa*, Vol. 1, p. 307.

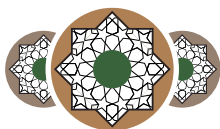
<sup>25</sup> Al-'Alla'i, *Jami al-Tahsil*, p. 73.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmoo al-Fatawa*, Vol. 35, p. 54.

people who malign the Prophet's companions on the basis of unconfirmed reports should also raise doubts about the Prophet's authentic hadiths.

**Three:** Many of the sinful actions some of the Prophet's companions committed prove their good characters. The fact that they hastened to express regret, repent and seek Allah's forgiveness, or request the Prophet to enforce the mandatory punishment on them proves beyond any doubt their firm belief in Allah and that they were Allah-fearing. Of the Juhani woman who committed adultery, the Prophet said: 'She has expressed repentance in a way that would have been sufficient for seventy of the people of Madinah. Could there be any more sincere repentance than that she offered her life for Allah's sake?'<sup>27</sup>

**Four:** Sunni Muslims are unanimous that all the Prophet's companions were of the highest degree of integrity and good character. All their reports are acceptable. We have cited some expressions of such unanimity, which is confirmed and based on the texts of the Qur'an and the sunnah, as well as the numerous reports of their excellent characters. Other than the unanimity of the Sunni people there is nothing except the disunity of deviant groups.

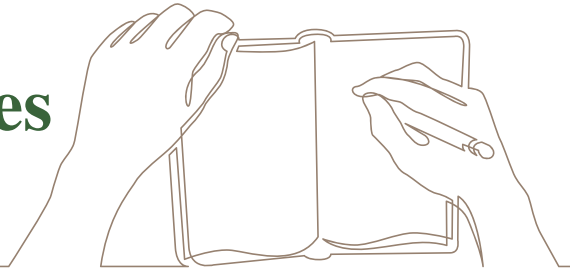


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27 Saheeh Muslim (1696).



# Notes on Some Important Issues



## Note One: Reason and Religion

**One:** Someone may say that reason takes priority ahead of religion, because we get to know religion through reason. Therefore, reason has the final word. In answer we say that when reason directs us to religion, it does so through an essential quality of religion, namely, immunity to defect or error. At the same time, reason does not claim such a quality. How can we place a fallible source ahead of an infallible one? Suppose that an uneducated person guides us to a learned scholar, does this give the uneducated person any status that makes his verdict more entitled to be followed than the verdict of the scholar? It is good enough that this person has directed us to the scholar, but from that point onwards, we must follow the scholar, not the uneducated guide.

**Two:** People have different standards of understanding and different people react differently to news and information. This is influenced by their upbringing, social environment and education. A person living in a remote area of a jungle may judge something as totally illogical, while one who grew up enjoying

the environment of modern civilisation may judge the same thing as perfectly logical. Therefore, a person who questions a religious text which he finds difficult to understand should not be quick to judge the text as contrary to reason. He should review his own understanding and the understanding of other rational people. He may then discover that the problem is due to his way of understanding which takes into consideration his initial premises which were taken for granted. These are based on, or influenced by his upbringing, environment and life circumstances.

On this basis we ask: if people of sound reasoning differ as to the acceptance or otherwise of a hadith attributed to the Prophet, who has the final say? Whose mind and reasoning should be given precedence? The answer is that there should be another or external element, which is the way of verification. This means that we need to establish whether this hadith, which is subject to logical differences, was truly said by the Prophet or not. If we can establish beyond doubt that he said it, then the hadith will certainly not be contrary to reason.

**Three:** The need to understand the limitations of reason. Imam al-Shatibi said: ‘Allah has set a limit for the human mind which it cannot exceed. He has not given the mind a way to understand all things’.<sup>1</sup> To acknowledge the limitations of the human mind does not detract from its importance. It simply gives it its right position and status. This is the starting point in finding answers for matters that belong to the realm beyond the reach of our faculties of perception and which continue to make us wonder.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Shatibi, *al-I'tisam*, Vol. 1, p. 831.

**Four:** The importance of distinguishing what is logically problematic from what is impossible, or rather what appears to our minds improbable and what is reasonably impossible. The Shariah may state something that sounds strange and makes us wonder but it will never state what is impossible or contrary to reason.

Ibn Taymiyyah said: ‘It is necessary to differentiate between what the human mind knows to be false or impossible and what the mind cannot conceive or understand. The first is beyond the bounds of possibility while the second is problematic. Allah’s messengers inform us about the second type’.<sup>2</sup> He also says: ‘Prophets may tell us about matters that the human mind cannot understand, but not about what the human mind knows to be false’.<sup>3</sup>

### **Note Two: Science and Religion**

I was reluctant to include this theme in these notes, because it branches out into many subdivisions, and it is difficult to explain its more important dimensions in a few lines. Moreover, it has not been tackled in scholarly research as widely and extensively as its twin subject, Reason and Religious Text. Therefore, my intention is only to refer to some of what I believe to be important under this heading, but readers may have recourse to other reference works.

**One:** A proper approach to this subject is not possible without a good understanding of the environment in which natural science

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<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Jawab al-Sahih*, Vol. 4, p. 391.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Vol. 4, p. 400.

has progressed in recent times. We also need to understand the nature of conflicts witnessed in Europe as a result of such progress, and whether these are related to the church or to some of its main figures. Such history and the general conditions associated with scientific progress made most scientists or science students move away from religion and all that is imperceptible. It is now inherent in their conception that neither science nor humanity managed to progress and make scientific discoveries until it broke away from the hegemony of the church and religion. Therefore, scientific facts have taken the lead, ahead of everything else, despite recognising that these are not absolute. They even describe religious and philosophical studies as devoid of fact. When they consider something relating to a religious or philosophical subject, they do not give it the same status as what relates to experimental science.

As Muslims, we have a religious system that is built on a logical basis and sound factual reasoning. We believe that there is no contradiction between our religious system and any true experimental fact that has been well established. This belief of ours is based on several fundamentals that need not be explained in this short presentation. I stress, however, the need to bear in mind the conditions of European society when natural science managed to make its breakthrough. It was the conditions prevailing then that led to the attitude that rejects religion and what relates to the realm of the imperceptible.

**Two:** Some of us consider the experimental science world as neutral, unaffected by any preconceptions. Therefore, whatever it says has no ulterior motive. This is not strictly accurate. There is an atheistic and materialistic tendency that has produced a



mindset that looks for a physical explanation for everything. When no such explanation offers itself, it makes some material speculations as possible explanations. When such speculation is supported by well-known figures in the scientific world, it carries much weight.

What is more is that natural scientists and proponents of atheist philosophy are confident that the methodology of natural science is the only reliable methodology. They are not prepared to consider a different methodology. They claim that natural science has attained a stage where there is no need for any other source to explain the universe. Indeed, they claim that the universe is self-sustaining because of the physical and mathematical laws that govern it. As Stephen Hawking says, there is no need for a creator. In this situation, can we rely on whatever a natural scientist claims, only because he is a doctor of Physics or a professor of Biology? Only naive people take this as an absolute fact.

**Three:** In natural science there are always new data, updated experiments and replaced theories, but none of these applies to the divine source. Therefore, it is wrong to treat scientific theories as absolute certainties, only because they are devised by scientists of experimental science. There are many examples of theories that received broad acceptance and gained great popularity, to the exclusion of every other theory in the field, but were ultimately proved wrong and were replaced by new theories. One significant example is Newton's theory of aether and some classical concepts of physics which were replaced by modern concepts. Newton's theories influenced thought, philosophy and the attitude towards religion. Facts were accepted if Newton's scientific perspective

accepted them, whether Newton said so or not. What is not consistent with his perspective or theories was unacceptable. These scientific theories led to the rise of new philosophies that largely leaned towards atheism, materialism and the exclusion of religion. They gained their epic position with the popularity of the positive doctrine in the first half of the nineteenth century. As other sciences showed an increasing desire to follow the lead of physics, a painful blow was aimed at a set of absolute facts and solid concepts in classical physics. The blow came from within physics, in the shape of two events that caused a great upheaval affecting physics that preached certainty to make it uncertain and introduce relativity. The first of these was the Michaelson and Morley experiment of 1887 which disproved the concept of aether, and the second was the discovery of the world of the atom which is not governed by the established laws of physics.

The Michaelson and Morley experiment caused much confusion in scientific circles, and scientists were unsure how to deal with its results. The possibilities before them were either to continue to uphold the aether theory, even if it would lead to the assumption that the earth is stationary in its placing, or negating it, even though it was well established and other theories were based on it. In his book, *Einstein wal-Nisbiyyah*, [i.e. Einstein and Relativity], Mustafa Mahmood mentions the Michaelson and Morley experiment, then says: ‘What this meant was that scientists would have to acknowledge that the aether theory had no real basis and that there was nothing called aether, or that they would consider that the earth is stationary in space. The aether theory had taken such hold that some scientists started to doubt

that the earth moves and to believe it to be stationary'. As the experiment showed that the aether theory was incorrect, scientists looked for an alternative basis to measure the movement of objects. Ultimately, Einstein gave a new explanation, stating the relativity of movement of all objects. Every motion is compared to others in relation to the position of the observer.

**Four:** As stated earlier, this subject is greatly detailed. A proper discussion of it requires reading the history of modern science and gaining an idea of its philosophy and criticism.

### **Note Three: On Freedom**

**One:** The first question is to establish whether the Islamic concept of freedom is a rational or religious one. The right answer is that it is a religious one. Based on reason alone, we cannot arrive at many of the Islamic rules that relate to freedom, such as the rules pertaining to payment of *jizyah*, or tribute, and the rules applicable to non-Muslims living in an Islamic state, or the application of mandatory punishments, as well as other laws and rules relating to freedom. Therefore, we conclude that this is a religious area which depends on knowledge of Islamic laws and regulations. This means that in order to know what is right and proper in this area, we need to refer to the relevant religious texts and to formulate a total outlook. We cannot uphold only some texts to the exclusion of the rest.

This gives us another benefit, which is a better understanding of the texts in the light of their total meaning, rather than possessing

only a narrow view based on a single text. Thus, when we look at Allah's statement, 'There shall be no compulsion in religion', (2:256), we need to understand it in the light of other relevant texts, such as Moses' reference to the calf worshipped by the Israelites: 'Now look at this deity of yours to whose worship you have become so devoted: we shall most certainly burn it, and then scatter it far and wide over the sea.' (20: 97). Allah's condemnation of the behaviour of the Children of Israel: 'They would never restrain one another from wrongdoing. Vile indeed were the things they did.' (5: 79). And the mandatory punishment for adultery: 'As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion for them keep you from [carrying out] this law of Allah, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day; and let a number of believers witness their punishment.' (24: 2). It is wrong to try to understand any of these texts in isolation of the rest?

**Two:** In order to arrive to a correct concept of freedom in Islam, it is very important to understand that there is an external factor that greatly influences the formation of concepts of freedom that are at variance with the Islamic concept. This external factor is the pressure of Western liberal culture. It has, in turn, influenced some Islamic presentations of freedom that contributed to the formation of a confused concept. It is necessary for any researcher to distinguish the features of freedom as advocated in the West and those approved by Islam. This does not mean to reject whatever is said about freedom if it comes from Western sources. What it means is that we need to understand the Islamic features of freedom from their original sources, in isolation of foreign

influences. We then need to understand the other and different concepts. We then deal with the reality, and all its conditions, according to the rules of Fiqh.

**Three:** One of the basic Islamic concepts of freedom, which we can hardly find in any other system or philosophy, is the liberation of man from being a slave to wealth or desire. In an authentic hadith, the Prophet says: ‘Miserable is the one who worships money; miserable is the worshipper of fine clothes. Miserable and loser is he. If he suffers adversity, may he not be able to overcome it’.<sup>4</sup>

**Four:** When we consider the scope of freedom in Islam, it is necessary to differentiate between what a person believes and what he declares in public. Islam allows disbelievers to live in its land, under certain conditions. These include that they do not abuse Islam or religion and they do not declare their disbelief publicly. Confusion in this area occurs when the two situations are not clearly distinguished. Some people cite the fact that disbelievers lived side by side with Muslims throughout Islamic history to establish laws that permit disbelievers to advocate their religion at the same level as Islam, and even to criticise Islam and raise doubts about it. This is wrong. There is a clear difference between having their own belief and practising it within their own community on the one hand, and preaching ideas that are contrary to Islam on the other.

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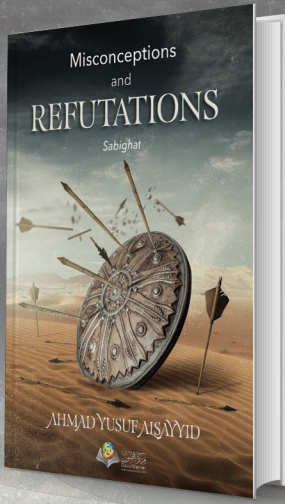
<sup>4</sup> Related by al-Bukhari, 2,887.

Akin to this is the confusion between the freedom Islam allows people to ask any question about matters of religion they do not understand, and the deliberate circulation of such problems among people to create confusion in their minds. With regard to seeking knowledge and reassurance, Islam provides a great scope of freedom. Allah says: ‘When Abraham said, “My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead”, He replied, “Have you, then, no faith?” “Indeed, I have”, said Abraham, “but I only wish my heart to be fully reassured”.’ (2: 260). ‘If you are in doubt concerning what We have bestowed on you from on high, ask those who read the Scriptures [revealed] before you’. (10: 94).

It is important to keep the door open for anyone who wishes to ask questions or discuss any issue, whether they seek to learn or to clear doubts. The attitude of publicising and circulating doubts so as to create confusion is a totally different scenario. It must not be allowed. What I have said in this short volume is merely a few points for further discussion. Readers may have recourse to various books which deal with the question of freedom in Islam and which explain it in detail.







I have sought to list some important works of reference covering most areas for readers who wish to study the problem further. This book is based on courses.

conducted and to which I gave the title: 'How to deal with contemporary intellectual doubts?' The book, however, presents the material in a new form, with some additions and improvements.

AHMAD YUSUF ALSAYYID



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