

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



ISLAM AND SOME CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

by DR. HASSAN HATHOUT

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○ Almighty God, guide our steps,
and chart our course on the straight path
May our deeds be solely devoted to You.

○ Lord, ease our sojourn on this earth
and alleviate our exit from it.

May our best day be the day we
behold Your glory

Your servant
who is destitute without You

Hassan Hathout

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ISLAM AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Reclaiming Islam to our contemporary life is the major task facing dedicated Muslim thinkers and activists. The reduction of Islam to empty rituals and the imprisonment of Islam with a past historical period, deprived us of the empowering energy and the guiding light that we needed to live the present and prepare for the future.

These collections are from Friday sermons addressing contemporary issues from an Islamic perspective. The speaker is a known Muslim leader who has been focussing on islamic thought and activism for more than half a century, hence he is offering through his talks a refreshing approach to Islam, that a contemporary person living in America will find it both education and inspiring.

The present collection was made possible by the hard work undertaken by Dr. Aslam Abdullah, Editor-

in-Chief of the Minaret, Shireen Noah and Khadeeja Abdullah in copy editing, proof reading and type setting. May Allah reward their efforts.

DUA QUOTED FROM THE QURAN

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, The Compassionate, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment, You only do we worship, and to You do we cry for help. Guide us to the Straight Path, the path of those on whom you have bestowed Your Grace; those whose fortune is not wrath, and who go not astray.

God, let my entry be by the Gate of Truth and Honor. Likewise may my exit be by the Gate of Truth and Honor.

Grant me from you an Authority to aid me.

So order me that I be grateful for your favors which you bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may work the righteousness that will please you. Make me by Your Grace, in the ranks of your righteous servants.

I seek refuge with you, from the suggestions of Satan. I seek refuge with you lest they should come near me.

Grant your forgiveness and mercy, for you are the best of those who show mercy. Make me one who establishes regular prayers. Also raise such amongst my offspring. Accept my prayer. Cover us with Your Forgiveness, me, my parents, and all believers, on the day that reckoning will be established.

Increase me in knowledge.

Enable me to disembark with Your Blessing, for You are the Best to enable us to disembark.

Truly I am in desperate need, for any good that You have sent me.

Put me not amongst the people that do wrong, save me from the people given to do wrong. Send us not into the company of those who do wrong. Make us not a trial for the people who do wrong. Praise be to Allah, Who has saved us from the people who do wrong. Grant me victory over people who do mischief.

Forgive me, my parents, all who enter my house in faith, and all believing men and believing women.

Allah suffices me. There is no God but He. On Him is my trust. He is the Lord of the Supreme Throne.

Bestow on us mercy from You. Dispose of our affairs for us in the right way. Pour on us patience and constancy. Take our souls unto You, as Muslims. Our God, let not our hearts deviate now, after You have guided us. Grant us mercy from Your own Presence, for You are the Granter of bounty without measure.

Avert from us the wrath of Hell. For its wrath is indeed an affliction grievous.

In You do we trust, and to You do we turn in repentance, and You are our final goal.

Make us not a trial for the unbelievers. But forgive us, for You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise. Remove the penalty from us, for indeed, we are believers. Condemn us not, if we forget or fall into error.

Lay not on us a burden like that which You laid on those before us. Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our Protector. Help us against those who stand against the faith.

Our Lord, we have heard the call of one calling to faith, "Believe you in your God," and we have believed. Forgive us then our sins. Blot out from us our iniquities.

Take to Yourself our souls in the company of the righteous. Grant us what You did promise through Your messengers, and save us from shame on the Day of Judgment, for You never break Your promise.

We believed in what you have revealed, and we followed the messenger, then write us down amongst those who bear witness.

Your reach is over all things, in mercy and knowledge. Forgive then those who turn in repentance and follow Your path. Preserve them from the penalty of the blazing fire.

Grant that they enter the Gardens of Eternity, which You have promised to them, and to the righteous amongst their fathers, their wives, and their posterity. For You are the Exalted in Might, full of Wisdom.

Forgive us and our brethren who came into the faith before us. Leave not in our hearts rancor against those who have believed.

Our Lord, You are indeed full of kindness, most merciful.

Grant unto us spouses, and offspring, who will be the comfort of our eyes.

Give us the grace to be the leaders of the righteous.

Perfect our light for us, and grant us forgiveness, for you have the power over all things.

We do turn to God in repentance. We shall but return to God. To God surely we will return.

Praise be to Allah, and Peace on His servants that He has chosen. Glory be to your God, Allah, the Lord of honor and power. Free is He from what they ascribe to Him and peace on the messengers and praise be to Allah, Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds.

A FRIEND TOUCHED BY THE QURAN

A friend, called Hussain, shared with me a story. One day he received a phone call from someone whom he didn't remember, so he asked who it was. The caller said, "I was in your class in elementary school, 30 years ago"

Hussain replied that it was good to hear the man's voice again, but he was not quite sure he would remember him.

The man said, "I'd like to invite you to dinner." My friend replied, "This is strange and unexpected, is there an occasion?"

The man said, "Yes there is. I will tell you the occasion later on."

He accepted the invitation, and when they met, they were barely able to recognize each other; the man told Hussain that what had made him take this step was that verse from the Quran, that said:

“Those who have the *taqwa*, if they are afflicted by the devil, they remember and immediately they regain their sight.” The man explained, “It seems this verse gave me an inspiration to review my life. I am sorry that it took me so long to remember, but the verse gave me new insight. When I read that it said, that “They remember and immediately regain their sight,” this prompted me to extend the invitation to you.” Hussain asked why.

His friend said, “In elementary school, we went on a field trip, and at lunch time, you opened your lunchbox and found it empty.”

Hussain said, “Yes, I remember that.”

His friend said, “I would like to tell you that it was I who, thinking it funny, threw away your lunch, and after reading this verse in the Quran, I feel it on my conscience. So I invited you to meet me, both to give you a dinner, to take the place of your lost lunch, and to say I am sorry, hoping you will accept my apology.”

It was a happy reunion. The friend told Hussain, “This is not the only thing I have done today. I went back to that elementary school, taking a book, and told the librarian that thirty years ago I had borrowed the book and, since I liked it, I had kept it. Now, I said, having discovered that I had been wrong, I came to apologize, to return the book and to give a donation to the school. And that’s not all; I have called several people, whom I had back bitten, or hurt or resented, and to

every one I could find I confessed and apologized. This has transformed my life. It is as if I am born again, and living with a new perspective. I feel much purer and closer to Allah, Praised and Exalted be He.

The message is that people sometimes do wrong and allow it to pass. But if they scrutinize the Quran, and try really to understand its meaning, they may wake up to reality again; Allah is ever-watching and you must stay with God, and with the guidance He gave you in the Quran.

How many times have we committed transgressions and sins and have just forgotten about them? Or, we consider them just memories, needing no action to be taken upon them. A good test of your relation to the Quran is to try to correct your past, your present and your future.

It is beautiful to be a Muslim, and sometimes we boast of being one-fifth of humanity. But this doesn't look like a world that contains one billion Muslims. The majority are blind, or forgetful, or they remember but take no action.

Allah gave us not a message to read, but a message to understand, obey and comply with. The Quran should be our life before we dare to call ourselves Muslims. We ask Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, to give us the courage to say, "I'm sorry" and to correct what needs to be corrected.

PURIFICATION OF THE SOUL

Between man and Allah is a relationship, for Allah says, "*We have blown into him of Our Spirit;*" (32:9) and between man and mud is a relationship: for he was created *from mud and unto mud he will return.* (20:55) Some people strengthen their relationship with Allah, while others devote their lives to mud.

Our bodies are exactly like those of animals, so it is not our biology that makes us human; we are a spiritual being housed in the biological container which is our body. The mud in us is like mud in a glass of water. If stirred up, the water becomes turbid, and one cannot see through it. Only when the mud sinks to the bottom is the water clean and transparent. That is why if a man is agitated by anger or hatred, envy or selfishness, and succumbs to material or sensual pleasures, he becomes like a drunken man, and cannot see his way to the straight path.

A clean mirror reflects a clear image, but if dust accumulates, on it layer upon layer, it becomes a blind mirror, that cannot reveal or reflect. Hence we need to keep our mirrors clean and our souls tranquil. And what better way to achieve this than with the remembrance of Allah, and by keeping His company continually, and by asking Him, as our beloved Prophet did, to guard us and not leave us to ourselves even for as long as the blink of an eye or even less. For when you are disconnected from Him you become like a wire that has lost its electricity and cannot generate power or light.

Prophet Mohammed once asked a group of people: if a man lived on the bank of a flowing river, and bathed regularly in it, would any dirt remain on him? They answered, of course, no. And this indicated that our souls may similarly be washed clear and clean.

But let our first duty be to uphold the *Sharia* that Allah revealed in His Quran and through the voice and model of His Prophet. Allah tells us that the best way His servants can get closer to Him is to understand what Allah has mandated as obligatory and make every effort to perform it, and then the road is ever open, and the *nawafel* carry such a man closer and closer until Allah – as He states in the *hadith qudsi* (which are divine ideas paraphrased by the Prophet)- becomes his eyes, his ears, his hands and his feet, and indeed until he becomes a divine servant, who can say to something, “Be,” and it is.

But beware, for the *shaitan* (Devil) may set a trap for you even where you least expect it: and that is along the straight path of Allah, as the Quran reports that *Iblis* (the Devil) saying to Allah.

Beware of thinking that your importance is increasing, and of becoming pleased with yourself, for this is the sliding slope to arrogance, and arrogance was verily the original sin, since *Iblis* refused to bow to Adam, who was made of dust, while *Iblis* was made of fire.

And beware especially of ever thinking that you have come so close to Allah that you can exempt yourself from any of the pillars of Islam or from its morality and its basic do's and don'ts, for no one is ever permitted to graduate beyond them.

And whoever you are, and I do mean whoever you are, as you look at any person, and I do mean any person, ask yourself the question, "Do I know whether he or myself is closer to Allah?" The answer, of course, is "no." So be humble, because any person to whom you may feel superior, may in fact be closer to Allah than you.

And what human being thinks that he will not need the forgiveness of Allah one day? But as you ask to be forgiven, you must prove yourself a forgiver. And so among your fellow human beings seek forgiveness when you are wrong, and grant forgiveness when you are wronged.

Live not with resentment, rancor, or bitterness, for when Allah dwells in a heart, He leaves no space but for

love. A believing heart is a loving heart. Loving hearts are the friends and company to faith; and yet sick and wicked hearts are its patients to heal and cure, and no doctor should hate or desert his patients. *Iman* (faith) does not begin with rules and regulations or do's and don'ts; the ultimate goal and essence of Islam's message was made clear to the messenger, as Allah addressed him: "We have sent you for none else but mercy to the worlds." The primary *Sunna* for us to follow is essentially love, mercy and compassion, the ingredients of the Prophet's personality. One day the *kaffirs* (unbelievers) were particularly nasty and aggressive to him, and when Jibril offered to crumble the mountains onto their heads, the loving and beloved Mohammed answered: "Leave me, Jibril. May it please you, Allah, to forgive my people, for indeed they do not know."

And concerning another group of wrong-doers Allah addresses his Prophet, "Except for a few of them, you will always catch some of them committing acts of treachery. You must pardon them and overlook it: God loves those who act kindly."

Allah is the Light of the heavens and earth. In His company you are delivered from darkness into light. Only He can give you light. His light goes before us and to our right, and in His face and from his generosity we ask Him to complete our light for us, and He will make us signs of His mercy and show us rays of His light.

At that point, we should reach out to those who stumble in the dark and accept their care as our duty. For as Allah gave you the shining lamp, He put on you the duty of rescuing those whose eyes cannot see. Convince them that what you are offering is medicine to heal and not poison to kill. Approach them with a smile on your face, for ours is the religion that made the smile a *sadaqah* (charity), and ask Allah to give you a loving nature and to maintain for you the blessing of the smile.

Our beloved Prophet had a very loving nature; if only his followers would understand and emulate it. The Prophet forgave his enemies, and when victorious over them he pardoned them making them free people. He would give his hand to the maid in the streets of Medinah and follow her to wherever she wanted to take him. He would shorten the prayer because a child was crying for its mother, and prolong his *sujood* because his grandson was pretending to ride on his back, and he didn't wish to interrupt the boy's pleasure. He would notice the agony of the mother sparrow, and order that her chick be returned to her. He would teach that offering water to a thirsty dog could lead to heaven, and imprisoning a cat could lead to hell. He would tilt the vessel for the cat to drink. He would give all he had to a needy person. He would stand up in respect at the funeral of a Jew. He would give away his cloak to shroud a deceased man whom he knew to have harbored extremely ill feelings towards him.

What a pity and what a disappointment if Muslims' observance of the *sunna* focuses on how the prophet dressed and what foods he liked, whereas the emphasis should be put on studying his psyche, his noble motivation and his loving nature. To his heart he pointed and said: "*Taqwa* (consciousness of God) is here," and he taught that Allah does not look at our looks or our image but at our hearts and doings. It wasn't by his clothes or his food or his material possessions that the prophet towered over all men. And so to observe the *sunna*, follow his reality, not just his appearance. Be solid gold, not gold-plated.

But when we cling to the hand of the messenger, it is only so that he will lead us to the Sender. For He is the ultimate goal. He sent the Quran as our road map and sent Mohammed as the guide for the journey. Without the Quran and *sunna* we lose our way and go astray.

Let no one therefore lure us to deviate from the path, or promise us a short cut or an alternate way. For when the reckoning comes we will be judged upon the Quran and *sunna*, and will be measured by that yardstick. And accountability will be individual.

The Quran says, "*Each soul is responsible only for its own self,* " and repeats this five times, in *suras* 6:164, 17:15, 35:18, 39:7 and 53:38. No father or mother, friend or brother, king or sultan, sheikh or teacher, superior or chief, and no creed or breed will be accepted from

you as an excuse or justification, for indeed Allah says: *"Each soul is held as a pledge for what it has earned."*

Comes night and sleep closes the eyes, stills the body and silences the tongue. But the heart keeps beating and will not sleep or slumber for as long as there is life. Let your remembrance of Allah therefore be a function of your heart. Let it sound with your heartbeat and not just with the movement of your tongue or the swaying of your body. And be constant; and persevere. The road is long but you have to keep marching. The mountain is high, but you have to keep climbing. There is water under the desert so you must dig deep.

O Allah. You Allah, First and Last, Outer and Inner, *Quddoos* and *Wadood*. Write us from You, with You, to you, and of You.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Crime is symptomatic, having a chain of causation, and the best way to combat it is to prevent its causes. The Islamic *sharia* means to fight crime before it happens with a highly comprehensive legal system. The *sharia* protects society from crime by building three lines of defense, namely:

(1) The establishing and defining of the concept of an "Islamic conscience," a social force that has no match. The basis of the *sharia* is the firm belief in Allah and the awareness that His ever-watching eye is always there, marking all you do (or even think). In the Prophet's words, "Heed Him as if you see Him, for even though you do not see Him, He sees you." The development of conscience is influenced by family upbringing, by the educational system, the media, and the general moral environment of the community. None of these is exempt from the necessary regulation by law.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental value in Islam, but when free expression is abused for the purpose of dis-affecting the public or private conscience, it transgresses its boundaries. The *sharia* protects free speech within bounds, and also protects the rights of others from travesties of untruth. Morals cannot be sustained in a legal vacuum.

(2)The prevention of the material causes that can lead to crime. An all-encompassing economic reform to fairly answer the needs of all men and to distribute wealth more equitably may be the only complete ultimate means of crime prevention. Islam acknowledges private ownership and unreservedly defends it. The primary and most famous five goals of the *sharia* are the preservation and protection of "Life, Mind, Religion, Ownership, and Family."

There is no limit on the amassing of wealth in Islam, as long as it is done by lawful means. In capitalistic societies this is, however, the whole story. In Islam it is not. The rights of the poor and needy must also be preserved. Society must be integrated, and its parts mutually complementary, and, as the Prophet has said, "Allah has answered the needs of the poor in the money of the rich." This does not mean that we should extort money from the fortunate, hardworking rich and put it into the pockets of all poor persons, including the least energetic and most parasitic members of society. Aimless beggary is not allowed in Islam. Islam holds that respectable,

gainful employment is a human right, to be guaranteed to every able citizen. The disabled are the collective burden of society. Technological advancement cannot, for instance, be left ruthlessly to shrink the need for labor, inflating the ranks of the unemployed. It should be calibrated with the emergence of new labor opportunities. The same applies to transferring large industrial contracts to cheaper labor abroad, simultaneously laying off workers at home in a cavalier spirit. As the caliph Umar said: "If hands are not engaged in work that pleases Allah, they will surely become engaged in what displeases Him."

(3)The use of penal law. Obviously, punishment is not preventative, except to the degree that it dissuades others from committing crimes. Its punitive role serves the fulfillment of justice and adds to the feeling of safety in the community by affirming that the criminal cannot commit his crime and get away with it. The degree of punishment should vary with the heinousness of the crime and the degree of it perpetrated.

The Islamic penal code has some unique and interesting features. Not all sins are considered legal crimes. A good example is adultery, which is considered a grave sin in Islam, punishable by God, unless the culprit repents and engages in good behavior and charitable deeds, in which case the gates of God's mercy and forgiveness are flung open before him/her. Adultery may also become a legal offense, liable to court trial and ver-

dict, but only if certain legal prerequisites are fulfilled. Four witnesses of unblemished record are required to give testimony of having seen the "complete" sexual act (like a Kohl rod inside its container) and to identify without doubt the man and woman involved. Obviously this almost never pertains in real life. If any of the four witnesses differs with others on any detail, the case of adultery, in which a guilty verdict would imply the punishment prescribed by the Quran, is dismissed. In addition, the four witnesses would be subject to a charge of slander, and would be given the punishment specified for it in the Quran.

Specified crimes for which the Quran names a particular punishment are called *hudood* (from the singular *hadd*). They are very few in number and, like the rituals of worship, are constant and unchanging. The *hudood* include adultery, slander, theft, and murder (with several sub-classifications). All other kinds of criminal behavior are subject to *taazir* punishments, prescribed by the legislature, and open to change under various social circumstances. These make up the overwhelming majority.

The delicate balance between the public interest on one hand and the rights of individuals on the other is a cardinal feature of Islamic penal law. Some crimes maybe pardonable at the behest of the victim (plaintiff), while others may not, if they pertain to society's interests and safety (which are juridically called the rights of

God). The degree of the punishment is increased until it fulfills its deterrent purpose, so that crime does not remain one step ahead of the law, a syndrome that afflicts many societies that extol individuality at the expense of society. All these safeguards to protect the rights of the plaintiff are wisely balanced by a series of juridical rules intended to ensure justice and protect the rights of the defendant as well. A "capacity to commit crime" must be established (i.e., the precondition required for a crime to have been committed, that is, that a person is free, sane, beyond puberty or the age of 15 years, whichever is less, also that he/she is not under duress or coercion). The crime must be mentioned in the text of the penal law. A confession under pressure of any sort is not valid. The element of doubt should be invoked, according to the saying of the Prophet: "To err towards vindication is better than to err towards unjust punishment." The method of gathering evidence should be lawful and legitimate, otherwise the evidence is void.

Umar thought to catch some citizens drinking in their courtyard, but to do this he had to climb on a stone and look over the wall. The people confronted him with three irregularities that he had committed, according to the Quran : spying on them, not using the door, and not having prior permission. These complaints were sufficient to cause his case to be dismissed.

A judge cannot rule based on his own personal information but on due process only (though he may decline the case and present himself as a witness). A judge may not pass a verdict while angry. The judiciary have an inviolable immunity. The retraction of a confession annuls it. The suspect is innocent until proven guilty. Witnesses are not to be pressured or intimidated.

Many have attempted to profit from castigating the *sharia*, accusing it of being too harsh. They lose sight of the fact that the firm handling of one criminal is indeed a mercy to hundreds of prospective victims. They often complain that the *hadd* of theft, the amputation of a hand, is particularly cruel. In fact, however, over 99 percent of all theft cases belong to the domain of *ta'azir* penalties, where the *hadd* does not apply.

The legal prerequisites for the *hadd* place punishment closer to the realm of theory than practice: The stolen object has to be of certain minimal value. It must have been stolen while locked up for safekeeping. Stolen objects cannot belong to certain relatives of the accused, due to the possibility that they might become his property by inheritance. Stolen property cannot belong to the public treasury, since the accused, by virtue of his citizenship, shares in the general ownership. The thing stolen may not be something that loses value quickly. Stolen property cannot be so designated if it belongs to a spouse. Embezzlement or bribery are not distinguished as theft. The accused is dismissed if he

is a first-time criminal. Criminal intent must be clearly established.

The crime is invalidated if committed because of dire need or during a famine. Reasonable doubt mitigates the "*hadd*," as do repentance or the surrender of the perpetrator before being arrested. It is only after all these conditions have been carefully observed that the *hadd* penalty can possibly be applied. At this point, a convicted criminal has no one to blame but himself.

After a year of famine, Umar suspended the application of the *hadd* penalty for theft. A merchant once came to him with two servants that had stolen from him. They had justified their theft by the fact that the merchant had not given them enough to eat. Umar dismissed the case and warned the merchant: "If they do it again for the same reason, it will be your own hand that I chop off and not theirs."

Although there is much in Islamic countries that calls for evaluation and criticism, the effects of *sharia* outstanding examples of civility to all. When Westerners see that shopkeepers in Saudi Arabia safely leave their shops open and unguarded without anxiety, when going to the mosque for prayer, or that women can roam the streets of Cairo and other Islamic cities at midnight without fear of rape, robbery, or harassment, they are pleasantly startled. Such wonders seem unbelievable to residents of Los Angeles, New York, or most modern, "civilized," non-islamic cities of our time.

RAMADAN AND SELF-RESTRAINT

In the flurry of holidays which proliferate in this country, like Mother's Day, Father's Day, Secretary's Day, Valentine's Day, President's Day and so on, I have often pondered what would happen if a day to be called Self-Control Day were added to the list; it would be on the pattern of a Ramadan fasting day.

It is not that I am telling Americans to become Muslims. It is not even that I am suggesting to them that such a day would derive from Islam, but that I would like this day to exist even as a purely civil holiday, on the lines of one day of Ramadan, during which food, drink, sex, violence, cheating and so on would be restricted.

If this holiday were adopted in America, what would be the American scene on that day? What would be the statistics of crime, rape, violence, drunk driving, drugs and all the evils we know in our society?

Such a day, I believe, would make a great difference in American life, that might persist through the following days, because the missing element in our society is self-control.

Every evil can be traced back to the lack of self-control and self-restraint. Remember that boy who stood by the freeway, shooting at passing cars, and who, when arrested, said, "I felt like shooting someone"? Remember the boy who killed his mother, remember the scores of crimes that happen every day, in our streets, in our homes, in our offices and in our businesses?

All of them, without exception, can be traced to the lack of self-control. Although it is easy to know what is right and what is wrong, some are unable to restrain themselves and just say no!

Allah in His Grace gave us, not just a day of self-control, but a full month of drilling and exercising ourselves in self-control and self-restraint, by the fasting of the month of Ramadan.

There is no better exercise, and just as you exercise your body's muscles by putting strain on them to make them stronger, so Ramadan exercises our will-power, making us restrain ourselves so that our will becomes stronger.

It is also the month in which Allah blessed us by revealing His Book, the Quran-the month when Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, extends the invitation to us to be His guests, in mosques and in our homes and gath-

erings, a feast during which we feed upon the Quran, the Holy Book of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He.

The Quran is a great blessing of Allah, imparted to mankind through His Prophet. When we read the Quran, for every single letter we read, there is a reward(a *Hassana*), whether we understand what it is or not.

But this generosity is coupled with the gift of the common sense to know that reading the Quran is not an end in itself, but that we should seek to understand it and ponder it.

"Will they not then ponder on the Quran? or are the locks bolted over the hearts?" (4:82)

The third and final goal is to live the Quran and to implement it as a manual for life. And unless we know that, and implement the Quran in our lives 24 hours a day, we are short of answering the right of the Quran upon us.

We do all this for our own benefit, so that we become better, feel better, live and die better, and are resurrected better on the Day of Judgment. And it is amazing, with all this generosity for our own good, that we are also rewarded for it. We don't pay the price, but we are given the reward.

We should be grateful to Allah. Gratitude to Allah is not just the word on the tongue, it is the inclination of the heart and the direction of the deeds we do.

We ask Allah to make of us a Quranic nation, Quranic in its vision, in its hearing, in its living, in its

conscience, in this world and in the hereafter, *Inshallah*. Such a nation has a lot to give. Modern society and modern civilization are not in need of further material gains. They do not lack in technology, or in science, or in riches, they lack in values, and we have those values. And who knows, maybe we can succeed in persuading America is to act on one of our values, by establishing a Self-Control Day, and by establishing the teaching of self-control in our schools and institutions.

MARTYRDOM OF AL-HUSSEIN

Allah, praised and exalted be He, and His Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, have taught this *Umma* to be an *Umma* of dignity, to reject injustice, and to correct things that should be corrected.

The Quran says, "*Dignity is to God and His messenger and to the Believers;*" (63:8)

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "The best of the martyrs are Hamza (the Prophet's uncle, who was killed in the battle of Uhud) and a man who stood up in the face of a tyrant, and ordered him to act justly and rejected his injustice, so the tyrant killed him."

The Prophet also said, "If a day comes when my *Umma* does not say to the unjust, "You are unjust," then it is farewell to them, they are better buried beneath the ground, than walking on it."

Today is the 10th of Muharram, which is the day of commemoration of one of those martyrs who deserves to be the kin of Hamza and his equals. Today is the commemoration of the martyrdom of Al-Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him.

The story is well known. After the Prophet died, Abu Bakr was chosen Caliph; after Abu Bakr, Omar; after Omar, Uthman; but then there was a revolt against Uthman and he was assassinated. Then the *Umma* insisted that Ali Ibn Abi Talib should be Caliph. He did not aspire to this, but they told him that if the news of Uthman's death were to go to the corners of the Empire, without a new Caliph having been named, the situation would be chaotic. So Ali accepted to be the Caliph and all the people gave him their pledge of loyalty.

But Muawiya, the governor of Syria, refused to give his pledge. He said, "Hand over to us the killers of Uthman, so that we may avenge him on them."

The Caliph insisted that this matter was a matter for the state, and for due legal process. Upon which, Muawiya, who had been the ruler of Syria for ten years, and who because of his prior generosity to the people, was able to raise a large army, marched on Medinah, in order to attack Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib. At that time, Imam Ali could not retreat, because, the state would look ridiculous if its Caliph yielded to such a rebel. So, Ali tried to negotiate with Muawiya, to avoid bloodshed. But alas, the other side was adamant, and fighting was inevitable.

When the battle started, the army of Ali Ibn Abi Talib appeared to be winning. On the brink of Muawiya's defeat, a clever associate suggested to him that his soldiers raise the Quran on their spears, saying, "Let us arbitrate by the Quran." Now it became impossible for Ali's army to press the attack, even though Ali told his men that it was a trick. They agreed to arbitration. Muawiya dispatched on his behalf Amr Ibn Al Aas, the cunning man who had master minded the plan. The side of Ali Ibn Abi Talib proposed Abu Musa Al Ashaari, who was a very pious man, but no match in cunning for Amr.

Amr suggested that the nation was sick of their conflict, and proposed, "Why not end the disagreement by letting the people elect a new Caliph?" He was able to convince Abu Musa that this should be done. When it was time to report to the others, Amr very politely said to Abu Musa, "After you, you are my elder."

Upon which, Abu Musa stood up and told the people, "I depose my friend, as I remove this ring from my finger." But when it was Amr's turn he said, "I confirm my friend as I put this ring on my finger." There was chaos, and there was a *fitna*. Three people decided to kill Ali, Muawiya and Amr. Muawiya was attacked when he went to the mosque, but the assassin struck him in the back without killing him; Amr did not go to the mosque and was spared; unfortunately, the one who was killed was Ali Ibn Abi Talib.

After Ali, his eldest son, Al Hassan, took over, and Muawiya approached him. Al Hassan was a farsighted and peace-loving man. He didn't want bloodshed amongst the Muslims. So he agreed with Muawiya that as long as Muawiya lived he would be the Caliph. When Muawiya died, Al Hassan would become Caliph.

Unfortunately, events intervened. Muawiya bought the death of Al Hassan by bribing his wife and promising to marry her to his son Yazid. So Al Hassan was poisoned by her over a period of time, and he died. Then Muawiya did something unprecedented in Islam. Using both gold and sword, he compelled the people to swear the oath of loyalty to his son Yazid as the Crown Prince, to be Caliph after him. This was a complete novelty in Islam.

The people resented this, but, by gold and sword, they were subdued, except for a few. Time went on, until Muawiya himself died.

Yazid, the Crown Prince, who was neither known, nor famous for his piety, declared himself the Caliph, and sent the leaders of his troops to extract the pledge of allegiance from the people. Whoever rebelled would be beheaded. Only a few refused to give their oath. Yazid was very keen to get the pledge of Al-Hussain. Of course, Al-Hussain refused. The people of Iraq invited him to come to them, promising 100,000 troops to support him.

So Al-Hussain took his family, who were the family of Rasul Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, and headed toward Al Kufa.

But unfortunately, Yazid hurriedly sent an army to Al Kufa, which overwhelmed the people and extracted the pledge from them.

Some of them sent a messenger to warn Al-Hussain, but unfortunately that messenger was intercepted and killed, and when the army of Yazid came and found the few troops of Al-Hussain, the two forces stood face to face. The army of Yazid had lost their water, and asked for water from Al-Hussain, and he allowed them to take some.

Then their leader asked Al-Hussain, "Shall I pray as imam for my troops, and you pray as imam for yours, or shall we all pray behind you, as the leader of the prayer?" They decided that all would pray behind Al-Hussain as the leader of the prayer. But immediately, instead of placing themselves behind him, the enemy forces surrounded Al Hussain, his family, and the few people with him.

When Al-Hussain and his family had finished their water, and wanted more, they were denied it. The little son of Al-Hussain kept crying, "Father, I am dying of thirst." So Al-Hussain asked the adversaries, not to give him water, but to give some to the children, and they refused even to do that.

Al-Hussain addressed his people, "Whoever wants to leave, is free to leave." He could sense the historical implications of the moment, because with his *basira* he could see ahead (into the future). If Al-Hussain withdrew, that would be the end of him. But there are moments to live and there are moments to die *fi sabilillah(i)* (in the path of Allah).

Al-Hussain chose to live and die *fi sabilillah*. So he remained, with seventy-two followers, to face an army of a hundred thousand.

The result of the battle was sealed, and Al Hussain was martyred, and his head cut off and taken to the Caliph in Damascus.

All the males with Al-Hussain were killed, except for a child, who was sick and feverish; that was Ali Zayn Al Abidin, the son of Al Hussain. His aunt Zaynab shielded him with her body. The women of the household of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, were driven across the desert, bareheaded, with their clothes in rags, until they came before Yazid.

But Zaynab, the sister of Al-Hassan and Al-Hussain, was very bold in the presence of Yazid, not fearing him, and she told him, "You are betraying Mohammad, peace and blessings be upon him. Is this what you do to the family of Mohammad?" They debated killing the little boy, but she said, "Impossible, you will have to kill me first to reach him." Fortunately, he was not killed, because he was the only continuum of the progeny of

the prophet. This battle happened at a place called Kerbala, on the 10th day of Al-Muharram. Since then, the *Umma* has seen lots of injustices, and lots of tyrants. What the *Umma* should never lose is that sense of faith which, when the time comes, will make it willing to sacrifice life for the cause of Allah.

In Islamic countries we suffer from tyrants, and outside their borders we suffer from Israel and from colonialism. Maybe the best advice to give the *Umma* is the saying of Allah in his Quran: "*Say: my prayer and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the Worlds.*" (6:162)

In the early days of Islam, facing the Persian Empire, the Muslim army sent an envoy, Saa'id Ibn Al Ans, to Rustom, the Persian leader; Saa'id told Rustom, "I am bringing to you people who love death, in the same way as you love drinking liquor."

This is putting life into its proper shape and size, so that as long as it is life in the cause of Allah, we live, but when in the cause of Allah, we should give our life then we give it. We should work on ourselves in order to acquire such a personality because only then will the *Umma* get rid of all its enemies, both inside and outside. It begins with your own heart. Work on it. This Independence begins by putting the life of the hereafter before the life of this world and its pleasures, and by filling your heart with the love of your fellow Muslims so that in solidarity you can face anything that comes.

BASICS OF SHARIA

This address will take us back to the basics of the Sharia. The *Sharia* is the sum total of injunctions addressing those who qualify as being eligible to bear their religious duties. It details the way of life that the Creator intends His created ones, who believe in Him, to abide by and to follow.

The primary source of the *Sharia*, of course, is the Quran, the very words of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, which He promised to preserve for us. Since its revelation it has been preserved, word for word and letter for letter.

It has not been altered or tampered with. Whatever is in the Quran is to us sacred. Whatever we hear from the Quran, our response is, "We hear and we obey."

To implement the Quran, the *Sunna* was necessary. That is the teachings of Prophet Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon him, in his capacity as Prophet. The

Prophet has drawn our attention to the fact that whatever he has said as a Prophet becomes a part of the *Sharia*, and hence is our religion.

Whatever he told us to be long to our religion, we abide by it, because Allah Himself, in the Quran, tells us to obey the Prophet. The Quran says:

"Whoever obeys the Prophet, has obeyed Allah." (4:80)

Allah also says in the Quran,

"Do whatever the Prophet commands you to do, and abstain from that which he forbade you, and heed Allah for his punishment is severe." (59:7)

Religious teachings are different from what the Prophet said just as a human being. The Prophet was determined to teach us to make that distinction.

The Hadith of the Prophet was narrated and collected after his death. It was not as unchangeable as the Quran. But in it the Prophet explained the Quran and showed us the Quran in the form of the behavior of a human being. When the wife of the Prophet was asked about his character, she said, "His character was the Quran."

So it was he that made us read the Quran, not only on paper, but also in his behavior.

There are somethings, which the Quran does not detail. The Quran orders us to observe our prayers, but it was the Prophet who taught us how to pray, how many *rakas* are in each prayer, what to do and how to perform the prayer. This is the *Sunna*, which complements the

Quran. These are the two basic sources of the *Sharia*.

In order to get to know what the Prophet said and taught, one of the most exact sciences, and one of the most precise branches of the science of history, was created. That is the science of the Hadith, which seeks to determine which *Hadith* are authentic, which are less so, which *Hadith* are possible and which are to be rejected. The science of the *Hadith* is perhaps the most exact branch of the science of history that humanity has ever known.

In order to implement the Quran and Hadith, we also need the Muslim mind, which doesn't look at things only on a superficial level. I would like to quote the example of Hadrat Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (*Radiallahu anhu*), may God be pleased with him.

He was one of the most knowledgeable people concerning the Quran, knowing its language, the circumstances in which its verses were revealed, and also understanding the wisdom that every verse of the Quran expresses.

So when he became Caliph, he stopped spending the *Zakat* money for public relation purposes. According to the Quran, one of the purposes of *Zakat* is to give money to a certain category of people in order to win their allegiance or their support for Islam, in order to prevent them from harming Islam and Muslims. When Umar ibn al-Khattab became Caliph, he stopped such payments. When he was asked about this, he said, "I am

not disobeying the Quran, because what is in the Quran is sacred; the wisdom of making such payments was valid in the days when Islam needed to pay money to gain support, and to make friends. But today, *al hamdu lillah*, Islam has become strong. Islam does not need the support of those people anymore, so therefore, I am not going to pay them any money from the *Zakat*."

The Quran and the Hadith are the constants of the *Sharia*; they are the unchangeable part of the *Sharia*, but require a good, intelligent, knowledgeable, deep understanding.

We know the punishment for theft in the Quran; yet, when a man brought his two servants to Umar, accusing them of theft, they admitted it, but said, "We did that because our master does not give us enough to eat." Umar said, "The punishment does not apply to them; go, and if you bring them back, and I find that they still do not have enough to eat, it is your own hand I'll cut off."

Other sources of the *Sharia* concern matters not specifically mentioned in the Quran or the Hadith. Because the *Sharia* is progressive, and is suitable for all times and places, the third source of the *Sharia* is the *Ijtihad*, the reasonable deduction, which must remain within the limits of the Quran and the *Sunna* of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him.

For example, drinking alcohol is specifically forbidden in the Quran. But the Quran and the Prophet never

said anything about cocaine or heroin. But then, *Ijtihad* tells us that since the reason for forbidding alcohol is its effect on the human mind, and since cocaine has a similar effect, then according to the *Sharia*, it also becomes *Haram*, forbidden.

In this way the scholars of our nation took thought, from very early times, to derive rulings about issues which were not mentioned by name in the Quran and the Hadith, all the time focusing their thought on the word and the spirit of the Quran and the Hadith.

That is why we have the *mazahib*, like Abu Hanifa, Shafie, Ibn Hanbal, Malik, and Al Jaafari; and within every *mazhab* there are various schools of thought, always addressing new situations in new places, and new times, facing new issues. We are confident that the *Sharia* can cope with all issues in all times, in all places, until the Day of Judgement.

Hence, there arose a new science in Islam, the science of *Fiqh*, and also the science of *usool ul Fiqh* (fundamentals of *Fiqh*), which attempted to derive rulings within the framework of the Quran and the Hadith. *Al hamdu lillah*, the *Sharia* has proved inexhaustible.

There was a time when Muslims lagged behind the times, and believed all they had to do was to go back to the writings of earlier scholars. When those works were written, they were the current rulings. With the passage of time and the appearance of new issues and new situations, they were not enough. The door of *Ijtihad* had to

be opened to create new rulings, and al hamdu lillah, Muslims are now determining rules for such things as test-tube babies and the new technologies of the space age.

You might read several books by different authors, all addressing the same issue, and perhaps coming up with different conclusions, which in Islam is all right, as long as a conclusion does not conflict with the Quran and the *Sunna* of the Prophet. On the foundations of their religion, Muslims are united, and in the secondary branches differences are allowed, provided none conflict with the Quran and the Hadith.

So we need not panic when we read or hear different opinions. There should be different opinions, and as a group we have a treasure of knowledge derived over the ages in the area of the science of Fiqh, which represents the hard work, deep thinking and *Ijtihad* of notable scholars, always within the boundaries of the Quran and the Hadith.

What is the Goal, the final objective of the *Sharia*? It can be put in these words: Mercy to the Worlds. Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, addresses his Prophet in the Quran saying, "*We have sent you for none else but Mercy to the Worlds.*" (21:107)

This is the total, all encompassing objective of the *Sharia*. Under this, the *Sharia*, catering to the needs of people and to their welfare, has divided the needs of the nation into three categories: first, the vital, the essential

needs of the nation, second, ordinary necessities; and third, complementary goals, that make life better and more enjoyable. All these are within the brackets of the *Sharia*.

So if we mention something like building bridges, or hospitals, or making traffic regulations, there are all within the *Sharia*. These are all included to make Muslim's lives, happy, well regulated and disciplined. When we examine the vital needs detailed in the *Sharia*, we find five well-known goals that have been called the Goals of the *Sharia*, or the *Maqassid*. These are the protection and preservation of:

1. Life
2. The Mind
3. Religion
4. Ownership
5. Family

Subdivision of Life includes: the sanctity of human life, the prohibition of killing, when to kill and when not to kill. It also includes: health and the prevention of disease, seeking treatment when we are sick, good nutrition and physical fitness, cleanliness, the environment, cultivation and planting to keep the environment fertile, and so on.

Mind is that without which we can not comprehend, and therefore insane people are exempt from accountability. This goal includes protecting the mind from anxiety and repression, ensuring freedom of

thought, and of the pursuit of knowledge, making this a religious dictate. It also includes protecting the mind from anything that numbs or kills it, such as drugs and alcohol.

Third, the *Sharia* protects freedom of religion, even if one is not Muslim. Entering Islam should be a voluntary action, not an imposed action. *"There is no compulsion in religion;"* (2:256) *"You say the truth from your Lord, whoever wishes will take the faith, and whoever wishes to reject it will do so."*(18:29)

We do not judge people, because the ultimate Judge (Allah) is the only one who may judge them.

We don't have the right in Islam to compel people to become Muslims. A subdivision of the category of Religion is protection from attack by the enemies of the religion, or protection of the lands of Muslims from attack. This area also deals with ensuring that everyone can worship freely; this includes the building of houses of worship, the observance of Ramadan, and so on.

Then, the right of ownership: You have the right to own property, but the ultimate Owner is the Creator, Allah. We own as trustees for what we own. Subdivisions of the category of ownership include how to make money in a lawful way, and the listening of what are prohibited ways of making money, which include cheating, fraud, usury, and theft.

The *Sharia* protects ownership. So, if you are protecting your possessions against attack, and are killed,

you will be a martyr. However, capital in Islam has a particular function. Whatever we have ultimately belongs to Allah; we are His agents or trustees, and we must manage and use our possessions according to His will and His plan.

The goal of protecting the family includes the concept of honor, the issues of marriage, whom to marry, whom not to marry, the right to have two parents and to know them, the clarity and purity of genealogy, prevention of adultery and whatever may encourage it, and so on. Each of these five main areas and their branches are guaranteed in two ways. First, by a code of moral behavior. But morality is not enough. So there is also a legal framework. We live by our morals, but we also have legal system, and both are human necessities.

Some religions live by morals only. The morality which asserts that, when someone smites you on the right cheek, you must turn the other cheek, is noble. But can people live by this? If I smite you and you take me to a judge, the judge will rule that I be punished. So there are both moral and legal wings in Islam. Islam caters for moralities and for societies. When a Christian friend asks me, "How do you feel about the separation of Church and State?"

I tell him, "Excellent, it is the best thing America and Europe have done."

Then he asks, "Why are Muslims keen on the *Sharia*, and want to live under Islamic law?"

I tell him, "The difference is that in Christianity there is no State, and in Islam there is no Church." If you apply Christianity as Jesus taught it, then you will give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's. In Christianity as taught by Jesus, there is nothing about taking into account a state and a law. When the church took power, and monopolized temporal authority, the church was wrong and the people had to separate the church from the state.

But when Muslims are living in their own land, where they are a majority and they want to be ruled by Islamic law, it is their democratic right. It would be folly to protest people's democratic wish to be ruled by Islamic law.

In Islam, if you remove from the Quran the parts about governing the Islamic state, then what will remain will be a *moshaf*, of thirty or forty pages. This is because Islam is a comprehensive way of life.

So, please let us in America separate the church and the state so that freedom of religion is safeguarded.

But please don't blame Muslims if they want to be ruled by Islam. It is their prerogative as a majority in their land, and nobody is in a position to tell them, "Do not be ruled by your religion."

All that we have mentioned so far, however, would be false, dead and empty without the foundation, and the foundation is in the heart. When you apply to people laws that are alien to them, the result will never be

a success. There is no alternative to faith in the heart and to the human conscience, which is God's voice in our inner self. That is why you must begin at the beginning, you must begin by solid faith in Allah, Praised and Exalted be He.

If you do not begin at the beginning, then you might qualify to be prescribed by the verse in the Quran that says,

"The Bedouins said we have attained to faith, say no, you have not attained the faith, just say, We have submitted, but faith is yet to enter your hearts." (49:14)

Therefore heed God as if you see Him, for even if you don't see Him, He sees you. Voluntarily surrender your life to God. When you do that, this will manifest and express itself in your dealings with your fellow Muslims and the entire world.

When I see imams, teachers, scholars, and other Muslims, fighting one another, backbiting one another, and going to non-Muslim courts to settle their differences, then I say that this is a huge building, but without foundations, and it will collapse.

I hope Muslims, with the help of Allah, will begin at the beginning, inside the heart. Then what we do outside will be a reflection of what is inside. We ask Allah to fill our hearts with Him, and His Love, and the love of our fellow Muslims and fellow human beings, and to improve us from the inside out, because if we start at the end we'll never reach the beginning.

ON DIVORCE

The subject of divorce is of grave concern to the Muslim *Umma* in America and crucial to its future. A strong community is made of strong units; the unit of a strong community is a strong family.

But I have been appalled at the rate of divorce among Muslims in the United States. It is even approaching the divorce rate of the rest of the American nation.

Moreover, there is so much confusion about the issue of divorce, among lay Muslims, and even amongst the Islamic leadership of many Islamic centers.

Divorce is the most hated of the things lawful to Allah in Islam. The Prophet, *pbuh*, said, as well, "The Throne of *Ar-Rahman* trembles for a divorce."

Many causes are identifiable as having contributed to this rising incidence of divorce among Muslims.

To start with, there is carelessness and superficiality in making the choice of the spouse in the first place. So many people marry women for their beauty, they fall in love and marry. Then six months or a year later, they are divorced.

The Prophet, *pbuh*, said, "A woman may be married for one of four things: her beauty, her family status, her wealth or her piety. So, take the reason of her religion."

Unfortunately, many Muslims, young and old, are attracted to superficial looks, which are not so durable. What is durable is the faith in the heart and the *taqwa* of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He.

Another of the causes of divorce is that, regrettably, many Muslim homes in America have become secular homes and not true Muslim homes.

The difference between a Muslim home and a secular home is that Allah has His continual presence in a Muslim home. Its members heed Him, and feel Him, and they fear Him as if they saw Him, for even though they don't see Him, He sees them.

This changes the equation, because then the relation between husband and wife becomes part of the relation with Allah, Praised and Exalted be He. There will be room to appreciate the saying of the Prophet, *pbuh*, "*Let the believer not forsake the believing wife. If he doesn't like something about her, then surely there are things about her he does like.*" (24:22) Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, enjoins us in the Quran,

"Let them forgive and forego, don't you like that Allah forgives you?"

To be forgiven by Allah, is to be forgiving to our fellow human beings, chief among who is one's own husband or wife.

Ignorance about divorce still prevails, even among our leader. Although divorce can be lawful, it should be the last resort, according to Islamic teaching.

It is like the operation of amputation; you do not amputate, unless it is the last resort.

Although Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, put the right to divorce in the hands of the husband' this means a grave responsibility on the part of the husband.

It means the hope that the husband will not be emotional; many hastily say to their wives, "You are divorced."

Thank God that such men are not entrusted with the atomic bomb, or, from a moment of anger, a catastrophe would resort.

Most Muslims do not know that Islam permits the right to divorce to be placed in the hands of the wife, if this is stated in the marriage contract..

Even if this is not done, anytime the wife feels that she has been wronged beyond repair, she can go to court and sue for divorce.

Islamic jurisprudence has divided divorce into two types. One is called "*altalaqu alsunni*" ("upon the teachings of the *Sunna*"), the other is called "*altalaqu*

albidaey.” (“unacceptable by the *Sunna*”) The first complies with the prescriptions of the Prophet, *pbuh*, and his teachings; the other does not comply with them, and is called a reprehensible innovation.

Scholars are divided in their opinions on this latter (*bidaey*) type of divorce, and some even say that it is not valid, since it is not according to the *Sunna* of the Prophet, and because the Prophet said, “Anything that doesn’t follow our traditions is to be rejected.”

These are some of the features of the rightful divorce, that is, divorce that complies with Islamic rules.

First, it should be out of necessity. It should be the only option remaining, and not just arise from the whim of the moment. It should be preceded by an attempt at arbitration.

The Quran says,

“Send an arbiter representing him and one representing her; if their intention is to reconcile, then Allah will guide them to reconcile.” (4:35)

Then, divorce should not be the result of anger, named by the *Sharia* “*talaqu ighlaq*.” If a man becomes so angry that at the peak of his anger he says to his wife, “You are divorced.” then this divorce is not valid; it is as if he has said nothing.

Similarly, when a drunken man divorces his wife, or a man is compelled (by threat of violence, for example if someone holds a knife to his throat) to say that he divorces his wife, these divorces are not valid.

The Prophet, *pbuh*, said,

"My nation are exempted from mistakes they do inadvertently, when they are forgetful (like taking a sip of water in Ramadan) and that which they are compelled to do."

Divorce is not valid, if it takes place during the menstrual period of the wife. If, during the time of menstruation, her husband says, "You are divorced," it doesn't count.

If, in the clean period after the menstruation, he divorces her after having had sex with her in that clean period, then this divorce is not valid, and is of no consequence.

If the husband complies with these restrictions, and divorces his wife, then the wife should not leave the home, as many do. If a man says to his wife, "You are divorced," she should stay at home until the waiting period, "the *iddah*," is over. This is the period of three menstrual cycles.

The wisdom of this waiting period is to give the husband a chance to review the situation, and maybe to change his mind. If the wife is still at home, and he feels the need to go to her, then there is the chance that he will do the reclamation, " *al morajaah*," telling her, "I cancel my divorce." Of course, her presence in the house encourages this to happen, Islam is very keen that families should not break.

Only when the *iddah* (period of waiting) has concluded does the time arrive for the divorce to be actually implemented.

Even if he changes his mind after the *iddah* is over, the husband has the right to remarry his wife, but the marriage requires a new marriage contract and a new dowry. He can do that once, and he can do it twice, but after two effective, implementable divorces, if a man divorces his wife for a third time, then he cannot remarry her, unless she marries another man and happens to get divorced from him; then, her former husband can remarry her again. But planning this, and hiring a man to marry and divorce the wife just to satisfy the technicalities, is not acceptable in Islam, and is called *Mohallal*. The Prophet, *pbuh*, says. "God curses that man who arranges to be a fake husband, and God curses the man who arranges for him to play that role."

Also, we know that after divorce, the wife must be compensated; this takes three forms.

One, the husband must support her for a specified period.

The second manner of compensation is to pay to her the part of dowry which was deferred. Usually upon marriage a part of the dowry is paid at the time of the marriage contract and another part is held in reserve, to be paid in case they divorce. And third, the wife deserves what Islam calls "*al mataa*" (something to enjoy life with); the Quran say,

"The divorcees have the right of this mataa. And it is enjoined upon the men who fear Allah." (2:241)

The amount of the *mataa* is flexible; there is no hard and fast rule. The *fiqh* in the various Muslim countries varies concerning this.

There is a rule that whatever is unjust is contrary to the *Sharia*. So, the amount of the *mataa* has to be fair to both parties.

Next comes documentation, "*al ish'had*." Allah says in the Quran,

"Thus when they fulfill their term appointed either take them back on equitable terms or part with them on equitable terms; and take for witness two persons from among you imbued with justice and establish the evidence (as) before Allah. Such is the admonition given to him who believes in Allah and the Last Day. And for those who fear Allah He (ever) prepares a way out." (65:2)

Of course we know that witnesses are necessary for both marriage and divorce, but obviously nowadays their presence is not enough; registration in official records is necessary, whether for marriage or divorce.

At the time of the Prophet, *pbuh*, when people married, two witnesses were enough, and when they divorced, two witnesses were enough. Later on, people had been no longer as pious as they were in the time of the Prophet, *pbuh*. In all Muslim countries now it is not permissible to marry only with two witnesses; there is also special civil servant who carries the register, and

who registers the couple as married. Then, he places this documentation in the state records. It is the same in the case of divorce; the documents must be registered with that same functionary, who is called "*al mazoon*."

Many scholars say that unless the divorce is documented it is not valid. In one Muslim country there was a case of a man divorcing his wife without legal documentation; and when she remarried a year later, her former husband reported it to the police, saying that she was living with another man while she was his wife. She did not have documentation providing her divorce. The scholars consider this a flaw in the laws of that country.

Because the *Sharia* does not condone injustice, documentation should be provided, so that the mutual rights and responsibilities of the two may be upheld, and so that injustice is not done to either party.

I am sorry to say that many times, in various Islamic centers, couples marry, and are issued a certificate which is not recognized by American law. Later, if the husband ejects the wife from their house, she has no proof of legal marriage, because the paper from the Islamic center is not a document recognized by the state.

Therefore, what we do is to insist that the couple go to the city administration, and get married there first, bringing the license to us, so that we can fill in the part of it left open for a record of religious marriage; we note that an Islamic marriage has been performed, and send the license to be registered.

The same should apply to divorce. In America, therefore, the divorce should be a court divorce, and should be documented. If a couple agree to divorce, then the divorce agreement should go to the court to be documented; if not, then the divorce case should go to the court to be decided.

A divorce obtained in an American court is an Islamic divorce; do not believe that it is not Islamic. Marriage is a civil contract, prescribed by the *Sharia*. So, living in a country, you abide by its laws; when a judge passes the verdict of divorce, this signifies a divorce, and the couple should no longer live together. Sometimes as a tax trick, a Muslim couple will obtain a legal divorce; they intend to reduce their taxes and still live together. They claim that their divorce is not an Islamic divorce, but only an American divorce. This is cheating, and Islam does not teach us to cheat. Muslims have to abide by our religion, and be honest.

We ask Allah to give us knowledge of His religion to and help us to abide by it.

MORE ON DIVORCE

There are two other issues we would like to clarify in relation to the subject of divorce. The first is my observation that among many Muslims the Islamic validity of an American court's ruling of divorce is still in doubt. That the ruling is recognized Islamically is a fact *Fiqh*, not a matter of personal opinion, and has been frequently reiterated by such top scholars as Sheikh Tantawi (Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar), Qaradawi the eminent *faqeeh*, and others in their writings and television appearances. What I came to realize, almost invariably in the cases that came my way, is that the Muslim immigrant husband seeking a divorce abhors the American system for financial reasons, and clings to the family laws of his home country, which make divorce far cheaper than it is in America; and to him, of course, this is an Islamic divorce. The question, however, is not that simple. Comparing fami-

ly laws in different Islamic countries, we find them to be quite different, although they are all Islamic. There is plenty of leeway in the *Sharia* for the legislating *faqeehs* in every country to formulate the laws to fit the particular circumstances of their societies at a given time. Some may lean toward one or another *mazhab*, or quote from than one. Some may modify their laws in response to the times, while others are rigid and ossified, clinging to the past, not only in family laws but in the other branches of *Fiqh* as well.

It is obvious that in some Islamic countries family laws must be reviewed in order to make them comply more fully with the justice required by the *Sharia*. Many Muslims face the situation where a divorced wife, has nowhere to go; she does not work, and lacks the support of a family. Here is relevant the function of the "*mataa*," specified by the Quran, and regrettably ignored by the family laws of many Muslim countries, which leave support to the sole discretion of the husband, who is in most cases angry and bitter, and who would prefer to pay nothing. Other Islamic countries, however, have moved toward giving a judge the authority of deciding the "*mataa*" according to the circumstances of the family, apart-of course- from the payment of support during the *idda*(3 months) and of the deferred part of the *Sedaq*, if any, as is universally observed. It was interesting and refreshing, to read in the *Los Angeles Times* a story about a divorce case that had come before a court in Tehran,

Iran. The court was presided over by both a male and a female judge. With the granting of the divorce came the ruling that the wife was to receive a sum of money equal to a salary that might have been paid to her for her work in the home from the day of her marriage to the day of the divorce.

The second problem we would like to discuss does not fall within the domain of divorce, but is rampant and quite often predisposes or leads couples to divorce. This is the phenomenon of the 50/50 ratio, which I call the curse of the fifty-fifty. When both partners are working, the husband may insist that the family budget should be covered equally by the earnings of both, in the ratio of 50/50. I have seen this happen even when the income of the husband far exceeds that of the wife. There is no taking into account of the fact that the family responsibilities are not equally shared, be they the cooking, cleaning, shopping, or care of the children. "Dollar for dollar" is the slogan raised by the husband, and pen-and-paper accounting dominates the family's life.

And why?

Because that is what is done in America!

Well! This is a free country, and nobody can compel another person to change. But for the benefit of those who are keen on abiding by Islam we state that in Islamic law the financial responsibility for the family rests with the husband. It is his legal obligation even if

the wife is rich or earns and income. She may contribute without limit to the family expenses, but in her case this is not a legal obligation but a matter of voluntary cooperation and compassion, and the desire to improve the lot of the family. The financial polarization of "me verses you" is not healthy, and- as I have noticed- always undermines the sense of being in unison which makes the family- not either the man or the woman, but both- a single unit. A Muslim man should not take as his ideal the common American family, which indeed has been suffering from the loosening of ties and a rising divorce rate.

The financial responsibility of the husband towards his family is the "degree" given to men by the Quran. It is the reason that in inheritance a brother's share is double that of his sister; this arises from the responsibilities decreed for men, from which women are exempt.

It is sad to see so many Muslim homes operating on a secular basis, and to see the divorce rate among Muslims rising, nearly catching up with the national rate. The spirituality, compassion and "love and mercy" mentioned in the Quran as between husband and wife seem to be draining away under the materialistic and selfish impulses pervading modern society.

MERCY IN ISLAM

Every once in a while, Brother Aslam Abdullah, the chief editor of *the Minaret*, magazine, does me the courtesy of inviting me to do some proofreading of the *Minaret* before it goes to print. That is how I came to read a letter from a Muslim sister from South Africa, who was not born a Muslim, but who embraced Islam. She had lost her husband and headed a single-parent family that included a daughter and a son—a Muslim family, with a mother doing her very best.

At the age of seventeen, her son committed suicide. It was a grave blow to her, losing her only son at that young age. Of course she had to face the immediate duties of burying her son. For that, naturally, she went to her Islamic center. You will be surprised to learn what happened. None of the officials of the Islamic center would take part in the funeral or the burial, saying that the boy had committed suicide, which was *haram*.

What a distortion of Islam! What cruelty has crept into the hearts of those Muslim brothers? Who among them had not disobeyed Allah at some times?

If the boy was guilty, what was the guilt of the mother? A Muslim mother, left with the body of a dead son.

It was as if they had already tried the son and passed a verdict on him, that he should remain unburied.

But such was the unfortunate event, until, with the help of two Muslim sisters and a group of Christians, the mother was able to arrange for the washing, the *Janazza*, and the burial of her son.

This was the Islamic behavior of some Muslims in this calamity. I have been pondering and wondering about some Muslims, whose Islam begins with knowledge of the rules and regulations, such that they might have a full Islamic library in their heads, yet they would see only the tree, and remain blind to the forest.

Before the stage of rules and regulations, before the stage of worship and behavior, before the stage of "haram" and "halal," "makruh" and "mandub," before memorizing and learning, we should not miss seeing the total picture of Islam, the totality of Islam.

The total objective of the mission of the Prophet, *pbuh*, was described to him by Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, in the Quran:

"We have sent you for nothing else but mercy to the worlds." (21:107)

Therefore it is so simple to conclude that anything which conflicts with mercy does not run parallel to with the mission of the Prophet, *pbuh*.

The Prophet described himself as "*Ar Rahmatu al mozjah*," the mercy presented by Allah to mankind. All his life, he was the best example of mercy. His was a mercy toward those both far and near, friend and enemy. That was the psychology of the Prophet, *pbuh*.

Yet some Muslims are unaffected by to this concept of mercy. They want to make themselves judges, passing judgment in situations where it is only for Allah to pass judgment. To have the arrogance to speak on behalf of Allah, condemning a dead Muslim to remain unburied, to me looks like the epitome of cruelty. Cruelty is incompatible with *Iman* (faith) and Islam.

At the time of the Prophet, *pbuh*, there was a man who was widely known to be a hypocrite. In secret, he allied himself with the enemies of the Muslims. The Prophet knew this, and many Muslims suspected it.

They thought of killing the man; the culprit's own son came to the Prophet and said, "O Prophet of Allah, let me kill my father."

The Prophet, *pbuh*, answered, "Never let it be said that the Prophet kills his followers. We only have the authority to implement the law. But if there is no legal crime then we cannot punish him."

Sometime later, that hypocrite died, and everybody felt relieved. Yet the Prophet, *pbuh*, sent his cloak to be

used as a shroud for that man, and went alone to conduct the *janazza* prayer over him. That was the conduct of the Prophet.

He knew that the man had been wrong, but what about the son who was faithful? Didn't the son deserve some courtesy? Or shall the son bear the burden of everybody's curses on his father?

What about that Muslim, the faithful mother with the body of her dead son on her hands? She cannot carry him, she cannot wash him, nor bring him to the funeral, nor bury him. Isn't it a shame that it was two women and a group of Christians who fulfilled these duties?

The essence of Islam is *Rahma*. Whoever will need the *Rahma* of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, has to build up a stock of it in his account. If you need the mercy of Allah, then give mercy. If you will ever need the forgiveness of Allah, then give forgiveness.

Yet we see Muslims now and then whose hearts are hard, whose emotions are dry, who know the rules and regulations, but miss the *Rahma*, which is the essence of Islam.

Islam, to me, can not be embraced halfway. It cannot be practiced by observing the rules and regulations and the do's and don'ts. The beginning of being Muslim is the total realization of the total mission of Islam, which is to be a mercy to the worlds.

Some time ago, I sat with one of those great scholars

who has plenty of followers. Our discussion arrived at the status of the illegitimate child in Islam. Very promptly, he said, "To be killed."

So I said, "O, Abdur Rahman, suppose you and I were standing in this room, and through the door comes a sweet five year old boy, with a ball in his hand. He smiles at us and throws us the ball, to play with him. Would you go and kill him?"

The man understood my message, and said, "No, I wouldn't kill him." I was relieved.

This example shows that knowledge may be acquired by Muslims, even those who had lacked the essence, of Islam.

May Allah inspire us to live our lives in the shade of His mercy. And may Allah make us instruments of His mercy, not of His punishment.

We ask Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, to fill our hearts with mercy, and to give us mercy when we need it. We ask Allah to make us instrumental in showing the way to other Muslims who, unfortunately, are confused about Islam and give more importance to the form than to the essence of Islam.

Without acquiring this essence, we have missed the beginning. Without starting with it deep in our hearts, we cannot go on to say that we are Muslims. Without realizing that the total mission of Islam is mercy, and that the Prophets mission is nothing but mercy, then we have not begun at the beginning.

MORAL VACCINATION

When a family has a new baby, almost immediately after the congratulations, they take the baby to the doctor to be vaccinated. There is a vaccine against measles, against diphtheria, polio and German measles, and so on.

Why do they do that? They do it because the vaccine will give the child immunity against those diseases. Someone might ask, since this baby is at home and not exposed to these diseases, why then does he need the vaccinations so early? The answer is that it is important to provide immunity before exposure to infection, so that later on when the child is exposed to infection, he will have already acquired immunity, and will resist the disease.

We are not only bodies, but we have souls, too, and morality. There are moral illnesses, which are also con-

tagious. The medical principle of early immunization also applies to the moral state of our souls. We need moral vaccination to immunize our souls to be able to resist moral illnesses.

That our society is full of moral illnesses does not require proof. It is a society infected with violence, licentious sex, homosexuality, drugs and drinking, and the rest of a long list.

Only a few days ago we heard about a young boy with a handgun, who, finding, no other target, went and shot his own mother.

These are diseases; they are very infectious, and our children are exposed to them. During the earliest stage of their lives, whatever Mom says is correct. But then, at a later stage, there is the competition of their peers' influence a vigorous competing influence against which Mom and Dad do not have a chance.

The greatest influence on the child at that time, then, will be his peer group, not his parents. His friends will influence his thinking, will provide the food for his thought. This constitutes peer pressure, which is very powerful; hence the child, unless previously vaccinated, cannot resist.

Therefore we should make sure that in the limited window of time that we have, which is early childhood, we vaccinate our children against those moral illnesses, so that when they are exposed to them, it will not be too late for us to help them. If we do this, they will have

already acquired resistance. Some parents wait until they see the deviation of their children from right toward wrong. Some families think that because children are children, they'll remain children. Some parents think that because they are Muslims, then it is a matter of course that their children will be Muslims. This is not true.

If you miss the chance, then it might be a bit too late when you come to me later, saying "Dr. Hathout, my brother, help! Our daughter has a boyfriend, and she wants to marry a non-Muslim." Or, "Our son goes out with girls, or does drugs, or he wants to marry a Christian or a Jewish girl."

This in fact would be a sign of short sightedness, because you do not prepare the soldier for the battle during the battle. He should have been prepared long before the battle.

When the disease is evident, you are not looking for a prevention, you are looking for treatment. But it is immunity that we would like to cultivate in our children.

Then, when offered a cigarette, he would say "No!" When invited to do a vicious deed, when his peers say, "Come on, you are not a child, be a man." he would have the courage to say, "No, we do not do that, we are Muslims."

The time when Muslims lived with an inferiority complex should be over. Now, the time has come when

Muslims should say, and live, the saying of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, *"Dignity is to Allah, and His Messenger and the Faithful."* (63:8)

Even the only Muslim child in his whole school would not feel that he is a minority. He would confidently say, "I am a Muslim, I do not do that."

Then he would not be on the defensive, he would be on the offensive, because he offers a role model, he provides an example, and he encourages the hesitant, who feel too weak to resist peer pressure.

How will we achieve that? Not by waiting until our children are adolescents. Not by waiting until they feel, "I am 18 now, and I am old enough to leave this home and family." Not by waiting until they catch the disease, or marry the non-Muslim, or fall into violence, or drugs.

As we take our babies in the first few weeks of their lives to the doctor for physical vaccination, so for moral immunization, no age is too early. Even mothers suckling their babies may sing to them, "You will be a Muslim, you will obey Allah."

If that window of time is missed, it may be too late. However, even for those who have gone astray, the gates of repentance are flung open.

Even those who have committed grave sins should not despair; Allah says:

"Commit adultery and whoever does this will encounter sin upon sin; He will have a double portion of torture on the Day of Judgment, and he will stay there for ever;" but imme-

diately the Quran adds: "Except those who believe and do righteous (work), and repent to Allah. For these, Allah will change their sins into charities. Allah is oft Forgiving, oft Merciful." (63:8)

Even in that late stage, which is not the stage of prevention, treatment is often successful, but prevention is better than cure.

Parents, in the early days, are very keen on their children's cleanliness, clothing, food and schooling, but omit altogether the introduction of the concept of Allah. They omit to convince the children that Allah exists, and that we are not animals, and that Allah wants for us more than He wants for the animals. Allah wants us to do certain things and to avoid other things. We have the choice of what we do and we bear the consequences. This concept should be introduced to children at a very early age. Then, tell them what Allah wants them to do and what Allah does not want them to do; you can support your case with statistics, of STD's, of AIDS, of violence, of broken homes, of drugs. You will find evidence to support your case that one way is the way we should take, and that the other is the way we should avoid. Give them confidence enough to stand tall in the face of their peers and say, "You may do it, but I am not going to do it."

Let the child know that if only he, and Allah are on one side, then he is not in the minority, he is in the majority. In this context, we would like to emphasize the

importance of Islamic schools. Not all homes have a parent available all the time. Because children spend a number of hours with their peers at school, more than they spend with their parents at home , and because not all are knowledgeable, and because not all parents are good examples (some parents drink, some gamble, some do even worse), only the Islamic school can complement the role of the home. During elementary Islamic education, children will acquire the imprint, "We are Muslims, we have a set of values, we don't do what others do; we have to be selective, whatever pleases Allah, we do, and whatever displeases Him, we do not do."

Al hamdu lillah we are now going into the business of building Islamic schools; we have realized that the era of building mosques should yield to the era of building schools. We can put a mosque in a school, but cannot put a school in a mosque.

If we feel happy about having a mosque with its minarets, without schools, then the mosque will be up for sale in a few generations, because no one will be coming to it in the future if the next generation is lost.

Please convey this message to other Muslims in order that they may realize what the right track is.

THE ULTIMATE CAMERA

Among the most significant incidents that have happened in this city, in this country, in this century, was the "Rodney King case," or the "Rodney King beating." It provoked what was almost a revolution. It created damage, and it still resonates with us today and will do so for a long time to come. A group of white police officers mercilessly beat an unarmed, unresisting African American even as he lay helplessly on the ground.

Yet the key to this whole case, without which it would have been relegated to oblivion and nothingness, was the video camera of an ordinary citizen. Without that video, justice couldn't have been sought and proof would not have been available. It was a simple instrument, a video camera.

Many more cases have had their key in a video camera, such as bank robberies and store burglaries, and it is

now in the news that the L.A.P.D. will equip their cars with video cameras.

I often wonder if those officers who beat Rodney King, or the burglars or the robbers committing their crimes, had known there was a camera recording their actions, then, how would they have behaved?

Their behavior would certainly have been different. Everybody would have behaved correctly, and would have tried to act their best.

What people are not aware of yet is that the camera is always there. I was reading the Quran, and I came across the aya that says,

"This Our Record speaks about you with truth, for We were taking copies of whatever you have been doing."
(45:28-29)

The literal meaning of "inna kunna nastansikhu ma kuntum tamalun" is "We have been ordering and taking copies of all that you were doing.

So please, my Muslim brothers and sisters, bear in mind that it is not the camera of an amateur that records what you do, it is the divine observance of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He. This is a camera that is watching you 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

It is a camera that records not only your external deeds, but also why you did them. It records your intention. It records your thoughts.

It records every good deed that you wanted to do but didn't have the opportunity to do. It records every bad

deed you were about to do, but you controlled yourself and restrained your impulse. It records the *niyat*(the intention).

Is it a new idea to you that a camera is focused on you, like the camera focused on the Rodney King beating?

It is indeed a more comprehensive camera than that one.

"(Allah is the One) who knows the secret, and that which is more secret than the secret." (20:7)

He is the *Alim, Samiea, Basir, Al Mohaymen.*

Nothing hidden can be hidden from Him. (69:18)

"We indeed have created the human being, and We know whatever his own self insinuates to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein." (50:16)

"There are two guardians, one on the right and one on the left, taking notes of whatever happens, taking full account; whatever one utters will be registered by a vigilant observer." (50:17-18)

This is the situation of all human beings, Muslim and non-Muslim.

Perhaps you can hide yourself from the law, perhaps you can do a sin in the dark or behind locked doors, perhaps you will backbite your brother or sister, because he or she is not there, and will not hear you speaking about him or her. Perhaps you will cheat in the privacy of your own knowledge. You can escape the amateur's camera, but you will never escape the observing, watching eye of

Allah, Praised and Exalted be He. How about this, now that you know it? How are you going to behave, when you are with people, when you are alone, when you are in your bedroom, when you are planning and plotting? How are you going to behave when there is no escape from that camera that not only record's scenes and voices, but also thoughts and intentions. And upon these you will be judged by the Ultimate Judge, Allah, Praised and Exalted be He. The Judgment will come, if not in this world, then in the world to come.

With this eye opener, one would expect that any of us with even a trace of wisdom would watch their step and watch their tongue and watch their thoughts, and watch their hands and watch whatever emanates from them because it will be on record. And it is a sure record.

From now on, our lives should be perfect. Now, we know that we are under the focus of Allah. What about the past? All of us have done wrong in the past. All of us have sinned. All of us have trespassed or wronged our fellow human beings. What are we going to do about that? About that which is already on film and already on record, which is already preserved by the angels of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He?

It is through the grace of Allah that you can reclaim these and erase them. Because Allah says, "*The Good things would erase the Bad.*" (11:114) According to a *hadith*, Allah also says, and His promise is the truth,

"Tribe of Adam, if you were to approach me with enough sins to fill the earth, then come to repent and worship me, not associating anything with me, I will approach you with an earth full of forgiveness."

Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, says,

"Hurry, race to forgiveness from your Lord and Paradise whose breadth is like the heavens and the earth, prepared for the mutaqin (those who heed Allah). Those who give out of their money and their possessions, whether they are affluent or poor; and those who tame and control their anger, and those who forgive others; and Allah loves the muhsinin (who go beyond justice to forgiveness). And those who if they do a fahisha (a heinous sin) or have wronged themselves (by doing that), remember Allah and ask for forgiveness for their sins; and who is to forgive the sins, more than Allah? And they didn't persist in (the wrong) they were doing, to the best of their knowledge.

Those will have for their reward forgiveness from their Lord, and Paradises under which rivers flow: they will dwell in these forever; and this is the good reward for those who do righteousness!" (3:133-136)

Even if you have sinned, even if you have tarnished your record, even if your film documents serious crimes that you have committed, the gates of repentance are open; this is the grace of Allah. Allah did not take any people as His chosen people or His relatives, and we all come from a single pair of a male and a female. Humanity is only a single family, there is no chosen race

that can claim special favor with Him, (As the Jews think). Allah did not slaughter anyone, let alone His own Son!! (as is claimed by Christians), in order that we should be forgiven. His Grace, His forgiveness, is just for your asking, if you ask for it with a good intention and a sincere heart.

The gates of forgiveness are open. All you must do is make the decision to stop sinning and to receive your forgiveness from God. The film's record of your sins will be erased, even if the sin was as serious as adultery; because Allah says in the Quran,

"Unless he repent and do righteous deeds; then Allah will transform their sins to charities. And God is Oft-Forgiver, and Oft-Compassionate."

This is what Allah offers you. How are you answering him? This is Allah hurrying to you. Are you turning your back, or are you hurrying to Him?

Repentance should not be a million repetitions of "*astaghfirullah*" on the tip of your tongue. Seeking forgiveness has to come from your heart. If your sin caused harm to a fellow human being, it is no good putting your hand in my pocket, taking my wallet, and then going home to say *astaghfirullah* a million times.

You have to amend. You have to restore. You have to go and do good for what you have done wrong. You have to give the owners of the rights you violated, their rights back. If the hurt was caused by a word, then go to your brother or sister and say, "I said so and so about you,

please forgive me.” And he will forgive. He cannot afford not to forgive. Because when the day comes and you feel the anxiety of the Day of Judgment, and Hell is on one side, and Paradise on the other, and people are in shock, like drunkards without drink, and you say, “My Lord, I want your forgiveness,” you will be asked, “Were you a forgiving person?”

So, if you want your credit in the bank of God’s forgiveness to be full and rich and generous, the only way is to forgive others who did wrong to you. Don’t say, “My Lord, punish them!” Don’t say, “My Lord, retaliate!” Don’t say, “My Lord, treat them with Your Justice!” Say what the Prophet said: “May it please You, Lord, to forgive my people, for they do not know.” Then you will become a forgiver.

Then you will become like Abu Bakr, *Radiallahu anhu*, when a group of Muslims, but who were hypocrites, plotted to tarnish the honor of his daughter, Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him in the talk of “*ifk*.” They tried to portray her as an adulteress; one of the main perpetrators was a relative of Abu Bakr, to whom Abu Bakr used to give sustenance and support, because he was poor.

When the Quranic verses came vindicating Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, the least of the least, Abu Bakr said to himself, “By God, I’ll never send him any money anymore.”

But new verses of the Quran were communicated, saying: "Don't let them say hy God and swear that they are not going to give sustenance to their relatives, the needy, and to the wayfarers. Let them forgo, let them forgive, don't you love that God forgives you?"

And who amongst us can do without God's forgiveness? If God treats us with His justice, we are lost; our only hope is God's forgiveness. Our only hope for God's forgiveness is that we ourselves become forgivers.

A heart filled with love. This is the faithful heart. *Iman* (faith) and hate cannot coexist in one heart. May Allah give us those precious hearts, the hearts of the *mumin*, and make us worthy of being Muslims.

When you are a *mumin*, you see with the light of Allah. When you are a *mumin*, Allah is your sight with which you see, and your hearing with which you hear, and your hand with which you act, and your foot with which you move. But we are weak and we are prone to fall, and dust accumulates over the mirror of our souls so that we don't see, or so that we are like a glass of water turbid with dirt.

But with faith, remembrance of Allah, attaching your heart to His guidance, filling your spirit with the love of Him, the dirt settles down, and the water is clear, and you can see your way through. And all the turmoil and agitation of the world cannot prevent you from seeing clearly which way to go. And it should be the Way of Allah, and not the way of the devil.

THE VALUE OF POSITIVE ENCOUNTER

This Islamic center held a function to honor a man named Michael Wolf. He had a Jewish mother and a Christian father and he became a Muslim years ago. Wolf had produced a film about the *Hajj*, which aired on ABC with very positive results. ABC told us that never before had a film produced such sales as this one.

Wolf gave a speech, and a phrase of his that really caught my attention was his comment that all the members of his American crew, were not born Muslims, but had become Muslim. Someone asked him, "What made you and all those others become Muslim?" He replied, "Invariably, in each case, the reason was a positive encounter with Islam." That is, somehow they came in touch with Islam and Muslims, and this contact produced a positive result. I know of many people whose attention was drawn to Islam in this way.

Someone told me that the first time he went to Cairo, he saw that women could walk in the street late at night in complete safety. "I contrasted this with Los Angeles and New York,"he said; "I came to realize that it was the Islamic atmosphere and social climate that made this possible." This aroused his attention toward Islam; he studied it and become Muslim, *al hamdu lillah.*"

Another man visited Saudi Arabia, the point that attracted his attention there was that when the call to prayer(*the adhan*) sounded, the shopkeepers left their shops open and went to the mosque, knowing nothing would be missing when they came back. This attracted the visitor's attention to Islam, and eventually he became a Muslim.

Michael Wolf, for his part, lived in Morocco, a long time ago, and was very impressed by the kindness of the people and their compassion to one another; this attracted him to Islam, and he became a Muslim.

We know that whole countries have converted to Islam, because of encounters with ordinary Muslims like you and me. Consider, for example, Indonesia. There was never a Muslim conquest of Indonesia, never did the foot of a Muslim soldier touch its land. It was Muslim merchants who went there and made Islam, knowing; today, the country numbers about 200,000,000 Muslims. We also know that it was merchants who took Islam to Central Mid-Africa and North Africa, inspiring conversions just through posi-

tive encounters with Islam. The citizens could see that there was something different about these merchants; when they investigated, they found that Islam was the reason, and they became Muslim.

Positive impressions of Islam are conveyed even in our modern age, and in our country of the United States. I know of a young man in Baltimore who applied for a job at a branch of a grocery store chain. He told the interviewer, "If you select me, let me tell you now that Friday must be my day off, because I must go to the mosque to pray the Juma." He was given the job, and for the first time in several months the store made a profit. Afterward, the woman who had interviewed him told him of another man who had applied for a second opening, and who also had told her, "I am a Muslim, I need Fridays off." She had said immediately, "You've got yourself a job." Her impression of Muslims was a good one; her positive encounter with just one Muslim had given her that impression of Islam, so that she gave a job to the next Muslim who applied.

I know of an old lady, in Seattle who did the most important action of her life at the unlikely age of 86; that was to embrace Islam. That lady was bed-ridden with resistant arthritis, and she was undergoing a long treatment. She happened to encounter a Muslim doctor, a woman who was her neighbor. That doctor volunteered to visit the lady at home, to give her the necessary physical therapy for free, until the woman would

be able to walk again. The woman asked, "Doctor, what made you go out of your way and waste your time, to come and give me treatment at no charge? This is very strange." The doctor answered, "Madam, I am a Muslim, and our religion tells us that we should do that." The patient soon thereafter died, as a Muslim. This emphasizes to us the value of a positive encounter with Islam. This is better than a thousand *Khutbas*. This is real *Dawa*.

In our country people are very curious about Muslims, but are continuously fed lies about Islam and Muslims. It behooves us to change this. We will not be able to change this as long as we only go to the mosque, say our prayers, greet each other and go home, never mingling with non-Muslims.

We should create and invent ways to provide positive encounters. People read Islam in Muslims and, believe me, some people are beginning to suspect that what the TV says about Islam can not be true. When we visit churches, universities and other groups to speak about Islam, invariably our audience says, "We didn't know." It is time they should know. There is a vacuum we should fill.

Earlier this week, I was invited to give the invocation at a luncheon meeting. It was at a very prestigious hospital, it was the yearly occasion on which the hospital honors their fundraising volunteers from around the country. It was a big function at the Beverly Hilton

hotel, a gathering that had been held every year for the past 39 years. On the occasion of the 40th year, it occurred to the organizers to invite a Muslim to give the invocation.

When the emcee introduced me as , “from the Islamic Center of Southern California,” there was an uproar of applause, not for what I said, for this was before I had said anything, but because people found themselves face to face with Islam, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Creating a positive encounter with Islam should be our duty. Recently in Los Angeles a group of young Muslim physicians opened the free *Umma* Clinic in South Central Los Angeles to treat poor people who are not insured. This is a positive encounter. This is the *dawa* that Muslims should do.

Whenever it is said that Muslims in a particular locality have rid their neighborhood of drug dealers, this is a positive encounter with Islam. This should be repeated. It is our duty to reach out and give people some positive encounter with Islam.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, teaches us, “The best deeds in the eyes of Allah are the constant ones, even if they are very small deeds.”

We have to prove the relevance of Islam to others, for whom we shall be invited one day to be witness, as our Prophet will be the witness for us. I hope that you will think it over and make the decision to go out among non-Muslims so that people may read Islam in you.

REAL OR COUNTERFEIT

If any of you were offered a ten fold increase in pay, would he accept? Of course yes. But if attached to this is a condition, that the money you will be paid will not be real dollars, but counterfeit dollars, looking exactly like dollars, but not being real ones, would he still accept? Of course not. It looks as though Islam now is dealing with the problem of counterfeit currency. That is what the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, meant when he said,

“There will come the day when the nations will fall upon you like the hungry eaters over a bowl of food.”

They asked, “On that day, will it be because we are too few?” The Prophet, *pbuh*, answered, “No, on that day you will be very many, but you will be like the froth on the surface of the torrent.”

Allah promised the *mumineen*, in the Quran,

“If there are twenty steadfast of you, they will overpow-

er two hundred, and if there were one hundred of you, they would overpower one thousand." (8:65)

But Allah recognizes that Muslims may have their ups and downs, and He says,

"Now has Allah lightened your burden, for He knows that there is weakness in you. So if there be of you a steadfast hundred they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a thousand (steadfast) they shall overcome two thousand by permission of Allah. Allah is with the steadfast." (8:66)

So the faithful, even at their weakest, will be able to stand up to their enemies, even if the enemies were double their numbers. So what is wrong?

We are one billion Muslims, and what is going on in Bosnia, Palestine, Kashmir, Somalia, India, North Africa and everywhere in the world makes one wonder, where are those Muslims who can stand against their adversaries, at the ratio of 1-10 or in their weakest, in the ratio of 1-2?

We know that Allah certainly speaks the truth. The only explanation is that our count is not like a count of real dollars, but of counterfeit dollars. It is not the count of the faithful, but the count of people who look like faithful, who claim to be faithful, but are counterfeit. This explains how our purchasing power is nil, because we are not real currency, we are fake, and therefore on the losing side. We are not solid gold, but only gold-plated. This is why Muslims are where they are today.

They need not wait for the angels to come down to support them, because Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, says,

"Allah does not change the condition of a people unless they themselves change their condition." (13:11)

This *aya* also gives the key and the solution, to the problem; the solution will not come by the pressing of a button that will correct all the Muslim peoples. The start is individual and the beginning lies with each one of us. Each of you should ask himself or herself, in honesty and clarity, "Am I a real Muslim, or do I just have a label that says I am a Muslim?"

The specifications of a true Muslim are well known; they are spelled out in the Quran and illustrated by the Prophet whom we should emulate. The unbelievers at one time asked, "Why did Allah send a human being like us? Why didn't Allah send an angel?" But Allah says,

"If We were to send to the people an angel, we would have given that angel a human form, and dressed him in human clothes." (6:9)

The point of the whole exercise is that Allah has chosen a human being like us, so that when Allah says,

"You have indeed in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern of (conduct)," (33:21)

We should not have the excuse that it is impossible to be like him, because he is not human. That is why Allah sent human prophets for human beings to emu-

late. Are we behaving in the way of Mohammed, *pbuh*? Or are we falling too short of the mark?

Of course, the Prophet is the most perfect of human beings. But this is not an excuse for us in trying our hardest to emulate him; we have to do our best; less than our best is not acceptable. We do not follow the example of the Prophet, *pbuh*, in how he looked, how he combed his hair or dressed. We do not follow him by eating the food he liked to eat. These things were not the components of his Prophethood. Instead we should study Prophet Mohammed, *pbuh*, and become conversant with his character, personality and psychology, how he thought, what filled his heart, how he behaved in his pleasure and in his anger. As his wife described him, his behavior was the Quran.

The Quran was sent to us not only as a book to read, but as a book to do. As long as we fall short, we have to work harder, so as to earn for Islam one more real dollar instead of a counterfeit one, thus adding to its assets. But on top of that you must guide other Muslims, or others who are non Muslims, to become real Muslims. We should acquire weight, not just size. In every confrontation each side is put on the scales, and the heavier side will win. So far one billion Muslims have not proved heavy enough on the scales.

People, especially in the Middle East, are cursing American politics and shouting slogans against America, but all it would have taken for them to catch

the attention of the Americans would be to have stopped smoking American cigarettes. America would have turned to them and asked, "What do you want?"

I once asked an American diplomat, "Why do you take sides against the Muslims always, when you have your real interests in their countries."

He replied, "Doctor, our interests have never been touched and will never be touched."

We can win ideologically, because we are witnessing the crumbling of a civilization that will meet its fate and its conclusion on the rock of immorality. We Muslims have the ideals and the teachings, which can correct the course of this civilization and save it from the abyss it is about to fall into. Once there forms amongst the billion Muslims a critical mass of real Muslims, then in negotiations their words will be heard and heeded. The other day I spoke to a Muslim couple living here, who wanted to divorce in order to reduce their taxes. They had obtained a legal divorce. They then had a dilemma, and came to ask me whether it was all right to live together. I asked, "Why do you care?" They replied that they feared to do *haram*. I said, "But lying and cheating are *haram*. Is it because you are cheating the government that you think it is all right?" Some of us Muslims are fussy about some aspects of Islam, and blind to some of its most basic aspects, like honesty. Spending for Islamic causes is also important. I know of a very successful doctor who had received a letter from his daughter's old

high school, asking for a donation, and he sent \$35,000. But when we approached him for the Islamic school, we couldn't squeeze one dollar out of him. He is counted as a Muslim! We have to know that we are owned by Allah. In your life, make sure that you can meet your expenses and insure your future. But you have two futures. One is temporary, but beyond that there is the ultimate future. After death there will be either eternal bliss or eternal fire. So, when you spend your money, think of three things: your present life and that of your family, your future life in this world, and your ultimate future in eternity. On that day (of judgment), you will discover that the real dollar you invested was the one you invested in the path of Allah. Never was spending for the cause of Allah a cause of poverty it will always be a cause of richness, material and spiritual.

Allah's Messenger, *pbuh*, said: When a man dies, his acts come to an end, except three: perpetual charity, or knowledge (by which people benefit), or a pious child, who prays for him.

On your journey you will be called to the Gate, leaving behind life and going on to death. We know that people die, but we don't really focus on the fact that this also happens to us. Once you leave you can only take the three things which the Prophet has mentioned, a continuing charity, knowledge in a good cause, and a pious child praying for you.

Remember that an Islamic school is a "perpetual charity" as long as it takes Muslim children and makes them Muslim, it is knowledge put to a good cause, as long as it teaches the children the Quran and Islam and the behavior and morality of Islam. It also insures that a pious child is praying for you. I suggested to the school board that every week the children pray for those who have contributed to the school.

Our first New Horizon school has opened, *al hamdu lillah*, but based on a bank loan of several hundred thousand dollars. The community was able to raise eight hundred thousand dollars. So I propose to each of you to help pay off the loan so that another school can be built. Any of you whose heart Allah opens to this *ji*had(*ji*had in America is making our children Muslim), write your check and mark it "for the school." It is one thing to say that you are a Muslim and then frown at your neighbors, or criticize me for wearing a tie, and so on, but it is another thing to be a Muslim who follows the example of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. A Muslim corrects himself so that the inner and outer selves are not in conflict; he does not just appear outwardly to be Muslim, while inwardly he is empty. I would like to leave you with a *hadith* of the Prophet Mohammed, *pbuh*, who said, " If you are mindful of Allah He will be mindful of you, and if you are mindful of Allah you will find Him before you. When you ask for anything ask it from Allah, and if you seek help seek

help from Allah. Know that if the people were to unite to do you some benefit they could benefit you only with what Allah had recorded for you, and that if they were to unite to do you some injury they could injure you only with what Allah had recorded for you. The pens are withdrawn and the pages are dry."

THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

One of the functions of Friday is to brief Muslims about current events, especially the hot issues. Concerning Jerusalem and Palestine, I thought I would summarize the issue for you, how it began and where it is going.

I feel that many of my fellow Muslims need to have this information, and I would like to give it, especially as I was personally involved at one stage of it.

It all began with the alliance between two opposites, which somehow found they had something in common. On the one hand, let us consider the history of the Jews. Through the history of Christian Europe, the Jews were persecuted, because the Christians believed that they killed Jesus, the Christians' God. So there were problems for the Jews, not only in Eastern Europe, but even in London or America. A few decades ago, one could find displayed in a restaurant a sign saying, "No dogs or

Jews allowed.” The persecution continued even when the Jews were not the primary target. When the Crusaders went to Palestine to fight the Muslims, St. Bernard said, “We go to Jerusalem to fight the infidel, when we have infidels in our midst;” so, every Crusade began with a massacre of Jews. This was seen also at the time of the Inquisition. When the Christians won their battle in Spain, both Muslims and Jews had to convert to Christianity, or else leave the country, or be killed. And many of the Jews found refuge in Islamic countries. More recently, there was the Holocaust of Hitler’s Germany, in which millions of Jews, and also Christians who opposed the system, were put to death. For a long time, the Western European countries and America did not welcome the Jews, so they prayed that somehow they would find a place for themselves. So, the Jews sought a home land.

Another consideration relevant to this matter is the strategic location of Palestine. It has been observed since the Crusades, for instance during the campaign of Napoleon, that if the Arab’s lands were united they could not be defeated, but that the right lower angle by the Mediterranean Sea that is Palestine divides the Arab world into two unconnected parts.

The Jews began to consider where to locate their homeland; at first, they considered Ghana, Australia and South Africa. But the proponents of the idea did not find support among the Jews, who preferred to live

where they were instead of going to foreign lands. So the proponents of resettlement chose to present the issue in religious terms, to make it more appealing, and they settled on Palestine, which they called Zion, the ancient home of the biblical prophets.

Then, the Jews invented two claims, the historical claim and the religious claim to Palestine.

Historically they say, "We lived in this part of the world during two periods of our ancient history." Those two periods together do not amount to more than three hundred years; and, when the Jews first arrived in Palestine they did not find the land empty, not, when they left it, did they leave it empty. There were people there who had always lived there and who lived there during and after the time of the Jews. The Jews said that granting them Palestine would be "giving a land without a people to a people without a land" When Golda Meir was asked about the Palestinians, she said, "What Palestinians? I do not see them." But now, *al hamdu lillah* everybody knows that the Palestinians occupied Palestine before, during and after the Jews, and are there still today.

Concerning the religious claim, Jews quote the Bible about the covenant of God with Ibrahim: "To you and to your seed, I give this land from the Nile to the Euphrates." We agree with them that this covenant was made, but we disagree about who are the seed of Ibrahim. To them, the seed of Ibrahim means the Jews;

the Jews who converted to Islam or Christianity ceased to be the seed of Ibrahim, even if they were descended directly from him through Isaac. They cast a blind eye on the first son of Ibrahim, Ismail, the ancestor of the Arabs and of Prophet Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon him.

Therefore, the religious claim should include the Muslims, the Christians and the Jews because they are all the seeds of Ibrahim. And the historical claim should include those people who lived in Palestine even before the Jews came there.

Somehow, the West which didn't like Islam and still lived in the shadow of the Crusades, forged an alliance with the Jews, whom the west had previously disliked. The Jews received support, money, weapons and technology. And the British appointed a Jew to be their High Commissioner for Palestine. During the Second World War, a whole regiment of the British Army was called the Jewish Regiment. So, the Jews had training and weapons, while the Arabs could be sentenced to fifteen years in prison for possessing even one bullet. The bias was quite obvious.

In 1947, the United Nations decreed the partition of Palestine, part to be for the Jews and part for the Palestinians. When President Truman was asked about the Palestinians, he asked, "How many votes do they have in our election? What do they have other than a bundle of legal documents?" America not only voted for

the partition, but pressured other countries to vote for it. The Palestinians resisted, and there was a faint-hearted war urged by the Arab states, some of which actually colluded with the new state against the Palestinians.

Now we come to the recent peace process. The weakened Palestinians seek to get something, instead of nothing, but the Jews don't want them to have a country. Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, came to the U.S. and addressed Congress; he demolished previously negotiated agreements, and got a standing ovation from the same Congress that had hailed Rabin, his less militant predecessor. This is the kind of politics we have in our country.

It is difficult to say what we should do, but first of all we have to deserve God's victory. It seems that we are not yet in a position to deserve it. Muslims are still disunited. My heart aches when I hear of fighting among Islamic centers in our country, and of police closing mosques. My heart aches when a new Islamic regime begins by closing girls' schools and dismissing women from their jobs. Our priorities are confused, and our egos are taking the best part of us. We have yet to learn *Al Ikhlas*, so that what we do is not what we want but what He wants. We should work, therefore, to make Muslims real Muslims.

After that, there are two approaches to take. One is to create in this country an Islamic lobby, to be a power in elections; our number is not less than that of the Jews.

If we do that, we can influence foreign and domestic policy in the United States.

Muslims are one billion people; they control most of the oil, they are a large market, but they lack the will to use this power to influence the United States and Europe. Somehow the Islamic masses have to be woken up from the economic and cultural invasion of their societies by such corporations as by Macdonald's, and Marlboro. America primarily cares for the dollar, and if it perceives harm to that, it will review its policy.

As soon as we become deserving of God's victory, then His help will come. It is as if the help were coming in a plane and there was no runway for it to land on; if we build the runway, the plane will land.

There is a story about a pigeon which had a nest in a tree. Every day a fox came to the foot of the tree and said, "Give me your egg, or I will come and hurt you." Every day, the pigeon surrendered an egg, until one day someone told the pigeon that the fox could not climb the tree, so then she began to say, "No!" We Muslims are like that; we cannot be hurt, and we must learn to say no.

In the face of Israeli treatment of Palestinians, we must keep our political will and do what must be done. And nothing will give us this will except really returning to Allah.

We must do more than prayer and fasting. The Quran says,

"Wal lil la-hil iz zatu wa lirasu-lihi wa lilmuminin":

"The dignity is to Allah and His Messenger, and to the believers." (63:8)

This is our thermometer, our litmus test, when the Muslims have this dignity, then it is true that they are Muslims. When they lack this dignity, then something is missing, and they must change themselves in order to have it. Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, gives support to the believers, and we must be believers in more than name only.

We must be true believers, starting with ourselves, our family, our masjid, and the *Ummah* around the world. This must be done, and *inshallah* it will be done.

DEATH

All through the Quran, Allah teaches us by giving examples and parables and similitudes. As Allah says: "*Allah proounds parables for people so that they may think and remember.*" (14:25)

By way of parable, I would like to tell you today about a group of people on a journey. During the journey, they had to transit through a certain place. So they stopped and went out shopping. Some of them unfortunately, spent their money on items that they could not take on the rest of the journey, things too cumbersome, or unsuited for the final destination. The others spent their money on things which they could take with them and which would make their life at their final destination a happy and comfortable life.

We might think that the first group were short sighted, and even laugh at them. And yet this behavior is so prevalent, even among us.

Realize that this world we live in is only a transit point, and that the lasting life is the final destination of the Hereafter.

So many people focus on life here, and when the time comes and they leave this world, their lot over there, for eternity, will be regret and they will say, "We wish we had gotten ready for this destination."

Some of us think that death is something that happens to other people. Some of us go to attend the burial of a friend, and as they watch the coffin going into the ground, they are just watchers. They don't think automatically, "My turn will come." It is unavoidable, it is inescapable. Death is the sure address, the guaranteed one. Ever since there was life, there was death. Death is the crowning moment of life. We know that we will die, so we'd better prepare ourselves, for our home in the final abode.

We know that when we die we'll be asked, "Who is your God? Who is your Prophet? What is your Book?" We hope of course that we will answer that Allah is our God, and Mohammed is our Prophet, and the Quran is our Book.

Be aware, though, that more questions will be asked. You will be asked how far you implemented the orders of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, taught by the Prophet Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon him, and specified in the Quran

And then you will find your register opened before you, recounting the details of what you have done. Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, says in the Quran:

"We have been taking copies of whatever you used to do;" (45:29)

On that day you will face the consequences.

"On that day, an atom's weight of good, you will get the reward for, and an atom's weight of evil, you will get the consequences of." (99:7-8)

I don't mean to depress you by reminding you of death, but our life can never be correct unless we always remember death. Death is the inevitable route we are going to take. We'd better get ready for that, because, as the Prophet said, "You will be asked on your life and how you spent it, and on your possessions and how you disposed of them."

You think the day is far away, although it may be so near; it may be around the corner, or you may live to be 100 or 120; but it will come. What will come is near enough. We ask Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, to make us aware that we are here as transit passengers, until we are called to go to the final abode. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, teaches that "The example of one of you in this world is like a traveler who found a tree, had a nap in its shade and woke up to resume the journey."

We should introduce ourselves and our children to this concept, so that all the time we will heed Allah,

Praised and Exalted be He. Heed Him as if you see him, because even though you don't see Him, He sees you.

It is this continuous awareness that will make us act correctly in this life and sow the proper seeds for our final abode in the Hereafter.

May Allah grant us the wisdom to heed death and to realize that death is not an evil, but the inevitable. Death is not an enemy, as a matter of fact it should be the friend of the believer, because the day of death is the day when he will face his Creator; if he has prepared himself before that day, then he will find eternal bliss and happiness in the Hereafter, inshallah!

"This is the Day when Allah will not shame the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their Light goes in front of them and on the right side, while they say, "O Allah! complete our Light for us, and grant us forgiveness; for Thou hast power over all things." (66:8)

Therefore the light will emanate also from behind them and on their left side and they will become complete light, suitable to merge with the Absolute Light, the Eternal Light, which is Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, Who said, *"Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth."* (24:35) It is wise counsel to seek the goodness of this world, to seek wealth, to seek happiness; all this is legitimate, but it should not be, your basic concern. Your concern should be "How am I going to utilize this?" Because the way you utilize your gifts may lead you to eternal hell, or to eternal heaven.

We ask Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, to give us the guidance and the light of eye and *basira* so that we watch our step in this life, and do what will bring us to the mercy of Allah on that day when Allah will say:

"O tranquil soul, come back to your Lord; Pleased and pleasing, enter in the company of my servants, and enter into My Paradise." (89:27-30)

THE EARTHQUAKE OF 94

The preoccupation now is with the recent earthquake. We Muslims feel for those who have been afflicted, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. As a matter of fact, our hearts have been aching for a long time, now for the victims of the earthquake, and before for the victims of atrocities and other disasters.

Worst of all are those disasters which could have been avoided or prevented, since they were the outcome of human actions. Our tears have hardly dried over fellow Muslims in Bosnia, when we hear of terrible events in India, the Philippines, Palestine, in Africa and Asia, and our hearts are overburdened.

Earthquakes are a test; they may bring out the best in human nature, and may show the resilience with which we have been endowed, as the human race, God's vice-regents on the planet Earth.

There is no doubt that it is our duty to reach out and to give every possible help, to join and to salute every help offered to human beings in this recent disaster.

This Center, the Northridge Islamic Center, and the American Red Crescent, as well as others, have joined the efforts of helping hands.

The Red Crescent will be organizing a campaign for blood donation soon; food and clothing are being donated, as well as the cash donated today in our mosque to aid those in need in the Northridge area.

Many people see an earthquake as an act of nature, they tend to see it as a senseless, aimless, purposeless disaster.

We Muslims have a wider range of thought; there are certainly other aspects to ponder about an earthquake. Disastrous as it was, this earthquake was but a sample of what may occur at a much greater magnitude.

Scientists teach us that our earth is like an egg, and that the solid part we live on is thin like the shell of the egg. This shell cracks and trembles here and there, every now and then.

When people speak of "the Big One" they mean an earthquake exceeding a level of 8 on the Richter scale, but actually the Big One has been described in the Quran:

*"When the earth trembles on its own quake
And the Earth relieves itself of its burden
And the human being says: 'Whatever happened to her;
On that Day it will recount its news:*

That your Lord has inspired her.

On that Day people will be resurrected, in scattered groups, so that they would see the outcome of what they had done before.

So that whoever did an atom's weight of good encounter its reward!

And whoever had done an atom's weight of evil will face the consequences. (99:1-8)

The earthquake indeed is a humbling experience. For the past couple of centuries man has been so obsessed with man, and the human mind has become so obsessed with science, that we have passed gradually into an era in which man worships man and worships his own science. And yet, at the height of our science, we remain helpless; not only can we not prevent, but we cannot predict the occurrence of these natural disasters, be they earthquakes or extreme cold, or floods or fires or drought. If such is the helplessness of man at the zenith of his scientific advancement, then it should be a sobering and humbling thought. Man has to realize that however full of himself he may be, he lacks the mastery.

If man is not the master, then who is? There should be some soul-searching, so that we may realize that mastery belongs to the Ultimate Master-not to man or nature, but to the One who created man and nature. Humanity has to acknowledge God, Allah, Praised and Exalted be He.

Human beings have to set their lives on the fact of

"La ilaha illa Allah (There is no God but Allah)." They have to come to terms with this. Human life should be organized on the basis of "God is."

The day before yesterday, I read an article in the L.A. Times; the writer said, "We call upon God, but we turn to Mom, because of Mom we are certain, of God we are not certain." This is the folly of humanity.

We study deeply the faults of the earth we stand on, while ignoring the faults that pervade our souls. We have to correct this; yes, it is right and even mandatory to study and to unravel God's ways in His creation, and to pursue knowledge, and to try to get ready and prepare for disasters, because we are enjoined to protect life and to prevent disasters and suffering.

But the protection of life is not an ultimate goal in itself, it is not a totality in itself. This is because protecting life will not prevent death. Quakes will occur, other disasters will occur, and death will be with us, this is a fact.

Everybody is talking about preparedness, earthquake preparedness. How about stray bullet preparedness, or HIV preparedness, or drink, drug and violence preparedness? It is not only the earth that is at fault, the fault is in us also.

Beyond the level of science and scientific research, there is another level to ponder on. On this other level of science, those phenomena which occur may carry a message to humanity. People try to separate the events

of these two levels from the Creator, who created the universe and its laws.

When something happens that we cannot explain, we attribute it to blind natural causes. But this is our ignorance, because everything that happens has a cause, and is part of a plan. We have to accept that.

Some people would ask, "If God is, then why do earthquakes occur? Why do innocent people have to suffer?" They miss the point. Our life on this earth is a test. We have been created to be tested. We are born and we die, and between birth and death is the test which we will be judged by. Life will contain suffering and we will react. How do we react? Shall we stop and ponder? Shall we discover our Creator and treat Him as He should be treated, or not? This is the test.

Indeed we accept both good and evil; when the angel Gabriel asked the Prophet Mohammed about the articles of faith, the Prophet answered him, "To believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day and to believe in fate, pleasant or unpleasant."

It is with us, it has been taught to us that these things will happen. But we also know that our ultimate goal is not just to protect life. We must protect life within the context that death is inevitable. Two constants in our life are our birth and our death. We can never be really prepared, unless we prepare to face death, just as we prepare to continue life.

People look at death as an end in itself. But we know that death is just the beginning of something else more lasting. Death is going out from this life to go into eternal life.

Therefore we should not view matters at the superstitious level thinking that somebody escaped and somebody else died. Death can be the key to happiness, or it can be the key to misery and torture. This is the wide context which we Muslims should think about, and we should not be influenced by the narrow perspective on disasters.

We live according to Allah's directives and in faith in Him and in faith that when we die we will be brought to face our accountability before Him. This is a message that we should heed, it is not taboo to think of, it is not unscientific, and if you read the Quran, you will find that things happen which people without faith take to be disasters, while others take them to be a message, and think and ponder about the message.

Allah tells us about people who disobeyed; and his message to them, the eye-opener, may have been a disaster.

"If the people of the towns had been faithful and feared Allah, We should indeed have poured upon them (all kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth; but they denied (the truth) and We brought them to account for their misdeeds.

Are the people of the towns feeling secure that our wrath will not visit them by night while they are asleep?

Or else do they feel safe and secure that it will not come in broad daylight while they played about ?

Do they then feel safe and secure from the plotting of Allah? Those who feel safe and secure from the plotting of Allah are but the losers!" (7:96-99)

People laugh at this, although it is a fact. When you read history you find that nations went astray and that they got God's message, or punishment, not in the form of a written letter, but in the form of these things which we call natural disasters.

May Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, enable us to live His way, and to die His way and to be resurrected with the belief that There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger.

We thank Allah for our faith and we thank Allah for our Islam, which means to willingly surrender to what God brings us.

We thank Allah for the Book He revealed to His Prophet Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon him, which is our guide and compass during our life.

We thank Allah for life and death, and we heed His saying:

"He created life and death in order to test you who are the better amongst you, and who did the good deeds." (67:2)

We ask Allah that we may never, never forget that every moment of our life is a test from Him, which we hope to pass and succeed in. And we ask Allah to make life for us the best preparedness for the life that will

come, so that we live and die in tranquility and in peace, and we ask His mercy and compassion and forgiveness, and we ask that every human being on this earth be enabled to see the light, since we human beings are one family, created from a single pair of male and female, and everyone is our brother or cousin. We feel for them and we reach out to them. We sympathize with them and we will do our utmost in order to help when help is needed.

A SUCCESSFUL ISLAMIC CENTER

I attended a large Islamic Conference in Chicago, with 16,000 Muslims attending. *Al hamdu lillah!* I had the opportunity to meet an old friend, whom I hadn't seen for several years. During our discussions, which sometimes concerned Islam in America, my friend told me, "Your Islamic center has scored well on four issues, and I would like to share them with you so that you may see how your center looks to distant eyes."

First he said, "You have transcended the problems of ethnicity." And indeed ethnicity has been an Islamic problem, whether in the United States or in the world at large. One feels sorry to see ethnicity dividing Muslims, even to the point that they fight one another, although the Prophet said, "Tribalism is not of us." (*"Laysa minna mun da'ah illa asabiyah."*)

When I was young and at school, I used to walk in demonstrations in the streets of Cairo, shouting

"Pakistan Zindabad!" That was before the birth of Pakistan, and we had such great hopes that at last there would be a Muslim country based on Islam.

The twentieth century saw the birth of two countries based on religion. One was Israel and the other was Pakistan. When things were not easy in my country, I always told my friends that if things did not improve, I would go to Pakistan.

Therefore it broke my heart to see Pakistan divided into Pakistan and Bangladesh, and to see Muslims within Pakistan divided on the basis of tribalism and other issues.

I feel the same way when I see Muslims in Afghanistan fighting not for the sake of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, but for the sake of tribalism and ethnicity.

When I heard from my friend that our Islamic center had transcended ethnicity, I said, "*Al hamdu lillah!*" When I go to the Islamic center, I know that this friend is Arab, that friend is Pakistani, and that one is Turkish, and so on, but deep in my heart, I have never felt that someone is nearer to my heart because he is an Arab, or that someone is farther because he is not.

I hope that this is the same feeling you have, that we really feel brotherhood, that ethnicity is something that we have gone beyond. I hope that the future will see Muslims in America and in the rest of the world, growing beyond that divisive issue.

The second success was that, as my friend said, "You have transcended sectarianism." There was an incident in Islamic history when a man raised his finger while reading the *Tashahud*, and his neighbor seized the finger and broke it, because in his *mazhab* this was a *bidaa* (innovation). Such was the prejudice of sects that really tore at the heart of the Islamic bond.

Al hamdu lillah, in this center, we are beyond that. The press has visited us more than once, asking some brothers whether ours was a Sunni or a Shi'ite mosque; invariably the answer was that this is a Muslim mosque.

Islam must not be held hostage to hostilities and enmities from the distant past. The Beast is preparing to eat Islam without differentiation. The real bond between us is "*La ilaha illa Allah*." We have common issues to address together, and must put shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart and head to head in order to face the burning crises that face Islam today.

The third point which my friend pointed out to me concerned women. Whereas in the world at large there are places where women are not treated equally to men, in our center they are, and some are elected to the board of directors. We treat both men and women as Muslims, equally responsible for Islam.

The fourth point he expressed was that we were able to break through the shell into America, to face the American people as fellow Americans. We no longer consider ourselves foreigners, because the foreigner will

never put down roots in this land, and we would like to send down the root of the Islamic Tree.

This cannot happen if we keep ourselves in isolation. It is our duty to make Islam known to the people, and we bear the responsibility for those who do not know about Islam, and for those who know about Islam only in a distorted manner.

I thanked my friend and I felt happy, because years ago he was critical of our center on those very same issues. Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, knows our shortcomings, and I ask Allah to make us aware of our shortcomings, either by ourselves or by listening to our fellow Muslims, and that we never be too arrogant to accept constructive criticism.

ON THE STRAIGHT PATH

Things happen to us every day to which we pay no attention, until a moment comes when an idea strikes, and one wonders, "If it has always been there, why didn't I take note of it?" Driving my car on the freeway, it looked like a very straight freeway ahead of me. I suddenly noticed that my hands were continuously moving the steering wheel to the right or the left, in small movements. I wondered, "Since this is a very straight freeway, why do I have to steer right and left?" The only conclusion was that our cars do not really go straight, they keep deviating, but we immediately and promptly give them that little steering that brings them into the line that they should be following. Then I realized that it is not only our cars that do this, but also we ourselves. We have the potential to deviate. Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, says in the Quran: "*By the soul and He who gave it its order and proportion, and*

inspired in it right and wrong. Successful is the one who purifies it and a failure is the one who corrupts it." (91:7)

We have that potential and we know we are not perfect, nor were we meant to be. The angels do good all the time, because they do not know what bad is. The animals follow their instincts without thinking; they are programmed to do what they do. But we have in us both the seed of goodness and the seed of evil. Allah gave us a brain to think, and gave us guidance to follow. He knows that we are not absolutely perfect.

As a matter of fact, the *Hadith Qudsi* says,

"You children of Adam, had you not been a species who err, do wrong, and then repent, and then are forgiven, had you not been that, then Allah would have created another creation who would fall into error and repent and be forgiven."

And so we know that, as we go along our path in life, we cannot just set the course and assume that we are going in a straight line. We should realize that it is those small prompt corrections that keep us on course. That is why Allah, in His wisdom and mercy, saw to it that at least seventeen times a day we Muslims say in our prayers, "*Guide us to the Straight Path.* (1:6)

It is seventeen times if we do our obligatory prayers; it will be more than that if we do non-obligatory prayers, or if we keep reading the *Surat Al-Fatiha*. Or sometimes we may just supplicate Allah, asking him to guide us to the Straight Path.

This assumes that when we pray, we are aware of what we say. Some people read automatically, without life in their words. They read the prayer as a mechanical ritual. But if we are aware of what we say when we say, "Guide us to the Straight Path," these words take us to another dimension. They become living words, not just words to utter, and we really mean it: "O Allah, Guide us to the Straight Path. Keep us from those little deviations." Indeed, "*al sirat al mustaqim*," the Straight Path, is mentioned in the Quran 34 times, and 4 more times, Allah ascribes this to himself: "*Siratu Rabbi, Sirat al Aziz al Hamid*."

What I am talking about here are the minor deviations, because, if you commit the major deviations, this would be like me driving my car and leaving it just to drift away, or to crash, or to fall off the edge of a cliff. We do not mean here the major sins, "*al kabair*," like adultery, drinking, and stealing; these are major deviations. These are incompatible with *iman*.

The Prophet, *pbuh*, says, "A person cannot commit adultery while he is in a state of faith (*iman*);" the *iman* just departs from him. Similarly, drinking alcohol, or stealing, these are irreconcilable with *iman* itself. So we are alluding in this discussion to the minor deviations. Although they are minor and are forgivable, we have to attach great importance to them, because the minor mistakes may become major one, and they add up. Allah warns us,

"Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it." (99:7-8)

And Allah says in the Quran:

"The book will be put forward and the criminals on that day will say 'Woe to us, look at this book; it doesn't omit any small thing or large thing, but records and reports it.'" (18:49)

To avoid the major deviations we must pay attention to the minor ones, in order to keep on the Straight Path. Being on the Straight Path is not a static, stable thing, it is a dynamic thing, an action continuously repeated, just like you tilt the steering wheel of your car as you are driving on a straight freeway. It is the continuous remembrance of Allah, and that is why Allah says,

"O you who believe, Remember Allah with a lot of remembrance." (33:41)

That is why we are enjoined, at the slightest whisper of evil within ourselves, to say, *"Aoozoo billahi minal shaitan al rajeem;"* "I seek shelter with Allah from the cursed shaitan." Please remember that the *shaitan* of anyone is anything that distracts him from the Path of Allah. We need to be on continuous alert; we need to have the name of Allah and His attributes on our tongues as much as possible. We need to say, *"Astaghfirullah, Astaghfirullah"* as much as possible.

The Prophet, *pbuh*, used to say, *"Astaghfirullah, seek the forgiveness of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He,*

because I, the Prophet, do repent every day seventy times.”

This is the Prophet, whose sins were forgiven, both those of the past and of the future. How about us? We should say “*Astaghfirullah*,” we should remember Allah, and know that the mouth that doesn’t have in it the utterance of Allah and His attributes is a dry mouth. Have you ever experienced your mouth being dry? It is almost painful and very uncomfortable. The more you repeat the “*Zikr*,” the mention, the remembrance of Allah, the more you will be immune from falling even into minor sin.

Don’t say that something is minor or easy, and doesn’t count; everything counts. What starts as minor might proceed to being major. You should watch your step even in things you think are small.

How about that little lie that you thought was an innocent lie? How about that little thing you said about your brother behind his back? How about some joke that makes fun of your religion or of religious personalities? How about being entrusted with something and not being 100% trustworthy?

In the daily life of each of us, we do very minor sins, too minor for us to notice. That is why the “*dua*” supplication of the Prophet, *pbuh*, was “I repent to You, from my sins that I know of, and from my sins that I am not even aware of.”

Live with Allah. You are required to keep His companionship every second. His remembrance is not the five times you stand for prayer. It is not the daily trip to the mosque, because the Quran says,

"Say, my prayer, my meditation, my living, my dying are all for Allah, Lord of the Universe." (6:162)

Allah also praises,

"They (who) remember Allah standing, and sitting and lying on their sides." (3:191) It is this continuous state of remembrance that you should strive for.

If you are successful and persevering, and insistent in commanding yourself perfectly and firmly to keep the remembrance of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, in your heart and on your tongue, then you will achieve the status of being "Light of the Light of God;" you will see with the Light of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He; you will be related to Allah, as the Prophet says: "Until you become a divine subject attributed to Allah, Praised and Exalted be He." So keep company with Allah, Praised and Exalted be He; keep His company all the time.

What I say may seem to be irrelevant in these days when there are great political upheavals, when there are great battles waged against Islam and Muslims, when there are so many crises all over the world. Then Dr. Hathout comes to say, Remember Allah and keep the company of Allah, Praised and Exalted be He.

Yes, I say it, because it is the essential beginning. You cannot take *iman* halfway. You cannot start your *iman* by endorsing the cause of Kashmir or Palestine or Bosnia, unless you begin at the beginning.

The beginning is inside your heart, putting Allah in your heart and in your deeds and on your lips and being true to that; then, the victory of Allah will come, because you will be eligible for it.

Sometimes we wonder, if Allah promised to support the believers, how come we are defeated by the unbelievers? Remember that Allah might punish a people through worse people. Remember that the victory of Allah comes to those who deserve it. Sometimes we say, "These are our rights," without asking whether we deserve them.

We will not deserve them if Allah is just a theory, just a word we say without thinking, if Allah is distant and we live far away from Him.

The beginning of victory in all fields and all arenas-political, military, economic, and so on-will not come until we are real Muslims. So far we are not suitable for, we are not deserving of the victory of Allah. When we are, then it will come, because this is His promise, and He never breaks His promise.

To be a Muslim is a 24-hour a day task. To be a Muslim is like a building which is placed on its foundation, which for us is to be a *mumin*. To be a *mumin* precedes being a Muslim. So many people pray and fast and

give *zakat*, without attaining to faith. As Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, addresses the Bedouins in the Quran:

"The Bedouins say, We have attained to faith; say No, you have not attained to faith; say, you submitted, but faith has yet to enter your hearts." My prayer to Allah is to make us mumin, to keep Himself inside our hearts, so that his presence reflects on our deeds and our sayings. (49:14)

TAQWA AND RELIANCE ON ALLAH

Prophet Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon him, said in his *Hadith*, "Every host who invites, would wish to see his invitation answered. And the Quran is the banquet of Allah on earth, so don't forsake it."

My quotation to provide a banquet for you is a short verse of the Quran. It is small in words, but when you ponder over it you will find it generous and rich beyond limits. Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, says:

"He who heeds Allah, Allah will provide him with an outlet from his crisis. He who relies on Allah, Allah will be sufficient for him." (65:2)

This verse combines *taqwa* and reliance upon Allah. *Taqwa* is a complex word. When you read translations, sometimes you see it translated as the 'fear' of Allah, sometimes as the "heeding" of Allah (this is the terminology I prefer). Sometimes you read that it is the "consciousness" of Allah. The Arabic word means "to pro-

protect oneself from;" you protect yourself from danger by taking refuge with Allah. You protect yourself from sins by taking refuge with Allah. Protect yourself from enemies by taking refuge with Allah. Protect yourself from Allah by taking refuge with Allah. As the Quran says,

"There's no shelter from Him, but Him." (9:18)

Taqwa is not just something that you do, nor something that you say, nor is it how you appear, because the Apostle of Allah, *pbuh*, once said,

"Taqwa is here (pointing to his heart)."

So, *taqwa* is a continual attitude, it means to be in a condition of *taqwa* all the time. It is to feel, when you are alone, that He is with you. It is for you to feel that there is a third, when there are two of you. When you feel tempted to do something that is not appropriate, remember that He is there and you refrain will from doing it.

A person may be *taqi* (in *taqwa*), or a group or a nation. There is not a single virtue mentioned in the Quran that is not related to the condition of *taqwa*. Those who fight "*fi sabil lilah*" are "*al muttaqun*." The Quran says,

"It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces toward East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast

in prayer and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient in diversity and danger and panic. Such are the people of truth. the Allah-fearing(al muttaqun)." (2:177)

And all virtues of the Quran and the refraining from every sin mentioned in the Quran are assigned to those who heed Allah(al muttaqun).

If one is in a continual state of *taqwa*, then all his affairs will be right, and he will be saved from the Satan outside him and from the Satan inside him.

The second injunction I would like to quote is,

"He who relies on Allah, He will be sufficient for him." (65:3)

Reliance on Allah, has to be taken at its true value. There is a difference between "*tawakul*" and "*tawak-kul*;" some people confuse being lazy with being reliant on Allah. When the Arab asked the Prophet, *pbuh*,

"Shall I tie the reins of my camel, or shall I rely on Allah?" The Prophet said, "Tie it and rely on Allah."

Reliance on Allah is when you do your very best, and then raise your face to Allah and say, "Oh Allah, I rely on you."

Omar Ibn Al Khattab once said, "Don't anyone of you be idle about earning his living, and he knows that the sky doesn't rain gold or silver."

To be reliant on Allah means that you have to be active to the utmost; then, you are qualified to be reliant on Allah.

Of course, examples of reliance on Allah and of *taqwa* are plenty in the Quran, and in our lives. Maybe one of the most glaring examples in the Quran is that of Ibrahim, *pbuh*, when he was arrested and sentenced to be thrown into the fire.

He relied on Allah, so Allah said,

"Oh fire, be cool, and peace be upon Ibrahim." (21:69)

None of us can attain what Ibrahim, peace be upon him, attained. And yet every day we see examples of people who are "*muttaqun*," who rely on Allah; and Allah, as He promised, will find for them an exit from their crisis, and will be sufficient to them.

I would like to give you another example, although the examples are many, and I know there are many examples amongst you. In one of the Middle Eastern countries, a village schoolteacher in a village got orders to transfer to the capital. Although he would be without his family and friends, the transfer was considered to be a promotion.

So he decided to accept it. The man was well known for his piety, and it so happened that, the day he arrived in the capital and went to his new home, the police came and arrested him in one of those round-ups of "Islamic elements."

They took him away, leaving behind his wife, an eight-year-old boy and an infant. The wife had only the equivalent of two dollars. Her husband said to her, "I leave you to Allah." Shortly after, the baby got a fever.

The wife had no money and knew no one in the city. She said, "Oh Allah, my husband left us to You; whom are You leaving us to?"

At that moment, the doorbell rang, she opened the door to find a man who told her, "I am the doctor; where is the patient?" She was shocked. Weeping, she took him to the baby. The doctor examined the baby and prescribed medicine. He gave her the prescription, and as he was leaving, she asked, "But, who are you? Why did you come?" The doctor told her, "You called me, is this not apartment 20?" She replied, "No, we are number 19."

The doctor had confused the two apartments. The women said, "I am sorry, I didn't call you, I have no money, and I cannot pay you, because my husband was arrested a few hours ago."

He said, "Don't worry." He went and bought the medicine and brought it back to her, at no charge. The next morning, came and she sent her little boy to buy breakfast from a shop across the street. The boy bought some beans (*mudammis*), and as he was leaving the shop the bowl fell to the floor and was broken to pieces. The boy cried frantically, so the shopkeeper told him, "Don't worry, your father will buy you another one." The boy said, "My father was arrested yesterday and we have no one." The shopkeeper, moved said, "Don't worry," and, for eighteen months, the shopkeeper sent up three meals a day to their apartment. After eighteen months the

teacher was found innocent and was released. I was very touched by this and came to believe even more in Allah's goodness. The unexpected relief of the family's crisis, and the providing of sustenance from a source the family never expected made me a strong believer. How at any time or by any means would the man have guessed that he would be arrested and held for eighteen months, and that his family would be fed by Allah, Praised and Exalted be He?

It was a lesson to me certainly to try my best to acquire that attitude of piety, of heeding, of *taqwa*, and reliance upon Allah.

Recently, we heard on the news about those thirty-nine people who committed suicide, but this is not the first event of its kind. Two decades ago, Jim Jones committed suicide with the members of his cult. This new occurrence won't be the last; it is proof that our current society is confused and going astray. Religious values no longer work. People are thirsty for faith, but they don't find anything to believe in and rely on. The orthodox Jews, the other day, proclaimed that Conservative and Reform Jews were not Jews. Christianity in the United States has two hundred and four denominations. People are thirsty for something to hold on to. There is no answer for the human soul except the teachings of Islam. Islam is there with all its light and guidance and richness. But it needs a vehicle, to tell those people about it and proclaim its realities.

I know some people who came to accept Islam. Some of them say, "I read the Quran." Some say, "I have been going to the Center for one year." Some people, by the grace of Allah, are able to show Muslims Islam, so that they see its reality.

Islam needs a vehicle. It shouldn't stay inside the book. Islam is both theory and action, and you are the action. Part of this action is the proclamation (*Dawa*). You have to show people Islam, because you are the *Umma* that will be the witness for the other nations. Without proclaiming Islam to them and witnessing who accepts and who rejects it, how will you be a witness for Islam?

Therefore I suggest that you add to your religious obligations, like prayer and fasting, the duty to present Islam to people, first by your example, because people read Islam in you, and second by establishing contacts and building bridges over which Islam can reach out to others.

QUESTIONS ON ISLAM IN AMERICA

For years I have been involved with Islamic work in America. Of course I am not the only one, and I expect each and every one of you to participate. It takes more than emotion to serve Islam; it also takes deep thinking, good analysis and good planning. I have seen progress by Islam in America, in spite of many setbacks and events that ought not to have happened. If you examine the last ten years, you will no doubt realize that Islam is making progress in America. In order for progress to continue at the required pace, and not less than that, I have found that Muslims have to answer four questions as they plan ahead.

My experience in America brings forward the first question: Is there one Islam or is there more than one?

To me and you it is clear that there is only one Islam. But when you travel around the United States, you are struck by the lack of a homogeneous understanding

thereof. That is because, as we know, Islam has its foundation, its basic tenets, its *Sharia*, and then there are the various schools of thought. We have *madhahib*, Shafai, Hanbali, Maliki, the shiai *madhahib*, and so on. So, there is room in Islam for more than one opinion, not about the basics, but concerning the secondary and tertiary issues. This has been so even since the time of the Prophet, *pbuh*. When he consulted his friends, Abu Bakr would give one opinion and Omar might give a different opinion. There is room for that, though anything which has been settled by the Quran or by the authentic *Hadith* can bear no more than one opinion.

"When Allah and his Apostle have settled an opinion, then no Muslim, man or woman, may claim to have their own opinions." (33:36)

Opinions arise when the Quran and the authentic *Sunna* leave space for people to think and have their own opinions about what is for the welfare of Muslims, as times and places change.

The problem arises when people forget the basic things and focus upon the secondary differences, devoting their lives only to those differences. Examples of these secondary differences abound. Some self-appointed teachers have acquired some very wrong even strange-ideas and have incorporated them into Islamic teachings.

In one Islamic center, a teacher may tell the children that they should hate Christians, Jews, Shiates and

so on. Another teacher may tell the children not to sit on a seat that a woman has recently sat upon because the transmission of the heat from her body to theirs is *haram*. I go to Islamic centers and discuss the most serious issues in the Friday *Khutba*, and someone asks why I am wearing a tie, or brings up some other petty issue.

The second question is whether Islam is foreign in America. I have read statements by the enemies of Islam claiming that we are foreign people with a foreign religion, worshipping a foreign God. If we see ourselves as only guests in this country, then Islam will never be established here. Many American Muslims send the message all the time that Islam is foreign. How can we ever transmit Islam when we are looked upon as foreign?

The third question is whether Islam is to put down roots in America or not. Our roots are not papa and grandpa; rather, our roots are our children and grandchildren. Are Muslims preparing their children, who are being raised in America, to be good Americans and good Muslims? It is not enough to be good Americans without Islam, or good Muslims but foreigners. Hence the importance of really making sure that after you die, your children will inherit more than your money. They should inherit Islam itself, whether it is from the home, the Islamic center, or the Islamic school. To me, the Islamic school in America is now more important than the mosque. You can pray in a school, but it is not practical to have a school in a mosque.

The fourth question is whether Islam is a spectator or a participant in this land? Do we watch things happen, or do we influence the making of decisions? If you stand aside, in a country that settles things by majority vote, then the schools will teach tolerance of immorality, as they do now, and the school will wash away Islam from your children. You cannot prevent the infection of your children unless you participate, and are an influential part of this community. A method of doing this is to use your vote. If out of five million Muslims in the United States, we can form a half-million-person voting bloc, we will be able to change things for the better for all Americans.

Finally, there is a crisis of hate between Muslims, locally, nationally, and internationally, by which it has become easy for Muslims to kill Muslims, to hate and tarnish the reputations of Muslims. Unless our fuel is love for one another, unless the Muslim community becomes a loving community, the future is bleak.

THE ETHICS OF THE MOSQUE

Allah says in the Quran, "*Remind, because reminding is helpful for the mumins (faithful).*" (87:9) Let us discuss the ethics of the mosque. Friday is a blessed day. The Prophet, *pbuh*, tells us that there is an hour of every Friday when prayers and supplications will be answered. Allah, Praised and Exalted be He, says in the Quran,

"When it is time for prayer on Friday, hasten to remembering Allah and leave everything else." (62:9)

Juma (Friday) is the day of a collective prayer that one cannot do alone. Therefore beginning in the morning with our intention that we will be going to pray the Jumaa, we feel that we are answering the call of Allah, praying as a collectivity. I go to the mosque as a member of a whole. Our togetherness is more than that of separate individuals who happen to be sitting beside one another. We should realize and bring in to our minds

and hearts that those beside us, to our right or to our left, or behind or in front of us, or far away from us, are our brothers and our sisters.

This feeling of brotherhood should prevail. We are a family, we are a collectivity, and we are an *Umma*. We are not just separate individuals, unknown to one another, who do not even care to look at one another's faces. Having this feeling of belonging and love for the community of which you are a member, you should act in ways that emanate from love. When you come late to the mosque, don't park your car behind the car of your brother and obstruct his way. This is a violation, not an expression of love. This might harm people who have to leave immediately after the prayer, to go back to their work. The Prophet, *pbuh*, said: "A Muslim is a person from whose tongue and hands (sayings and deeds) a Muslim should feel safe;" this is a consideration that you should not forget, that you should think of even before you enter the mosque.

When you enter the mosque, it would be prudent for you to put your shoes in the shoe rack. I have seen in some newspapers, under the heading "At the Mosque," pictures displaying a heap of shoes. Good taste is part of Islam, and consideration for the image of Islam should be one of our concerns. No shoes should be allowed on the floor as long as shoe racks are available.

Next, you go to perform your *wudu*, your ablution. Remember two things which the Prophet, *pbuh*, said.

The first is, "Cleanliness is part of the faith." Therefore, while doing your wudu, you should not splash water on the ground. Indeed it would be ethical for you to wipe the sink after you do your wudu, and to wipe up any water which has been spilled on the floor.

The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, ordered that we should conserve water. When he saw a man using a lot of water for his ablution, he forbade him to do this; the man replied: "Rasulu Allah, there is plenty of water." The Prophet told him, "Conserve water, even if you are doing your wudu at a flowing river." Therefore, make sure you shut off the water in between mouth rinses, in between nasal washings, every time you wash your face, once and twice and thrice, in order to conserve water. Then make sure that as you come into the mosque, your feet are not so wet as to splash water on other people or wet the carpets. As you enter the mosque on Friday, make sure you are wearing nice attire, because Allah says in the Quran, "*Be in your beautiful apparel when you go for your prayers.*" (7:31)

Dirty clothing doesn't just offend the eye, but it may also rub dirt off on your neighbors clothing. Indeed, the Prophet, *pbuh*, was so concerned with the ethics of avoiding offending people that he said, "If you have eaten raw onion, or raw garlic, then you'd better not come to the mosque," because the smell would annoy the people around you. This is the *Sunna* of the Prophet, *pbuh*.

Then, you pray "*tahiyat al masjid*", to salute the mosque; this is two rakats. Make sure not to stand at the entrance of the prayer hall. Try to come to the foremost rows of the worshippers, so that the mosque can be filled from front to back. It is the *Sunna* and the teaching of the Prophet that you try to sit in the front, of course without being too pushy toward others. He said that the best for men are the foremost rows and the best of the rows for women are those farthest to the back. Of course this is not because men are more important; it is a matter of ethics and aesthetics. When we pray we do *ruku* and *sujud*, and it is not very aesthetically pleasing when women kneel and prostrate themselves, knowing that a man is behind them.

When these first *rakats* are done, and the worshippers are waiting for the imam to come, some people display unsavory habits such as picking their noses. This is very disturbing to others, especially with the expectation that one might have to shake hands with these people at the end of the prayer. Also, I have seen people cleaning or playing with their toes. This is not a very aesthetically appealing scene. In Islam we know that Allah is beautiful and loves beauty, which is contrary to what these people do. Also, if you have a bad cold, and you sneeze and cough, let alone shake hands after the prayer, or even hug and kiss after the prayer, you will be infecting others. The Prophet says: "A Muslim is one from whom the Muslims are safe."

In the case of being sick, either don't come to the mosque, or sit at the very back, and at the end of the prayer, if someone comes to shake your hand, have the courtesy to say, "No, I will not shake hands, because I have a cold." Or, if someone comes to hug and kiss you, you should say, "Please don't: I have a cold."

Then there is the question of coming in to pray the greeting of the mosque, after the *adhan* and after the leader to the prayer starts to make the speech. Praying the greeting of the mosque while the imam is giving his speech is controversial, and in the juridical books you will find some who say that since the greeting is a *Sunna*, one must do it, while others say that since the Imam is speaking to you, you must not ignore him to do your prayers. I lean toward the second opinion. When the imam is doing his second *khutba*," this will be too close to the time of juma prayers. When the imam speaks, you should be paying attention to him. It is only courteous to listen to someone who is talking to you. The imam is not talking to a collective entity, called "the congregation." He is talking to every single one of you individually. Your response should be in accordance with that. Sometimes people talk to one another, though in a whisper, while the imam is giving the *khutba*. Then let us invoke the saying of Prophet Mohammed, *pbuh*:

"Even if the talk is in the way of saying to your neighbor, 'pay attention,' it is wrong."

Then, when the *khutba* is finished, and we start the *salat*, you should stand in straight rows as an expression of discipline, and you should fill up the gaps between you, as an expression of solidarity. Don't wait for others to fill up the gaps. Some people want to be at the back in order to be able to leave early, as soon as the prayer is finished; therefore when there are gaps they just wait for someone else to fill them. Why let somebody else be better and more rewarded than you? Even if you have to move from your place, go to where you will fill a gap.

During the prayer, if the imam is reading, he may forget something, or make a mistake in reciting the Quran, in which case it is the duty of those who know that verse of the Quran to correct the imam. By the way, especially during Ramadan and the *Tarawih*, it is permissible for the imam to have the Quran in his hand and to read from it for the prayer. During the prayer, don't be too hasty. Follow the imam and don't precede him, so that you don't do ruku before the Imam does the ruku and says, "*Allahu Akbar*." A common mistake that I see often is when, at the end of the prayer when the imam looks right saying, "*Assalmu alaikum*," and then again saying left, "*Assalmu alaikum*," some people do not wait until the Imam has done both *salams* before saying their *salams*. When the prayer is concluded it is time either to make a *Sunna* or to leave. In both cases, you have to remember that some of your brothers may have

a legitimate reason to leave immediately. So when you are embarking on your prayer after the obligatory prayer, leave a space between you and the wall of the mosque. If someone wants to leave, he will be able to do so. Then, make it your custom to look at the face of your neighbor, not just his hand, as you shake hands. This is not a religious requirement, but it is a good tradition, enabling you to make the acquaintance and shake the hand of your neighbor. Don't treat your neighbor as a mere hand that you shake; don't treat your neighbor as a stranger. Look in his face and smile, because to smile into the face of your brother is a sadaka, as the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said. We may forget each other's names, but we should be acquainted with each other's faces, because a face loving a face, is a heart loving a heart. When you leave the mosque, leave quietly and quickly. Do not cause over crowding, and certainly do not leave a trail of trash in the mosque after the prayer.

Once, being in London, I went to the mosque to pray during Eid. After the prayer, the place was covered with trash. I felt very ashamed as a Muslim. So, be sure to pick up your trash and don't leave any behind you, because that is part of ensuring a good image for Islam in this country.

About the Book

This book presents an Islamic perspective on some key fundamental issues such as marriage, divorces, Islamic unity and spirituality.

About the Authors

Hassan Hathout is a Physician, scientist, teacher, speaker, thinker, writer, poet and ethicist, as well as an Islamic scholar. He is one of those encyclopedic personalities reminiscent of older times. As an Egyptian American, he is bicultural and bilingual. Appalled by the distorted image of Islam in the West, he has made it his mission to explain Islam as it is. He is the author of more than a dozen books and unnumberable medical and non-medical papers and articles.

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