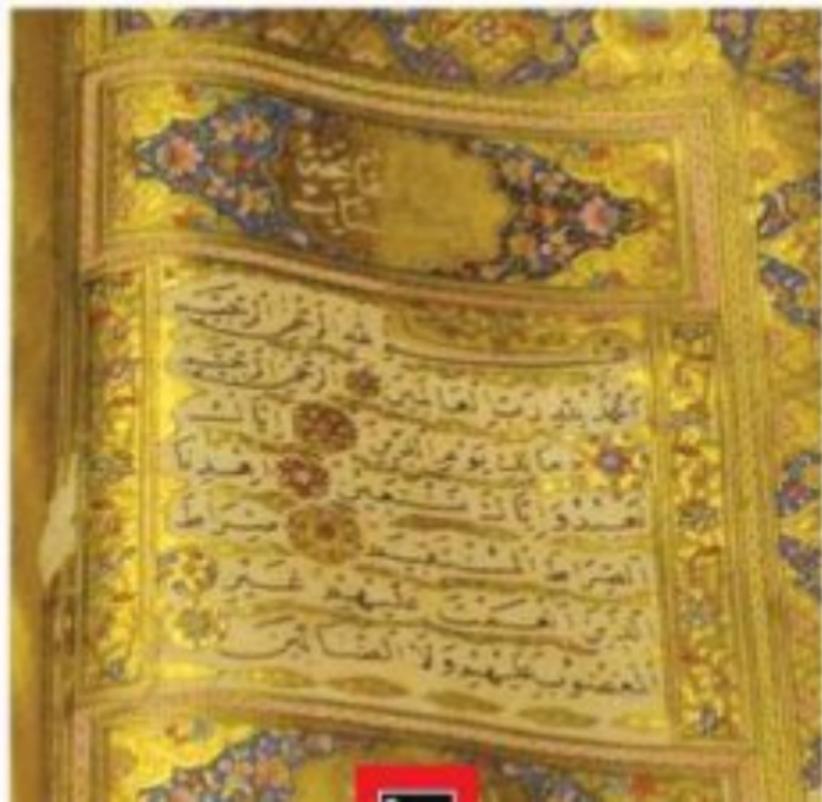


Manifesto of the United

Islam

Rashid Shaz



*Manifesto of the
United Islam*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*Gain is One of this nation; Loss, too, is One
One is their Prophet, Religion is One, Faith is One
The Sacred Mosque is One, God is One, the Holy Book is One
Would it be a great deal, had Muslims been One?*

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“The Shias and Sunnis of our day persist in separate compartments despite their allegiance to Islam. Their community interests are separate, their books are separate, and their religious ulama are separate; so much so, that even their mosques are separate. Not only Shias and Sunnis, but other sects of Muslims too such as Isma’ilis or Ibadis or later day upholders of Salafi, Jama’ati, Deobandi, and Barelvi dogmas, have all separated their mosques. Just look around and the fact cannot remain hidden from your eyes that whether it is mosques or religious madrasas these have all become pits of narrow-mindedness, prejudice and sectarianism, though apparently they may glint with the exotic sheen of religiosity and the echo ‘God is Greatest’ may resound from their minarets. Instead of being reserved for the worship of One God, these places have been reduced to sites exploited for upholding the banner of sectarian faith. Sadly, very sadly, there is no escape from stating that such places are no longer centres of monotheism, but bastions of shirk [polytheism] and sectarianism, which have been active like the virus working against Islam and Muslims right from within the Muslim society.”

Preface

The manifesto of the united Islam is no effort in the direction of inventing a new Islam, but a call to revert to that universal and prophetic Islam whose everlasting and intact testament is very much with us in the form of the Holy Quran. However, this call to revert to the Quran is different from all other past reformist and revivalist ventures in one particular respect. Whereas the past reformers have preferred to pass by in holy silence the intellectual muddle or disorientation intruding into the clear Islamic faith, we have reached the conclusion that unless the *ummah* totally disentangles itself from the non-prophetic alien orientations, it can hardly ever see itself reinstalled onto the path divinely ordained for it. It entails, therefore, that the *ummah* subjects its intellectual journey and its ultimate purpose and goals to a rigorous scrutiny in the light of the Holy Quran applying the highest standards of intellectual integrity. It should have no qualms then to reject unhesitatingly whatever is found alien to Islam, even though such an act may result into witnessing the edifice of one's beloved sect tumble to the ground.

Islam is one thing and the Islamic history quite another. The former is an everlasting message springing from the prophethood of Muhammad and which we Muslims have the honour of upholding. On the contrary, the Islamic history is a

narrative of the phase by phase journey in history of the followers of Muhammad. This journey encompasses moments of glory on the one hand, and occasions of unfortunate disasters on the other. The latter occurred when our nation got split into Shia and Sunni sects in the aftermath of political tussle and perceptual confusion in a certain phase of history; when we got split into the camps of four imams as a result of juristic and theological hairsplitting; and when our body politic got terribly torn apart owing to the mutual bloody strife of Shafi'is and Hanafis. Nevertheless, if we indulged in mutual bloodshed in our past and got torn into mutually warring sects for our intellectual and ideological confusion, it should be no reason at all for us to accord sanctity of faith to these instances of human failing in our history. How unreasonable it is to declare such failings to be beyond reform!

Difference of opinion among human beings is nothing deplorable. However, raising such differences to the level of sacrosanct faith and bringing perpetual sects into existence on the basis of varying interpretations is doubtless extremely condemnable—a manifestation of indulging in associationism (*shirk*). Our elders, who hold on to Islam as a mélange of contradictions, do not want to stir their thought process lest the very foundation of the Islam of their preference should be revealed to be shaky. On the other side, our new generation that breathes in the age of cybermedia lives through the agony of utter confusion and thought perplexity. This generation has

been at a loss to comprehend as to why the followers of the Prophet of God whom he left behind as a united *ummah* soon got fragmented into Shia, Sunni, Isma'ili, Ibadi sort of identities. What makes the matters worse is the fact that our hearts feel no ache and our eyes shed no tears over the absence of the united prophetic version of Islam. Each sect shamelessly insists on declaring its own version of Islam to be the most authentic one to the exclusion of the rest. In this modern age, our intelligent youth have now within their ready access all primary source materials on history, jurisprudence and theology and they, with a little movement of their fingers on the keyboard, can procure the entire corpora of complex and controversial issues and academic evidence. These young people have been frustrated by the thought as to which Quranic teaching has caused the splitting of Muslims into four or five or more sects. Be it Abu Hanifa or Shafi'i or other holy founders of different Shia or Sunni sects or sub-sects, none of them was appointed by God to their individual task, nor did any of them enjoy the companionship of the Prophet. What could be the reason then that they enjoy the unquestionable status of holy and infallible founders of religion and its exponents? Why do different sects of Muslims consider it but essential to follow them? Don't they realize that our community and religious life was much better organized in the early days of Islam when Muslims were just one *ummah* and when these founders of sectarian faith were far away from

appearing on the horizon of history? There is no reason therefore that our religious life could not be organized anew without their intrusion and interference.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, had entrusted the *ummah* with Islam alone. The early day believers called themselves 'Muslims', which was the only identity that God had bestowed upon them. How on earth did it happen then that this divinely ordained identity was unseated by Shia, Sunni like self-tailored identities? Worse, it did not stop there, but this tendency inclined them to seek further sub-divisions within divisions on grounds of juristic differences and sectarian thought. Each sect and group created its own world of sectarian books, endless corpuses of traditions and polemical juristic quibbling vis-à-vis the universally infallible message of the Quran, and thus perfected their dissociation with the prophetic message. The situation has so much deteriorated that today the worst kind of sectarianism and mutual hatred have encompassed the entire *ummah* in the name of Islam itself from which no ready rescue seems feasible. Be it the religious madrasas or the gatherings of holy sermons, lectures of religious instruction or the rhetoric of public speakers, you will unmistakably find one thing common to all of these if you are able to read between the lines. You will feel that all of them are busy strengthening their sectarian agenda and fanning group prejudices; hence, turning away from the universal message of Islam, rather falsifying and nullifying it. Therefore, the

deafening cacophony going on all around in the name of Islam or propagation of Islam has absolutely nothing to do with that original Islam which unifies all its followers with the belief of monotheism and turns them into an invincible force.

To retrieve the lost format of Islam and to resurrect it anew is a collective responsibility of all groups of its followers. Not only does our community's future depend on this endeavour but the collective interest of all nations of the world is also linked to it. The purpose of bringing out this booklet is actually to provide a spur to the process of this retrieval. Our endeavour would be to have all sects of the ummah join forces together with the sole aim of retrieving their real ideological origin and resurrecting their pristine common identity. An effort must be made to bring back into the prophetic fold even those who now consider themselves distinct from the rest of the Muslims or who delinked themselves from the rest in a certain phase of history but were very much a part of our common caravan in the past. Initiating a well-intentioned inter-religious, inter-sectarian, rather inter-group and inter-school dialogue may melt the ice obstructing our path in this cause. It is quite possible to venture a common struggle in this direction if all sects show a firm determination, driven by a sense of loss, to turn back to their real and original ideological home, i.e. the prophetic Islam.

Referencing historical sources has been deliberately avoided in this tract, so as to maintain its brevity and simplicity

of style. However, those interested in seeing academic references and historical details are advised to study the two volumes of *Idrak* together with *Kitabul Urooj* which document with precision the history of Muslim scholarship as well as an account of periodic intrusion of confusions and aberrations spread over a thousand years of our past.

With the publication of this book, the process of retrieving the Muhammadan message, spanning a quarter century of academic research and analysis, contemplation, and nightly supplications, is now entering the phase of action and application. No words would suffice to express gratitude to God Almighty for granting this chance and for extending life.

Rashid Shaz

Aligarh, 5 May 2012

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Manifesto of the United Islam

Are you a Muslim? One could only wish that the answer was in the affirmative. But, unfortunately, this is actually not the case. When you ask a Muslim what type of a Muslim he is; which group or juristic school he belongs to; which group or spiritual guide he subscribes to; he is a Shia or Sunni, Isma'ili or Ibadi, Hanafi or Shafi'i, follows the Deobandi school or Salafi way, it renders our claim redundant that we are nothing but 'Muslims' true in faith [حنيفا مسلما] and practice nothing but Islam.

This day, when the number of Muslims has risen to quarter to two billion and there is no significant spot in this world which is unknown to Muslim presence, it seems nothing less than shocking that in this multitude of humanity those are very rare, if not altogether nonexistent, who call themselves only Muslims and insist on this identity alone. All of us are prisoners to different types of sectarianism and each Muslim is identified by his respective sect. Not only that, but within each sect there are various juristic sub-sects and thus division within a division is continuing as an ongoing process in each camp. A modern Muslim believes therefore that in order to be and remain a Muslim he should first of all be a Shia or a Sunni. And if he is a Sunni, he should also inevitably subscribe to one of the four juristic Sunni sects. This is the minimum splitting

without which being a Muslim is thought unimaginable. Now, who should tell them that this sectarian groupism arising in the name of jurisprudence and schools of thought violates, rather militates against, the Islamic call to monotheism.

Belief in one God unifies human beings in respect of unconditional submission to Him. In this eternal relationship all find themselves useful and helpful to others, be they Arab or non-Arab, black or white, rich or poor, masters or slaves. Bilal of Ethiopia and Salman of Persia all construct an international brotherhood of the faithful in Islam. Despite their different national and geographical origins, they all share the same religious, community, political, geographic interest once they enter the fold of monotheism. They live and die for the same goal. On the contrary, Shias and Sunnis of our day persist in separate compartments despite their allegiance to Islam. Their community interests are separate, their books are separate, and their religious ulama are separate; so much so, that even their mosques are separate. Not only Shias and Sunnis, but other sects of Muslims too such as Isma'ilis or Ibadis or later day upholders of Salafi, Jama'ati, Deobandi, and Bareilvi dogmas, have all separated their mosques. Now which mosque belongs to which sects can easily be found out by the set of religious books placed in those mosques! Just look around and the fact cannot remain hidden from your eyes that whether it is mosques or religious madrasas these have all become pits of narrow-mindedness, prejudice and sectarianism,

though apparently they may glint with the exotic sheen of religiosity and the echo 'God is Great' may resound from their minarets. Instead of being places reserved for the worship of One God, these have been reduced to sites exploited for upholding the banner of sectarian faith. Sadly, very sadly, there is no escape from stating that such places are no longer centres of monotheism, but bastions of *shirk* [polytheism] and sectarianism, which have been active like the virus working against Islam and Muslims right from within the Muslim society. Since these centres survive under the façade of piety and righteousness, we do not normally feel the need to raise a loud and clear voice against them even though we may be fully aware of this alarming situation. This comment of ours against sectarian schools of thought and their mosques is not a result of our heightened emotion but owing to the Quranic edict addressed to the Prophet which our holy ulama are certainly not unaware of:

*as for those who divide their religion and break
up into sects, thou hast no part in them in the least.*

[An'am:159]

Sectarianism is associationism [*shirk*]. Those who fan sectarian bias or uphold the banner of group identity or prefer for themselves an identity other than Islam and Muslim and exhaust their energies in promoting that, are in fact the people who take to the path of *shirk* by turning away from One God. No hue of Islam can be spotted in such people. Just think how

painful it is that the followers of the same Prophet have got fragmented into different sects and that too in the name of religion or religious thought itself. The Shia madrasas are busy proving the Shia version of Islam to be the most accurate and Sunnis to be depraved. On the other side, the Sunni madrasas have been exerting themselves for centuries to prove the standpoint of Sunnis [*ahl-sunnah wa al-Jamaah*, i.e. upholders of the Prophet's way and mainstream Muslims] to be the actual way of the faithful. And within these Sunni madrasas, Shafi'is are busy exalting and glorifying the ulama of their school of thought, and Hanafis proudly believe that nothing could be more useful to appreciate religion than the authority of the elders' pronouncements. If God has given us a little insight, we cannot fail to see that in mosques, madrasas and monasteries, which our illusory perception shows us as Islam's castles, the process of falsifying Islam and glorifying and lionizing one's own sectarian faith is going on in fullest frenzy. In one place, pupils are being trained for academic crusade against Shiaism, and in the other, preparations are in full swing to raze the castle of Barelvi faith to the ground. In one place, mock-debates are held to prove the Deobandi school to be the most accurate and best, and in the other, struggle is on to ever widen the circle of spiritual allegiance to a certain holy figure. This condemnable business of promulgating sectarianism and groupism in the name of religion is constantly inflicting wounds on the ummah from within. Whatever pretensions of

mutual tolerance and generosity may be claimed by these conflicting interpretations of religion, as well as sects and factions resulting from them, the truth of the matter is that the very survival of these sects gets nourishment from the process of mutual nullification and condemnation. Suppose, Shias withdraw their political case against Sunnis, they would have no justification to continue believing in the twelve imams as divinely appointed and following them. Similarly, if Sunnis abstain from accusing Shias of heresy, they would have no justification for ignoring the twelve imams in their religious life. Shias and Sunnis cannot become perfectly united and this fragmented ummah cannot become a force to reckon with until Shias give up their Shiaism and Sunnis discard their Sunnism. Apparently though this seems quite an uphill task, it is not altogether impossible if hearts are ablaze with the real intention of rejecting *shirk* and embracing monotheism.

Over the past thousand years, both sects have pursued a policy of sheer hypocrisy which is labeled 'authentic faith' by each. It is the policy of mutual tolerance and coexistence in public and of mutual condemnation and dismissal in private. Undoing a hypocritical process of such nature or correcting a deviation spanning a thousand years of our history is doubtless a daunting task. However, after a millennium long painful experience we are now in a much better position to realize than ever before that unless we are united internally and until

we set in order our own house first we would never be able to undertake a decisive engagement with the enemy abroad.

Just think! Isn't this a fact that when Mongol invaders were hesitant to enter Baghdad for the symbolic spiritual awe of the Abbasid caliph, just then they enjoyed the support and encouragement of a Shia religious authority, Nasiruddin Tusi, for destroying the Sunni caliphate? Similarly, when the same Mongols desired to annihilate the remnants of the Fatimid caliphate in the Castle of Death, they enjoyed the physical presence and support of a Sunni religious authority, Alauddin Ata Malik Juwaini. We got split into different compartments around the fourth century when we also saw the rise of mutually competing caliphates in our midst. Since then, our energies have mostly been wasted on strengthening our own sect and destabilising the other sects. Institutions of religious sciences [*uloom shari'a*] mushroomed all over the Muslim lands in the wake of the establishment of the Al-Azhar University of the Fatimid era, which was actually started to propagate the Fatimid school of religious thought. Can we deny the fact that all such institutions were initially brought into existence to counter the onslaught of Fatimid thought? Just to counterbalance the Isma'elite or Fatimid Islam, the Nizamia madrasa of Baghdad was brought into existence as well as sufi centres and monasteries were encouraged to operate. Thus, from the fourth century onwards, in the name of religious science the factories of political and religious

sectarianism became operational all around the Islamic world. The Fatimid and Abbasid caliphates saw the inevitable fall and vanished into thin air of history in the due course of time, but till this moment we have not been able to get rid of factionalism and group and sectarian identity engendered in that period. Rather, the truth is that these heretic and deviant interpretations of our faith have relentlessly bolstered and toughened factionalism and group bias with the passage of time. The result is that today one may hardly if ever find someone who dares to declare that he is just a Muslim, first and last, and that he has nothing to do with identities such as Shia, Sunni, Isma'ili, Ibadi, Alavi, Daruzi, Qadiani etc. And that he is not a believer in any Abu Hanifa or Shafi'i or Jafar Sadiq etc.

Need for a Fresh Start

Apparently it looks quite strange that one may cast doubts on the foundations of sectarianism which is considered a namesake of Islam, rather than *shirk*, and which is taken by majority of Muslims to be Muhammad's Message. The thought may possibly cross your mind that what is the need today to declare those foundations suddenly unreliable upon which have thrived various forms of sectarianism in the name of real Islam and which have been in practice for about a thousand years. During these thousand years a large number of ulama and thinkers were born as well as interpreters, spokesman and

ideologues. Why on earth did they not point to the grand deviation that I am doing today after about a thousand years? This period saw the rise of theologians like Ghazali and Ibn Taimiyah on the one hand, and on the other revivalists like Shah Waliullah and Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab. Then, in the twentieth century appeared on the horizon, after the fall of the Ottoman caliphate, pupils of Afghani, fans of Iqbal, movements of Hasan al-Banna, Maulvi Ilyas and Abul Ala Maududi, but none of them called for doing away with this deviation, root and branch. They all shared an attitude of carrying forth this bundle of contradictions since, they assumed, this deviation is beyond human power to correct and this is a chronic ailment incurable in nature. Shah Waliullah, for instance, advances the idea that the real schools of thought are just two — Hanafi and Shafi'I — which automatically assimilate and blend in the other two. He is not able anyway to rid himself of the false thought that, as he says, the emergence of the four imams is from God. Ghazali was anyhow taken to be the advocate of the Abbasid stance for writing *Fadaih al-Batiniya*. However, even Ibn Taimiyah, who simultaneously enjoys the status of a fighter and a revivalist, is no different. He does consider the twelve imams of Shias a deviation, but has no answer to the Shia scholar Allama Hilli's objection that if the concept of twelve imams is false, what is the religious justification then for the four Sunni imams? If you read the books of different sects and try to understand their

standpoints, you will be dismayed to know that the issues upheld by them as matters of faith in their respective sectarian circles, with which reverberate their religious institutions, are in fact echoes of political factionalism of the bygone era, having nothing to do with Islam or its goals. The hard fact is that these factional interpretations have distorted the form of the clear faith of Islam and degraded and defiled it to the worst possible extent. We cannot realize this until we muster up courage to go through the religious books of all those sects with equal objectivity.

As for the suggestion that this deviation must be embraced because a period of one thousand years has passed over it or factionalism must be tolerated because it has thrived for centuries is really a strange one. Must a patient do nothing to cure his disease if it has gone chronic? This attitude fails to win the support of the Quran or the divine law or even reason. Islam is unequivocal in its clear condemnation of 'that-is-how-we-found-our-ancestors-do'¹ attitude. The Quran demands to place no reliability in the elders' sayings or ancestral practices if they are in conflict with Revelation and Reason. Just as the Quranic revelation united the early day Muslim society on the principle of monotheism, the modern day followers of Muhammad, in his absence, carry the burden of perpetually correcting their direction in the light of the intact and infallible message of the Quran. That is to say, it is incumbent upon

وجدنا ابائنا كذالك يفعلون¹

those in ummah who are at the helm of affairs to constantly review and revise their thoughts and actions in the light of the Quran and the holy Practice [Sunnah], of which the holy Quran itself is the most authentic source, in the absence of the Prophet. Then, they may hold on to whatever they find in agreement with it, and unhesitatingly reject whatever appears in conflict with it. And they should not be daunted by the fact that it carries the support of centuries old deviant historical process and the espousal of the words and deeds of simple-minded ancestors.

Now consider this matter from another angle! Just the antiquity of a deviation or its present popularity should not automatically become an evidence of its validity. Neither does a deviation of this nature or mistake lose a chance of reform just because of its antiquity. Aren't you aware of the fact that Faraj bin Barquq, reckoned by historians among the worst rulers, installed separate *musallas* [prayer areas] for four Sunni jurists in the Ka'aba mosque in his frustration resulting from the unending sectarian conflicts? As a result, the one ummah continued offering prayers in the same sacred mosque behind four different imams. Great many scholars lived through this prolonged period in the ummah, but none dared to put an end to this deviation, until the Najdi reform movement once again united the people behind one imam after they occupied Hijaz towards early 20th century. Now, after a lapse of three quarters of a century, none feels in his remotest imagination that rolling

back of the four separate *musallas* has caused any harm or deficiency to our prayers in the Ka'aba mosque. So, there is no reason to consider other deviations of the same nature irredeemable.

One could only wish we had realized that the constant drop in our national graph is due to our mutual ideological clash, which has caused different groups such as Shia, Sunni, Hanafi, Bareilvi, Deobandi and a host of others to be perpetually at war with one another. This flood of mutual hatred raging over a thousand years seems uncontainable. Rather, its current has been gathering greater momentum with the passage of time. In this situation, how can this ummah imagine for itself a peaceful and bright future, let alone the leadership role unto the nations of the world?

An ostrich-like attitude may just delay the matters a little. It can however offer no solution to the problems, rather further aggravate their intensity and severity. Our reformers have parroted for centuries the notion that Shias and Sunnis and others are all justified in their respective positions, and therefore the four Sunni schools of thought offer authentic forms of religion despite their mutual discord and disarray. Delusions of this sort have in fact hindered us from developing a realistic perception of actual issues. It is no more good saying that all those are equally just who have relinquished God-given identity of 'Muslim' and who are given to sect-worship, imam-worship, ulama-worship, and other worships of the same

nature and for whom upholding the banner of their respective sect or group is dearer than upholding the banner of One Great God. To project such a view is to deny both 'Revelation' and 'Reason.' The Quran clearly dictates in this respect, as mentioned above, that '[O Muhammad], those who fanned factionalism in faith and got split into sects, you have nothing to do with them.' Anyone with a horse's sense must not be unaware of the fact that those who sought an identity for themselves distinct from that of the Muslim ummah did in fact raise the banner of revolt against the path of the faithful. The interest of the ummah and its strength lie in the demise of factions. How is it possible then that all those are at the same time equally just who have invented un-Islamic identities for themselves to replace the identity of 'Muslim' alone and those who became Shia, Sunni, Hanafi and Shafi'i, and who let the unmistakable divine rope slip from their hands?

Prophetic vs. Historical Islam

Emergence of factionalism and establishment of political, juristic, and racial camps among Muslims took place in different periods of history. The Islam of the earliest phase was totally devoid of such blemishes and pollutions. If we develop a certain perception of our intellectual history to an extent, it would become much easier for us to overcome factional bigotry and to appreciate opponents' points of view.

In the first three centuries of Islam, Muslims were one ummah despite all their intellectual or perspectival differences. Factionalism in the name of religion did not exist anytime from Hazrat Usman's martyrdom to the civil wars of Jamal and Siffin and even during Umayyad or Abbasid upheavals. Though some major or minor rebellions were espoused during this time by the members of *Ahl-e-bait*, but prior to the consolidation of Aal-e-Buwaih's rule none ever saw it as even a remotest possibility that the Twelver [*ithna-ashari*] version of Islam could ever be a bearer of a distinct ideological identity. Neither the Isma'ilites' hidden interpretations of Islam enjoyed the status of an alternative and absolute ideology prior to the caliphate of the Fatimids, nor did the contours of Sunni Islam had taken a distinct shape before the emergence of Abbasids on the political horizon. At that time, the whole ummah was a grand unity in spite of its intellectual and conceptual differences. To label someone as *ithna-ashari*, *sab'iyya*, or *qata'iyya* etc. was considered no more than the adversary's propaganda. Some called themselves the 'upholders of justice and firmness' and some others thought their standpoint was representative of the Muslim mainstream. For the first three centuries the circles of scholars, the schools of hadith and jurisprudence, and the hadith collections were considered common heritage of all groups. The *Bukhari* and the *Muslim*, as well as dozens of other similar collections mentioned in the historical records, were of equal interest for all schools of

thought. These hadith anthologies carried traditions of both Shia and Sunni slant at the same time. Till this day, Shia traditions like '*khumra-e-namaz*'¹ or '*mut'ah*'² occupy the place of pride in *Sahih Muslim*. Besides, the *Bukhari* still carries the anecdote that the Prophet on his deathbed desired his will to be written down but Umar insisted on declining his wish saying 'God's Book is sufficient for us.' This and a host of other traditions which Shias resort to for the validity of their stance are still found in the *Bukhari*. The fact is that until the fourth century a clear-cut Shia-Sunni division on religious grounds had not taken place. Therefore, the compilers of hadith, such as Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim, were considered representatives of the common attitude of the ummah. However, when Shias produced their own separate hadith collections in the first quarter of the fourth century, the discarded collections were automatically taken to be Sunni sources of hadith. The entire project of collecting and compiling the distinct Shia thought, which eventually rendered Shias into a separate conceptual group, was accomplished under the aegis of Aal-e-Buwaih's rule. Kulaini's collections of hadith would have survived only as an academic achievement if they had not been adopted as the primary source material during Aal-e-Buwaih's rule. If *Nahjul Balaghah* had not been

¹ A clay tablet that Shias balance their foreheads upon during prostration.

² Time-bound marriage still allowed in Shia fiqh since it overrules the decree of Hazrat Umar permanently banning mut'ah'.

edited and compiled by Sharif Razi and Murtaza and if, around the same period, the shrines of Najaf and Karbala had not come into existence, a separate form of Shia Islam also would not have been born. Similarly, if the Fatimid caliphate had not been established in Cairo; *Da'aa'imul Islam* had not been taught at Jamia al-Azhar; an army of ulama and propagators had not been created for establishing the validity of Isma'ili imamate; and Isma'ili callers [*da'i*] disguised as sufis had not reached the cities of Multan; Kirman, Delhi and Ajmer, the Isma'ilite Islam would not have enjoyed any authenticity nor *punjtan* [pentacorpus¹] would have carried extraordinary sanctity as *ahl-e-bait*² for the Muslim masses. If the Abbasid caliphate had not been established, our Friday sermons would have been devoid of encomiums for the progeny of Abbas. Political incidents, therefore, can be seen at work behind all these different interpretations and versions of our religion. It is momentary political exigencies that ruthlessly subjugated religion to their ulterior motives. Whereas these political entities and empires melted, sooner or later, into the thin mist of history, the factionalism and viciousness generated by them still remain an active source of evil for us. For a fresh start, it is but necessary for us that we read history as history. We should not misread into it religion as such. The former attitude motivates us to derive lessons of wisdom from history, whereas

¹ *Punjtan*: i.e. Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain

² *ahl-e-bait*: members of the Prophet's household

the latter drives us to a point where we ourselves become a lesson in history.

A Glance at certain Key Deviations

What divides the Sunni and Shia sects from one another is their conflicting stances regarding caliphate or imamate. Twelver [*ithna ashari*] Shias believe the twelve imams to be divinely chosen and installed. Isma'ilites who initially believed in seven imams now place their faith in a chain of living imams. The Sunni belief in the four caliphs has become an article of their faith. Nevertheless, in actual fact, the four juristic imams, or *fuqaha*, have for centuries commanded their religious life. Now, if we look at the whole matter with an open mind, a little surface scratching is sufficient to tell us that all these dogmas have nothing to do with Islam. These are nothing but different readings of Islam worked out in different periods of history much after Islam had been perfected. It is wholly senseless, therefore, to garb them with the holy aspect of religious dogma. The received concept of the four caliphs took shape during the Abbasid ruler, Mutawakkil. The common understanding prior to that was that the martyrdom of Hazrat Usman had put an end to the collective politics of Muslims. The four and a half year long period of Hazrat Ali remained fraught with civil wars. A large part of the Levant never accepted his caliphate and Muslims could not reach unanimity on his caliphate. That is why, a mention of only

three caliphs was considered sufficient during Muawiya's rule. However, during the Abbasid period, general expediency inclined Imam Ahmad bin Hambal to include Hazrat Ali as the fourth righteous caliph. He did this to make his caliphate a part of Sunni political stance. Still, this pragmatic step until his time was considered no more than an effort to read history in a fresh manner. This stance gained a quick and wide currency owing to Hazrat Ali's personal merit and in view of his grand services. The need of political stability of Abbasids also warranted that they should be capable of winning the confidence of all Muslim factions. So, along with the four imams, a mention of the excellence of *ahl-e-bait* also became a part of the Friday sermons. Soon, along with the prayers such as 'O God, forgive the Abbasids'¹ and 'He established caliphate in them,'² the pulpits echoed with the cries like 'lords of the youth in paradise'³ and 'Fatima, lady of the females in paradise.'⁴ No doubt that this attitude of tolerance and desire to project a unified Islam played a significant role in generating an air of authenticity and acceptability for the Abbasid rule among Muslim masses. But, since these political steps were taken under the garb of Islam and the coming generations saw

¹ اللهم اغفر للعباس [This and the next prayer can be frequently heard in the Sunni Friday sermons.]

² اجعل خلافا فيهم

³ سيدا شباب اهل الجنة [ref. to Hazrat Hasan and Husain]

⁴ فاطمة سيدة النساء في الجنة

it as a construal of faith, these acquired by and by the status of Sunni dogma. On the other side, we have the concept of twelve imams, upon which rests today the edifice of Shia Islam. But the truth of the matter is that even the elders of the *ahl-e-bait* were not aware of this chain of imams. The list with a standard sequence of twelve imams as it is known today is considered a part of faith by Shia ulama, but no such list existed in Ja'afar Sadiq's day. We know when Zaid bin Ali rebelled, he did not enjoy his brother, Muhammad al-Baqar's active or even tacit support. If Shias of those days had known that Muhammad al-Baqar was the divinely appointed imam, how would have his brother Zaid been in the dark about it? In that case, how would it have been possible for him to initiate an uprising on his own without the consent of the imam of the day? Neither was Muhammad bin Hanafia, the non-Fatimid son of Hazrat Ali, aware in the least of this Hasani-Husaini string of imamate whose rebellious acts and their aftermath continued to bother Abbasids for quite some time later. Otherwise, why would he have thought it necessary to initiate rebellious campaigns on his own? During the Umayyad and Abbasid rule, about sixty major and minor revolts were carried out by different groups of *ahl-e-bait*, besides Imam Husain's. Had they been aware of any revealed sequence of these divinely appointed imams, they would certainly not have felt the need to initiate those rebellions on their own in the very presence and without the approval of those imams. So, the alleged list of imams,

acquaintance with which is considered a matter crucial for the soundness of shia faith, was unknown to the circles of *ahl-e-bait* of the early period. What on earth could be the reason then to declare it to be the basis of faith? On this heavenly chain of imamate disagreement always persisted even among the different groups of Shias of *ahl-e-bait* in every phase of history. Even today, Isma'ilites, Twelvers, and other shia factions maintain independent existence and identities on the very same grounds. All this intellectual and perspectival muddle, whether in Sunnis or in Shias, is a direct fallout of reading religious dogma into history or taking history as religious dogma. Just imagine when Hazrat Ali was a sovereign caliph, when his absolute rule swayed over a large part of the Muslim land, did he allow or promote separate azans [call to prayer] for Shias, or did he levy the *khums*¹ money from his followers in the name of *sahm-e-imam*?² If this was not the case, why are his followers insistent today upon a new azan and a new religious identity? Are they not repudiating their own exalted imam thus? Similar is the case of the upholders of *ahl-e-sunnat wa al-jama'at*, who have accorded the sanctity of religious faith to the historical narrative of the four imams, whose critique they believe would pull down the ramparts of Sunni Islam. The concept of the four caliphs is no more than an expression of a fossilized dogma. But the reality of the

¹ A religious obligation to contribute one-fifth of certain income to charity.

² Religious tax received as the right of the Shia imam of the day.

imams who practically command their religious life is that they had gained a great mastery in the *kalami fiqh* [dialectical jurisprudence] like many other experts in the field. These four imams maintained their seminaries in their day like a number of other ulama of their ilk such as Awza'i, Sufyan Sorry, Lais bin Sa'ad, Sufyan bin Ainiyah, Ibn Rahwaih, Daud Zaahiri, Jarir Tabari and many others. Imam Malik first incurred Mansoor's wrath and then won his favour because of which his book *Mu'atta* had almost become the officially adopted fiqh. And another faqih of the same period, Lais bin Sa'ad, due to his uncompromising attitude shrank to a non-entity on the social horizon despite his awesome academic grandeur. So much so, that even the details of his school of thought could not be preserved for future. Under the care of Qazi Abu Yusuf the Hanafi fiqh won the patronage of the government. And during Mutawakkil's regime, Ibn Hambal became the religious advisor to the ruler which catapulted him into fame as a faqih. Otherwise, in his own day and for long afterwards, he was known to ulama only as an expert of hadith and they were reluctant to recognize him as a jurist or *faqih*. Traditionally, Egypt had been a stronghold of the pupils of Shafi'i. But, during the reign of Mamluks when it was felt necessary to weaken the strength of Shafi'i chief justice, the political leadership thought of installing alternative judicial court. Baibars, who had earned extraordinary admiration for repelling formidable Mongol army at Ain Jalut, appointed four different

judicial courts with a view to seeking a sort of compromise among the four different, mutually exclusive and perpetually conflicting, schools of fiqh. Who knew then that the decision of an army general, unaware of religion and religious expediencies, would acquire intransience as well as sanctity, and Muslims would take it binding upon them to follow only one of those four imams? If Baibars had not appointed separate judges for these four schools of fiqh, these imams would have remained just a part of our intellectual history like dozens of other grand fuqaha [experts of jurisprudence] of more or less similar stature and nothing more. They would never have risen to the grandeur of the skippers of Sunni Islam.

Put it this way, to be brief, that if alternative regimes had not arisen among Muslims on grounds of political differences; if Umayyad rulers of Andalusia, Fatimid rulers of Cairo, and Abbasid rulers of Baghdad had not erected separate political castles of their own; and if they had not resorted to religion for seeking *raison d'être* for their respective politics, these different versions of Islam with distinctive identities had never ever seen the light of day.

Divine Religion: Human References

Islam as we know is divinely revealed which had been perfected in every respect during the very lifetime of the prophet, as is evident from the Quranic verse 'Today I

perfected your religion for you.’¹ Have you ever considered why on earth there should be a need for human references in the divinely revealed religion? For its verity the Quran advances the argument that ‘had it been from someone other than God, you would have found in it a lot of contradiction.’² Hence, if you do not see element of conflict in the Quranic injunctions, it is because it is from God. Otherwise, had this religion been a product of human intellect, it would have been replete with intellectual and conceptual differences. The reason behind the existence of so many versions of Islam is actually the same; in their making human intellect has played a lot greater role than the divine revelation. All deviations ensue from human interpretations and explanations in fact. The infallible and intact heavenly scripture of the heavenly religion Islam is still extant in all its pristine glory. How could the upholders of this religion then tolerate identities for themselves such as Hanafi, Shafi’i, Zaidi, Ja’afri, Salafi, Isma’ili and so on? Isn’t it extremely awful? How could it be possible for Abul Hasan Ash’ari to become the interpreter and spokesman of Sunni Islam and for his charter of dogmas to become an inevitable reference for the future generations? Whether it is Ash’ari or Maatureedi, Wasil bin Ata or Mamun and Ibn Hambal, all of them have transgressed the limits set by God, loud and clear, in the Quran: ‘All of them believed in God, His

اليوم اكملت لكم دينكم و اتممت عليكم نعمتي و رضيت لكم اسلام دينا ¹

ولو كان من عند غير الله لوجدوا فيه اختلافا كثيرا ²

angels and His books, and his prophets; we do not differentiate amongst any of the prophets.’¹ After this comprehensive detail of the articles of faith, there was hardly any room for raking up issues such as divine predestination or free will [*jabr-o-qadr*], or the Quran being eternal or created, or various matters related to the Person or Attributes of God. There was no room for the matter of Hazrat Ali being the ‘caliph sans break’ or ‘fourth caliph’ to acquire the status of dogma rather than being a version of historical narrative. God sent only one religion and in His Book He clearly laid out the extents of permissible and impermissible, desirable and undesirable in explicit details. Where was the room then for declaring the same thing detestable by one jurist but permissible and tolerable by the other? Although human reason may falter in getting to the purport of the divine revelation, what is the justification for holding imperfect and faltering human reason to be the source of religion? In principle we all agree that the elders were also humans like us who were capable of doing both right and wrong. However, just as Shias, despite declaring about elders that ‘they were (ordinary) men just as we are,’ cannot set aside the compilations of Kulaini, Sheikh Mufid, Sharif Razi and Murtaza, and the caucus guru Tusi, Sunnis too do not dare to go beyond the four imams in order to rediscover for themselves the real prophetic contours of Islam. So much so, that those who claim to have given up *taqlid* [adherence to tradition] and

¹ لَ أَمْنٌ بِاللَّهِ وَ مَلَائِكَتِهِ وَ كُتُبِهِ وَ رِيسُلِهِ لَا نَفْرَقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِيسُلِهِ

who talk of direct culling from the Quran and Sunnah, do not step beyond following the ‘virtuous elders.’ Now who should tell them that those whom they look upon as ‘virtuous elders,’ did not enjoy a status of holiness and trustworthiness when they lived. They often indulged in rivalry and conflict with their contemporaries. If one group of scholars consisted of their admirers and pupils, the other did not abstain from denouncing and falsifying their position and even blowing them out as ‘unbelievers’ [kafir]. Khatib Baghdadi has preserved for our instruction the mutual blame games and denunciation of the most outstanding jurists and their pupils. Even Bukhari and Muslim were not non-controversial in their time whose compilations today enjoy Quran-like sanctity and are held by some as ‘the most authentic after the Book of God.’¹ It is narrated that when the mutual discord between Ismail Bukhari and Muhammad bin Yahya Zahili intensified, it became difficult for Imam Muslim to decide which one of his teachers to support. Muslim ultimately distanced himself from Zahili. He went so far in his opposition to Zahili, and siding with Bukhari, that he loaded on camels all the copies of hadith acquired from Zahili and returned them to him. Just think, how different Muslim’s selection of hadith [*Sahih Muslim*] would have been, had the quarrel between the two compilers of hadith, Bukhari and Zahili, not so much intensified. There is no reason therefore that human compilations—based on

¹ اصح الكتب بعد كتاب الله

human intellect for collection, edition, analysis and research—should be accorded the status of infallible religious sources. And that too in such a fashion that Sunni Islam should be based on the six canonized books of hadith [*sahah sittah*], and Shia edifice be erected on the foundation of Kafi, Ibn Babwaih, Istibsar Tusi, and *Nahjul Balaghah*.

Emergence of Rabbis in Islam

In the early centuries of Islam when the Quran was the only reference for our thoughts and deeds, none even imagined seeking guidance from elders. Then, it was possible for a Bedouin woman to publicly challenge Umar's understanding of the Quran and for him in turn to realize his error right on the pulpit and withdraw his opinion, as it is narrated in history books on the issue of *mehr* [dower money]. Abu Bakr Siddiq's stance remained uncertain for lack of unanimity regarding those who refused to pay regular charity [*zakat*] to the government until they were granted release from imprisonment during Hazrat Umar's time. When the understanding and inferences of exalted companions, such as Hazrat Abu Bakr and Umar, did not enjoy the status of religious diktat and ordinary Muslims considered it their right to challenge them on the authority of the Quran, it may be guessed how pivotal and central was the role of the Book of God then in the intellectual life of Muslims. The first generation Muslims had no qualms about the fact that Islam

had directly linked man to his Creator. There was no need then for any go-between authority between man and God, such as the pope or spiritual elders. In crystal-clear terms the Quran had introduced Muhammad the Messenger as a prophet who would free people from the manacles of religious rituals, prohibitions and associations that had been placed upon them by self-styled religiosity, as it is said in the Quran 'he lifts from them burden that had been placed upon them.'¹ But, unfortunately, this feature of Islam diminished in the time to come. Though this started with Shafi'i's *Al-Risala*, the Islamic maulvi was fully chiseled out in the Fatimid era when the political version of Islam assumed the level of religious knowledge. It led, in isolation from Darul Ilm, to the mushrooming of *nizamia* madrasa chains as well as the sufi monasteries and lodges that echoed with the spiritual and religious sciences. The Quran is totally devoid of the term '*uloom shariah*' [religious sciences]. It tells us that declaring something permissible or impermissible [*halal* or *haram*] is the sole prerogative of God. So much so, that the Prophet's status is that of an interpreter of law and not that of a lawmaker, as he himself says: 'Verily I do not allow but what God allows in his Book, and I do not prohibit but what God prohibits in His Book.'²

¹ و يضع عنهم اصرهم و اغلال التي كانت عليهم

² اني لا احل الا ما احل الله في كتابه و لا احرم الا ما حرم الله في كتابه

In loud and clear terms the Quran preserves the right of a ‘religious edict’ exclusively for God and for Him alone, as is evident from the verse addressed to the Prophet: ‘They seek your *fatwa* concerning the women say: Allah gives you His *fatwa* about them.’¹ In the presence of such a crystal-clear instruction, there was no theoretical need for the emergence of a class of *maulvis* and spiritual gurus—like pundits, fathers and rabbis—that may claim for itself exclusive mastery of religious knowledge and competence for issuing religious edicts. Alas, during the decline of Abbasid caliphate when the rulers had no choice but to acquiesce to occupiers and usurpers the political authority, they installed certain jurists as religious heads, in consideration of their public image as devout, pious and knowledgeable. Ulama and sufis enjoyed public admiration and power-hungry Seljuks had the sword in their hands. The enfeebled and destabilised caliphate took refuge in seeking compromises with both these groups for the sake of its own survival. And, thus, the **caliphate** that used to be a fine blend of both religious and political leadership simultaneously got split into separate compartments. This temporary pragmatism led to a major and irretrievable loss, which was that the person of caliph was reduced to just a puppet in the hands of ulama and sultans instead of being an effective authority. Since, sultans had come to power by virtue of the sword, their illegitimacy

¹ ۛ ۛڪم [They ask thy instruction concerning the women say: Allah doth instruct you about them]

was obvious to one and all. But, Ulama masqueraded in the guise of devotion and piety, and so their real intentions remained hidden from the common eye. In the course of time, therefore, they were acceptable as reliable and competent interpreters of Islam. Gradually, their verdicts and utterances came to be considered holy and sacrosanct. Though, as long as Muslims maintained direct link with the divine revelation, acts and deeds of the elders could not prove fetters for them. What could be greater historical evidence for it than the fact that Hazrat Umar unhesitatingly altered during his time certain Prophetic precedents? For instance, regarding the distribution of conquered lands, or about 'heart-winning' [مؤلفته القلوب] steps, he adopted a policy different from the Prophet's sunnah or precedents.

At that time, the divine revelation for us was a beacon that maintained us on the highway of guidance each moment. Just contrast the attitude of creative revision and adaptation of the Prophet's precedents on one side, and on the other the tendency of insipid and bland imitation of the pronouncements of Shafi'i and Abu Yusuf. Just compare the two attitudes: realising the need to change the Prophet's precedents in response to the altered circumstances, and the condemnable attempt of seeking the purport of sharia in the writings of Shami and AlKasani. In the days to come the Seljuks who had created room for themselves in the political system of Islam by force became a part of history. The enfeebled Abbasid rule also

breathed its last at the hands of Mongols. The priesthood, nevertheless, entrenched itself at the ideological centre of Islam, under the titles like legal experts, sufis, spiritual caliphs, racial leadership etc., in such a way that this intrusion could not be repelled or uprooted despite numerous attempts. The belief became common that the ulama of Islam enjoyed the exclusive and unchallengeable right to the explication and interpretation of the faith, since they are the inheritors of the Prophetic knowledge; hence, on a par with the Israelite prophets in stature. This was a situation similar to what was created by Rabbi Akiva who declared that determining the meaning of the *Torah* was the exclusive right of the Talmudic interpreters, and when the latter openly asserted that 'once God entrusted us with the *Torah*, determining its meaning is solely our prerogative.' The emergence of this new priesthood laid a cordon of human interpretation and construal around the divine revelation. The pages of the Quran were shut off for the common man. Since the ulama had preserved solely for themselves the right of *ijtihad* and *tafaqquh* [independent thinking and reasoning] for which the final and decisive reference was the verdicts of the 'virtuous elders' rather than the infallible revealed scripture, so their concerted effort was to see to it that the Book of Guidance should not be allowed to be reopened. If that happened, they feared, there was a chance, rather an obvious threat, that the edifice of historical Islam would shake on its foundation, the authenticity and

competence of the elders would fall to suspicion, and above all the current key position of the ulama would tumble down on its face. How then could they cut the branch they sat upon?

A number of endeavours have gone underway towards reviving Islam in past centuries. But none of them goes beyond providing just a facelift to the same deviant and self-tailored historical Islam. Whether it is a suggestion to practice tolerance about the discordant fiqh of the four imams or to bridge the gap between Shias and Sunnis, or the glad tidings about discovering a legal ruse to circumvent the juristic rigours, rather tortures, of the verdicts of elders, all this but betrays our secret desire to cover up our deviations. None dares to say a loud and clear good-bye to all these conceptual deviations and self-generated delusions. None has the guts to point out that the rubbish you have been disseminating in the name of Quranic sciences [*ulum-ul-Quran*] in your religious schools for such a long time is all useless, rather ruinous. The first generation of Muslims was certainly not aware of the existence of branches of the *ulum-ul-Quran* such as disputed *qira'ah* [recitation], useless debates around abrogator and abrogated verses, contradictory reports regarding the occasion of revelation, unreasonable and unintelligible issues about seven patterns of revelation [*sab'a ahraf*], baseless fables about preferable and despicable business of talismanic charts, cut-charts and graphics. All these are man-made discourses and

inventions of the later generations which were certainly not a part of the faith of the first generation Muslims.

What a great irony it is of the intellectual history of Muslims that when we were creatively integrated with the divine revelation, when this book guided us at every turn in our life, and when the followers of Muhammad thought it sufficient to advance a Quranic evidence in support of their stance, no schools of *fiqh* existed anywhere and none even imagined that he should use polemical terms like *farz* and *wajib*, *sunnat* and *nawaafil*, *makrooh* and *mubaah*¹ etc. for getting to the meaning of sharia. At that time no generation of Islamic priests had come into existence that could think of defeating the purpose of sharia by categorizing an undesirable action into ‘tolerable’ and ‘forbidden’², or suggest ownership trickery³ towards gobbling up the orphan’s possessions. Then none was called a ‘*maulana*’⁴ and none was considered worthy of deified honorifics such as ‘*shaikh-ul-Islam*’ or ‘*Hujjat-ul-Islam*’.⁵ Nor was there any ‘*Fazilat-al-Shaikh*,’ nor ‘*Samahat-al-Shaikh*’.⁶ Nor was there ‘*Damat Barakatahum*’¹ or even a bare

¹ Compulsory and obligatory, the Prophet’s practice and optional, and avoidable and tolerable

² *Makrooh tanzih* and *makrooh tahrimi* مکروه تنزیہی ، مکروه تحریمی

³ *Heela-e-tamleek* حة ےک

⁴ i.e. Our Lord [interesting to note that this title is used for God in the Quran: ت مولانا فانصرنا على القوم الكافر Translator].

⁵ حجة الاسلام i.e. authority on Islam, شیخ الاسلام i.e. revered person of Islam

⁶ ےلته الشیخ i.e. ‘his excellency’, سیاحته الشیخ i.e. ‘his eminence’

‘*maulvi*.’² This journey started from Shafi’i’s *Al-Risala*, which ultimately ensued in the form of the ‘*ulama* institution’ in Islam in the twilight of the ripping of the Abbasid caliphate and its decline. To be honest, this institution was an innovative deviation of such a stupendous magnitude in Islam that it reduced an invigorative and regenerative faith like Islam into a soulless and petrified ritualistic creed. With an eye on intellectual and academic history if we can visualise the shattering of caliphate as well as its enfeebling and ideological muddle generated thereby, it won’t be hard for us to comprehend that no effort towards the attainment of unified Islam in future is expected to be fruitful unless we have guts to scrutinize and rethink the prevalent concept of ‘religious sciences’ [علوم شرعی] in the light of the Quran. So far the purport of the Quran has been subjected to the self-styled, corrupted and besmirched criteria of the so-called ‘religious sciences.’ It is but essential now that the reign of scrutiny and rereading must once again be placed entirely and unreservedly into the hands of the Quran.

I am saying this because, right from the first, dialectical theology of ours was allowed to intrude upon the codification of religion and *fiqh* in such a way that in the din of disputation

¹ i.e. ‘may his blessings last forever’ [used for a living religious figure as a mark of honour and admiration for him]

² مولوی i.e. belittling of *maulana*, [lit. ‘our fellow’] rather derogatory in modern usage.

and refutation of those days even our outstanding scholars could not estimate the extent of its harmfulness. At the behest of Abdur Rahman al-Mahdi, who desired that the academic and objective principles of faith-related inferencing be formulated, Shafi'i took up the cudgels to composing *Al-Risala*. In the days to come, unfortunately, the books written in this mode were more of the nature of extension of Shafi'i's *Al-Risala*, instead of being critical readings of its pattern and methodology. *Al-Risala*, thus, gradually assumed the status of a sacred composition rather than a mere academic endeavor. You may put it this way if you would that the growth and development of *fiqh*, in the days to come, mostly followed the direction set by the author of *Al-Risala*. To make it more clear, just consider this. Wasil bin Ata, who was mostly ignored during his own time for his mu'tazalite views, recommended four principles for the discovery of truth. First, the Quran should be consulted to find out what it says regarding the matter at hand. Secondly, the holy Practice of the Prophet [*sunnah*] should be explored to trace the relevant precedents if any. Thirdly, *ijma* [consensus] should be sought. If no clear guidance is possible through these three modes, *qiyas* ['speculation' meaning *ijtihad*, i.e. independent/analogical reasoning] should be exercised. In the days ahead these four principles came to be regarded as a grand 'magnificent method.' So much so, that these four principles became the source of deriving sharia law. Wasil bin Ata, probably, cannot

be blamed for pulling the infallible source of the Quran down to the guesswork level of the other three sources. Nevertheless, this is what exactly happened in future. Each of these sources practically assumed in itself the position of a permanent feature. Some Quran interpreters, in order to stress the significance of *ijma*, went to the extent of declaring that the authenticity and intactness of the Quran is due to *ijma* alone. Abdullah bin Mas'ood, who did not consider the last two short chapters of the Quran to be its part, kept his quiet on the issue only due to *ijma*. According to this opinion, these last two *suras* owe their existence till this day in the Quran to nothing but *ijma*. A little scratching beneath the surface may reveal the spurious nature of such reports, but the awe of the aforementioned four principles of fiqh has so much unnerved our interpreters that in backing them even their faith in the intactness of the Quran appears to slacken at times. We should also not lose sight of the fact that ever since the day of Shafi'i it has not been determined till date whether *ijma* implies consensus of ulama alone or it is inclusive of the common people as well? Again, for *ijma* consensus of ulama and public of only one city is required or it ought to be a comprehensive *ijma* of all cities and lands. Whether or not the *ijma* of a particular city could be equally valid for and binding on another city as well and whether or not the *ijma* of a particular period could be similarly valid for another period? To reach a decisive *ijma* [consensus] regarding these issues related to *ijma*

is still a far cry. We still do not know if ulama and fuqaha did ever actually have *ijma* on any single issue! Just think of the case of the five time daily prayers! For Abu Hanifa, the Quran recitation in the first bowing [*rak'a*] is compulsory, whereas for Shafi'i it is compulsory in all bowings, for Malik in the first three bowings, and for Hasan Basari it is obligatory in the first bowing only. When no *ijma* could be reached till this day even on the obligatory [*farz*] prayer, how far the claim of *ijma* may be valid then regarding other issues is not hard to guess for an insightful person.

If this interpretative methodology had remained just an academic exercise, possibilities towards its modification, rather cleansing and reform, would have also existed alongside. But, unfortunately, it assumed the status of 'juristic principle' in absolute terms. Consequently, it was considered essential for all that they should also find out, over and above the Quranic *nuss* [explicit injunction/ruling], what the *ijma* and precedence have to offer about the issue at hand. Even though the Zahiri and Shia ulama rejected *qiyas*,¹ they created room for a living *mujtahid* [independent legislator] under other titles. Similar is the case of the terms *istihsan* and *masalih mursalah*,² which are

¹ analogical and/or independent reasoning

² *استحسان* i.e. 'considering something better,' *مصلح مرسلة* i.e. 'general good' implying "public welfare neither commanded nor prohibited in any source of Islamic law." These two are considered two sources of Islamic law.

actually no more than extensions of *qiyas* and *ijtihad*.¹ This complicated procedure of discovering the purport of *wahi* shut the doors on the divine revelation for not only public but scholars as well.

Spiritual Caliphate or *Peeri Mureedi*²

The cordon laid around the divine revelation by jurists made the ummah lose sight of its actual path. The communal and religious life of Muslims began revolving around the conflicting and clashing opinions of men of their own mould. None felt concerned any more to see what the Book of God had to say on a particular issue. But what they considered most important was what their sectarian school of thought said about it. When men subjugated men, the emergence of smaller spiritual gods and Islamic priests under various labels was but natural. This was exactly the pattern maintained by papalism prior to the advent of the Prophet Muhammad. Rather, in the days to come, the church representatives also issued certificates towards sins or virtue or even for entry to paradise or hell. So, whoever wished a satisfactory prearrangement for his salvation was able to have it against a payment affordable for him.

It is widely believed that the Prophet enjoys special distinction for his grand mission which was to free the necks of men from the yoke of slavery to self-declared masters and to

¹ 'informed reasoning'

² Persian terms for mentor-disciple relationship in Sufism

put them under the direct care of God. One is just bewildered to note that among the followers of such a distinguished Prophet a new form of papalism appeared in the name of spiritual caliphate and *peeri-mureedi*. Tasawwuf emerged first as a cry of protest against the political abuse of religion and rampant materialism. It was exploited later as a movement by the Fatimids who wished to consolidate their political pursuit thereby and so they grabbed *tasawwuf* and cast it in their own political mould. Just realize the vast influence this secret movement wielded from the fact that during the Fatimid rule itself an Isma'elite dominion came into being in such a far-flung area as Multan. Right up to Mahmood Ghaznawi's invasion, Multan served as a busy headquarter for the sufi movement of the Indian subcontinent. There are quite a few evidences pointing to the fact that a number of Sufis of the brand of Mu'inuddin Chishti, Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki etc. frequently visited this little Ismilite city-state in North Western India. All leading sufi figures, such as Usman Harooni, Bahauddin Zakaria, Nizamuddin Awliya, Ali Hujveri, Baba Farid, and Shahbaz Qalandar etc. were in truth revered and determined Isma'elite missionaries [*da'is*]. Their secret mission was to work towards strengthening and expanding the Ismilite state of Fatimid *syeds*. No doubt, by establishing the hidden caliphate the Fatimids largely compensated for their political deficit. It is also undeniable that by the sheer power of their stanchness and stealthy style of work, the basic message of

Islam reached even those areas where the political conditions were highly hostile rendering them rather impenetrable. However, the concept of Islam that these Sufis propagated was actually the exaggerated Isma'elite version, which was based on concepts such as Ali's superiority, pentacorpus,¹ monism,² and the miraculous powers of the spiritual master of Alawi descent. Dozens of sufi shrines and monasteries, centres of pilgrimage attracting for centuries throngs of common people, have been in truth the clandestine centres of the Isma'elite mission. Little wonder then that most of the sufi terms such as *peer*, *mureed*, *shariat*, *tariqat*, *baatin*, and *zaahir* etc. are but fabrications of these very sufis.

The Abbasid caliphs too were not really unaware of the rising popularity of the so-called *awliyaAllah* [mystic saints or Sufis]. It is quite possible that the Naqshbandi line that traces its origin to Hazrat Abu Bakr, rather than to Hazrat Ali, had enjoyed their backing. Most of the holy figures of our history who use for themselves the title '*muhiuddin*,' [i.e. one who revives religion], for instance, Ibn Arabi or Abdul Qadir Jilani, bear a clear Fatimid signature on their writings or speeches and even on their gestures and mannerism. Maulana Room [of the fame of *Mathnavi*] holds a real high status in the Isma'elite call who, despite his personal academic grandeur, prefers to remain a disciple of the Isma'elite imam Shamsuddin (Shams Tabrez).

¹ Panjtan پنجن

² *Wahdat-ul-wujood* وحدة الوجود

Shahristani is held apparently in high esteem in the Sunni thought. But, he too holds the highest position of '*da'i al-du'at*' [lit: 'caller of callers,' meaning 'leader of missionaries'] in the Isma'elite mission. The writings of geniuses like Attar, Sa'adi, Shabistari, Nasafi etc., who have played an important role in structuring the Sunni mind, betray veiled Fatimid links. In this particular respect, the Isma'elite missionaries organized behind the façade of spiritual caliphate an extraordinarily successful worldwide movement. Though they could not get an opportunity to establish a state in the subcontinent after the fall of Multan, for sure their spiritual caliphs and their successors brought a vast chunk of Muslim population under their active and lasting influence.

Who would be ready to believe today that this retail of spiritual caliphate or *peeri-mureedi* is mere scum of a political movement of the past, which is not even remotely connected with the divine revelation and the natural temper of Islam? On the contrary, Islam is totally against the idea of man entrusting the most delicate matter of his salvation to men like him or that someone should interpose between man and God as a heavenly representative. Even after its collapse the Fatimid movement, which called to caliphate with claim to racial preeminence, remained a source of the rise of various confusions in Muslim thought. Even today, the personality of Agha Khan for Nizari Isma'ilites is of such an imam in whom God Himself is manifested. The remainders of the Musta'ali

Isma'ilites, on the other side, are at the mercy of different missionaries [*da'is*] who are busy with the profitable commerce of granting them salvation in exchange for *haqq-e-imam* [imam's right in their earnings] and other gifts. Manifestation of the 'blessings and abundance' of the grave-dweller continues in favour of the custodians of mausoleums even among the successors of Sufis who are apparently looked upon as the trustworthy holders of the spiritual leadership of Sunni Islam. This situation has kept the ummah divided into various spiritual 'paths' and 'brotherhoods.' One is shocked to see that the people whom God and His Prophet have not appointed to the spiritual leadership of the ummah and who enjoy no Quranic or even rational backing for their claim to accepting allegiance or distributing 'khilat,'¹ have so callously carried on this despicable commerce under the guise of piety and holiness.

The first thing to understand is that allegiance [*bai'at*] in the social life of Muslims is reserved for only '*amirul mominin*' [i.e. leader of the faithful], that is the caliph of the day. And for caliphate to be valid the executive power is an essential condition. The righteous caliphs took over the position of *ulul amr* [executive authority] as his successors in the absence of the Prophet. As far as the matter is concerned that a particular sufi has sought the permission of another sufi to accept allegiance, or such and such has appointed such and such his

¹ A sanctified robe symbolizing the transfer of spiritual power from a master to a competent disciple in Sufism.

khalifa or bestowed upon him khilat, or assigned him to the spiritual dominion of Delhi or Ajmer, all this is sheer nonsensical gibberish of the purest kind having nothing to do with Islam. Some of our esteemed ulama, most of whom were a product of and indebted to the same aberrant and rotten sufi chains, accorded not only legitimacy to this make-believe caliphate but themselves contributed to such an absurd and outrageous activity. For a common Muslim, therefore, it is hard to understand today that the despicable business of peeri-mureedi, profitable grave trade, and the claims of spiritual powers of the grave-dweller, are such assumptions for which no evidence could be found in the Quran or Sunnah. It is beyond our comprehension that the soul of a man, whatever perfect a saint or *wali* he was, should assume extraordinary spiritual power after three or four hundred years of his death, as Shah Waliullah opines. As a student of the Quran it is also difficult for us to digest that the emergence of different sufi chains is due to some heavenly plan, or certain chains are heavenly blessed with linkages like Siddiqi, Faruqi, or Alawi and some others are graced with a blend of many linkages. One wonders where Shah sahib got such information from and what was his means of communication with the divine world. Though we may never know that, we know for certain that until such anti-Quranic, absurd and meaningless concepts are scraped from the mind of the ummah, and until ordinary Muslims are freed once again from mental slavery to

priesthood, the Muslim ummah will remain divided as ever into mutually conflicting factions as well as cut off from the divine revelation.

Racial Leadership

Islam is strongly against racial or ancestral pride. In the Islamic society it is totally insignificant whether one is Arab or non-Arab, or whether one belongs to a privileged family of whatever high social rank. Only one criterion is valid here to judge one's distinction and that is *taqwa* or piety. The Quranic declaration that 'the most respectable among you is the most pious'¹ has annihilated once and for all the self-fashioned standards of superiority and distinction. Nevertheless, you simply feel helplessly miserable when you see that this pre-Islamic prejudice which first manifested itself as as Qarshi, Talibi, Abbasi etc. became an effective tool for capturing caliphate and leadership. So much so, that the Fatimid claimants to caliphate declared the descendants of Hazrat Fatima [*Aal-e-Fatima*] to be exceptionally higher in rank and distinction to other members of the Prophet's household [*ahl-e-bait*]. Hazrat Fatima, her husband Hazrat Ali, and both Fatimi sons Hasan and Husain constituted a spiritual family, known as the holy pentacorpus,² to be believed soon an

¹ ان اكرمكم عند الله اتقاكم

² پاک پنجن lit. holy five bodies

extension of the Prophet of God. This holy pentacorpus is held as sacred now as the heavenly family of Trinity for Christians.

In this land of ours there are a number of syed families that trace their bloodline to the Prophet of God and with this reference they have, thus, contributed towards the perpetuation and strengthening of priesthood in Islam. Nevertheless, the truth of the matter is that this claim of theirs enjoys legitimacy in no respect whatsoever—historically, rationally or even in the divine revelation. Like among other people, in Arabs as well symbols of racial superiority existed. And why to isolate Arabs, all those overlords in the human history who enslaved people in virtue of dynastic or priestly preeminence, have always introduced themselves as the closest descendants of the heavenly families. When the issue of caliphate was approached in terms of familial proximity rather than piety and competence, the question acquired significance as to who was the most deserving candidate for the Prophet's legacy. The problem, however, was that the Prophet had not left behind a male issue. The Quranic verse: 'Muhammad is certainly not a father of any of your men, but the Messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets'¹ clinches the fact in absolute and decisive terms that he did not leave behind a line of descendants. His real significance therefore is not that of a progenitor since he is not the father of a man to survive him for perpetuating his dynasty. But his real status is that of the Messenger of God and

¹ وما كان محمد اباً احداً من رجالكم ولكن رسول الله وخاتم النبي

the Seal of the Prophets. Historical sources are in total agreement on the fact that those people around the world who want to be identified as *saadaat* (syeds) may be Hashimite or Muttalibi by origin, their bloodline may be traced to the households of Abu Talib, Abu Lahab, Abbas or Hamza, but not to Muhammad the Messenger of God.

It is necessary to understand how and when the way was paved for the sneaking of racial ascendancy into Islam. Of the four jurist imams of Sunni Islam, Shafi'i is the one to claim Quraishi ancestry. In his travelogue, he has openly expressed his superiority in the same respect. But, then, mere Quraishi reference did not amount to direct lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad bin Hanafiah led an uprising which gained public support even though he was a non-Fatimid son of Hazrat Ali. That his call should succeed in attracting people without a Fatimid linkage clearly points to the fact that the pentacorpus theory or the claim to be in the bloodline of the Prophet is a later day fiction; clearly it is a result of the clandestine propaganda of the Isma'elite missionaries. In the Isma'elite sources, Hazrat Fatima is a figure of superhuman rather mythological proportions. This concept of hers unavoidably influenced the other Shia factions as well. She is considered *batool* meaning virgin even after having given birth to Hazrat Hasan, Husain and Muhsin. The belief is common that the sperm used in the creation of imams has nothing to do with the ordinary process or stages of human reproduction.

Isma'ilites also believe that Abu Talib was the *mustawda* (repository) of the Prophet. So, when Ali reached puberty, the imamate got transferred through him to his descendants. From this particular angle in the Isma'ilite heavenly system Hassan and Husain can be seen directly related to that heavenly family of imams. The incessant covert propaganda of this dogma gradually installed this fictional heavenly family of Hazrat Fatima and the holy pentacorpus at the very heart of Islam. Thus far, all claims to dynasty used to be based on lineage to male heir; but now, owing to mythological image of Fatima, a new tradition was forged, against all established norms, to trace bloodline through mother rather than through father. This was a very dodgy historical fraud tantamount to reopening in the ummah the divinely terminated bloodline of the Prophet, with the clear Quranic declaration to this effect. Thus, at the pretext of fraudulent 'syed' lineage, the accursed priesthood tightened its grip on the ummah once again.

This is also beyond one's comprehension that on what grounds the other daughters of the Prophet and their offspring were altogether deprived of the same distinction and honour and what could be the justification for their banishment from the aforesaid fictitious Heavenly Family. His eldest daughter Zainab's son, Ali bin Abul Aas, rode the Prophet's camel as she walked into Makkah on the day of its conquest, and was martyred later in the battle of Yarmuk. The other two daughters of the Prophet, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum, who

died in Madina, actively supported their father at every step in his mission. But, why did the political propagandists not consider them worthy of the same honour and distinction? Their offspring too was allowed to vanish into the pages of history like a number of other Muslims of Quraish descent. If the Ismilites had not exploited the reference of Hazrat Fatima as a stepping stone in their political adventurism, the concept of the holy pentacorpus would not have been created, nor the army of those had come into existence who proudly claim to be 'syeds' with concocted lineage to the Prophet. It is also equally interesting to note that the social expression of syeds' superiority was formally employed first during the reign of Aal-e-Buwaih when the term 'shareef' [i.e. a man of distinction] became popular for syeds. The honorific 'shareef' prefixed to the names of Shareef Razi and Shareef Murtaza bears the same imaginary 'distinction.' In the days to come everything bearing any link with syeds, even their places of birth or residence, were branded 'shareef,' even though in those places as such there was no iota of 'distinction' or any racial linkage to the Prophet in any sense. As for the syeds of India and Pakistan, it is historically documented that most of them have descended from Muhammad Al-Kabuli who, instead of being Hasani and Husaini, was a descendant of Muhammad bin Hanafia, that is, non-Fatimid offspring of Hazrat Ali. In order to save his life Muhammad Al-Kabuli took refuge in Kabul where he married the daughter of a non-Muslim ruler of Kabul. In the light of

history and *wahi* and reason there is no more truth than this in the claims of the bloodline linkage to the Prophet. As for the various Sufis that surfaced in India in their times as camouflaged Isma'ilite missionaries enjoyed just the status of missionaries who had been assigned the task of propagation. They were not related to the family of imams as such. This is very much acknowledged even today by the supreme Da'i or missionary of the factions of Daudi Bohra community. Fatimid missionaries played a key role also in spreading inflated views regarding the progeny of Hazrat Fatima. Ibn Arabi is one such figure whose notions have been casting shadows over the orthodox Sunni Muslim thought. He has forcefully advocated the idea in his *Futuh-at-e-Makkiya* that the promise that God has made to the Prophet for forgiving all his earlier and later sins is inclusive of Fatima's progeny as well as all her descendants to follow until the Doomsday. Such traditions are not rare among Muslims that inform that even the gravest of sins are washed off on account of one's gentle and kind treatment of Fatima's progeny. Ibn Arabi's lyric of Ismilite origin is extremely widely popular even among the Sunni Muslims which says:

لى خمسة ى بها حر الوباء الحاطمة
ى والمرضى وابناهما

[i.e. I have Five whose blessings cool down the heat of even the worst of plagues; Mustafa, Murtaza, their two sons¹

¹ i.e. the Prophet, Ali, Hasan, Husain

and Fatima.]

From this it is easy to guess how the declaration made to the effect of terminating the bloodline of the Prophet, with the unequivocal Quranic authority on its back, was so cunningly circumvented by the covert propaganda of the Fatimids. Thus, the freedom of thought granted and advocated by Islam was stifled by the invented racial priesthood.

The Sectarian Casting of the Sunnah

The various Muslim sects, that maintain separate theoretical and ideological identities, possess separate anthologies of the Prophet's sunnah. Books of one sect are not reliable for the other sects, irrespective of the presence of the Prophet's traditions in them. Shias hold on to the Sunni books as long as those books appear to support their sectarian stance. On the other side, Sunnis consider Shia books totally unreliable. Each sect insists that the collections of the Prophet's sunnah that they possess are the only authentic ones. This situation has generated sects locked in eternal discord such as Shia, Sunni, Isma'elite, Ibadi and many other sub-sects besides. Since this sectarianism has been flourishing in the name of sunnah itself, it is not easy therefore to demolish their foundations. One wonders why these 'sunnah lovers' fail to understand that it is our duty to submit to a hadith of the Prophet preserved by whatever group. How on earth, therefore, can we reject a tradition simply because it is found in books

possessed by a sect other than our own. If sunnah is found only in books of a particular sect, as is commonly held, then all sects in the ummah are hadith rejecters at one level or another in the sense that they refuse to abide by the hadith found in books other than those of their own respective sects. A common Muslim is fed up of sectarianism and anxiously desires the unity of ummah. When he finds that sectarianism among Muslims flourishes with reference to faith and sunnah, he feels totally frustrated. He then immediately infers that if it is really a matter rooted in faith and if reports preserved in those hadith books are really the pronouncements of the Prophet, there is no chance whatsoever for these different sects to be united even until the end of the world. He also feels that no power in the world could ever impose a halt on the process of ongoing disintegration and compartmentalization that started in the fourth century.

Is the ideological chaos then, as well as unending mutual strife among different sects, is what future holds in stock for the ummah? Can this ummah never be transformed into a single indivisible entity once again? This is the situation that our thinkers have lamented for centuries. Nevertheless, the sects that found religious basis for their ideological chaos found themselves lost in a blind alley. Finding no way out, they gave in to this painful situation. It is commonly believed now that we have to live with our mutual contradictions and conflicts embodied in our sectarianism, since reconstructing the

defragmented corpus of the ummah into a solidified unity is neither feasible nor practicable. It leads to the only consequence that our graph has been showing a steep drop with every passing day. Each planning is defeated by internal differences and mutual hatred, rather conspiracies hatched to see the other bite dust.

In order to disentangle ourselves from this painful situation, it is necessary for us to comprehend the historical process that generated the popular concept of sunnah and which, instead of unifying and strengthening it, split the ummah into mutually warring groups. We have to comprehend the point that the popular concept of sunnah and its Shia and Sunni versions are products of a particular social and political phase. It all sprang up when Muslims indulged in civil wars and political factionalism; when three caliphates emerged simultaneously in the Islamic world; and when the fall of the Abbasid regime provided environment conducive to the rise of Aal-e-Buwaih, rule of Saljuks, and priesthood of ulama and Sufis. But before going forth, let us consider a few important questions.

About sunnah two different traditions exist among Sunnis and Shias, on account of which they have parted ways. According to the Sunni hadith, the Messenger of God said, "I am leaving behind two things which if you hold fast you will not go astray and that is God's Book and my Practice (sunnah)". Shias say that by these two things he means God's

Book and *ahl-e-bait* (members of his household). Did you notice that there is no difference whatsoever between the two sects, as both believe holding onto the Quran to be the Prophet's commandment? The difference however is about the other thing he mentioned: sunnah or itrah [*ahl-e-bait*]. This is the delicate matter responsible for dividing Muslims into two groups, and so it requires a cool-minded contemplation. In order to get to the grips of the matter, both groups may be asked as to what the Prophet actually meant by his commandment to hold fast unto his *sunnah* or *itrah*? A mention of the Book of God [*Kitabullah*] immediately projects on the screen of our mind a particular book called the 'Quran.' But, if by the sunnah we mean the six canonical books of hadith popular as *Sahah Sitta* among Sunnis, or the authentic source of *itrah* such as the writings of Kulaini, Ibn Babwaih, *Istibsar Tusi* and *Nahj-ul-Balaghah*, the Muslims of the Prophet's time were totally unaware of any such books. All these hadith books came into existence in the third and fourth centuries after Hijra. Which collections did they consult then in their search for *sunnah* or *itrah*, that is the question. The books that we believe now to be the infallible source of *sunnah* or *itrah* and on which rests the sacrosanct edifice of religious factionalism had yet to come into existence then. How far is the claim justified then that the *sunnah* thrives in *Sahah Sittah* or *itrah* implies the four hadith books of Shias? It is also worth pondering that when the anthologies of *sunnah* and *itrah* were

non-existent, what did the Muslims of the early period understand by these terms? Aside from the authenticity of this hadith, their mind would certainly not have gone to *Sahah Sittah* for *sunnah*, nor would have the Four Books of Shias glimmered in their eyes for *itrah*. The fact is that the *ahl-e-bait* concept had yet to grow and fructify. Muslims of the early period had no inkling of the names of the twelve imams, their traditions and commandments, nor did they think of consulting the so-called ‘most authentic book after the Book of God.’¹ We can understand therefore that whatever was meant by *sunnah* or *itrah* around that time, it didn’t include a hint at those six or four later day hadith collections.

Now consider this delicate and sensitive issue from another angle! If *sunnah* or *itrah* had really been as important as the Quran, why did the Prophet not leave behind an authentic collection of that for guidance purpose as he did with the Quran. Had this happened, the very religious foundations of the rise of the sharpest differences and deep mutual hatred would not have existed at all. Who else can understand the point better than God and His Prophet that there is strength in unity and absolute loss in disunity? The Quran commands us to hold fast unto the rope of God and never to fall into disarray. It warns that if you Muslims take to the path of dispute and disunity, you will lose heart in front of your enemy. As for those who fell into sectarianism and got split

¹ An expression generally applied to *Sahih Bukhari*.

into groups, the Quran is clear about them too saying that they lost their faith and the Prophet has nothing to do with them [لست منهم في شيء]. How is it possible therefore that the Prophet who took extreme care about committing the Quran to both memory and writing and took every possible step to leave it behind in the form of a complete book, in its appropriate and final shape, would do absolutely nothing about the preservation of the so-called other source? Not only that, but his most revered companions as well as their successors would always eschew the thought of collecting his 'sayings' and compiling and publishing them in the form of a well-defined document. We should also realize that all these hadith collections, even put together, compiled by the third and fourth century hadith scholars, despite their claims to authenticity and accuracy, do not encompass all the twenty three years of the Prophet's life in their entirety. Nor have the compilers claimed that their collections present a comprehensive record of each and every word and deed of the Prophet. So, should we be justified in thinking therefore that today's ummah is not really in possession of a complete record of the Prophet's life encompassing all his sayings and all other major and minor details of his twenty three year long Prophetic life? If this is true, where should those people look for the complete sunnah who believe in holding fast to sunnah? Similar is the difficulty of the *itrah* believers. Different Muslim sects harbour different concepts of *ahl-e-bait*. For some *ahl-e-bait* is confined to the

holy pentacorpus. Some see it embodied in the form of twelve or seven imams. For some this chain continues till date. According to some interpretations, Aal-e-Abbas¹ too are included in *ahl-e-bait* on account of *hadith-e-kisa*. Some believe that the holy wives of the Prophet are also included, and for some others the whole ummah is included in his descendants in their capacity as the bearers of his mission. So, *itrah* too is as ambiguous and vague a concept as Sunnah whose dimensions are simply impossible to determine.

This difference of *sunnah* and *itrah* and these conflicting interpretations of *uswah-e-Rasool* [i.e. the Prophet's beautiful pattern of conduct] have kept the ummah fractured for about a thousand years. Its early features took shape, as hinted above, around the third and fourth centuries. However, it took many centuries for them to acquire the air of sanctity and authenticity that they enjoy today. After so many centuries the concept became popular that the information about the Prophet's words and deeds gathered in these human compilations is not admissible to any doubt. Any thought of its critical reevaluation would amount not only to shaking the foundations of our sect but also to losing our faith for relinquishing sunnah. The first thing to understand here is the fact that the term 'sunnah' in the sense of '*sunnat-e-Rasool*' is not a Quranic term. In the Quran we find though the terms such as '*sunnat-e-Ibrahim*' [i.e. Abraham's practice] and

¹ Progeny of Abbas, the Prophet's uncle.

'*sunnatullah*' [i.e. God's Practice], we do not find anywhere a term like '*sunnat-e-Rasool*.' Nevertheless, it has been enjoined upon Muslims to find in the Prophet's person the 'most beautiful pattern of conduct' [*uswah-e-hasanah*] that serves them the best for beautifying their own conduct. There can be no doubt about the fact that for us Muslims the personality of the Prophet is worth emulating in all its dimensions. We cannot even imagine hesitating in any measure in our obedience once we have known the Prophet's instruction, since such an attitude would be just fatal to our faith. Nevertheless, our love of the Prophet demands that we should be extremely careful about first ascertaining the genuineness of the reported hadith in terms of both content and reporter. We should first make sure that what is reported to us in his name is really a saying of the Prophet. We should never allow it to be so that what we believe as the Prophet's saying is doubtful in the first place. If this happens, it would amount to slandering the Prophet in that it would attribute someone else's lie, fraud and falsehood to him about which the Prophet has clearly said: 'One who deliberately lies in my behalf would for sure find his place in the [hell-]fire.'¹

All these hadith anthologies are a product of human endeavor. They cannot claim therefore total reliability or authenticity and absolute genuineness. This is because their collection or compilation is based on human reasoning and

¹ من كذب على متعمداً فليتبوء مقعده من النار

human insight. In hadith scrutiny human criteria have been employed. And this is what has caused differences among hadith experts on the issue of reporting and reporters of hadith. There is no reason, therefore, that the compiled Sunni or Shia accounts of the Prophet's day, as well as of the subsequent period, should be accorded the status of sanctity or finality in their respective circles. Be it Bukhari or Muslim, Kulaini or Ibn Babwaih, none of them had been assigned by God to the task of collecting and compiling sunnah. Nor has God commanded us to believe in those human academic endeavours the way we believe in the heavenly scriptures. These books have not been recommended or endorsed by God. What is the need then of embracing them as an integral part of religion? If these human endeavours of hadith collection and compilation had really been accomplished as a part of a divine plan, and if these books had really been a manifestation of revelation [*wahi*], the reports they carry would certainly not have been marked by insurmountable mutual conflict as well as clear contradictions. The Quranic verse applies to these compilations as well which says: 'Had it [Quran] been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy.'¹ *Much* discrepancy in the hadith corpus is indicative of the fact that its source is decisively other than divine, otherwise it would have been as discrepancy-free as the Book of God.

¹ لو كان من عند غير الله لوجدوا فيه اختلافاً كثيراً (النساء)

Sunnah is an ongoing process. In every society some traditions gather strength with reference to the concepts of commendable and condemnable [*ma'roof* and *munkar*]. However, in altered circumstances and in a different time and place the need arises to reevaluate those traditions. Contrary to Sunnah, the *Uswah* or 'Pattern' points to that eternal and infallible message in whose goals and purpose no change can ever occur. Sunnah rather refers to the outward form of a practice, whereas *Uswah* or 'Pattern' to the structure lying at the core of the action prompting the latter to manifest itself as a seemingly response to the given situation. Whereas the outward form is liable to change in due course of time, the underlying structure is not in virtue of its eternal and universal value. Muslims of the early period displayed a creative and ingenious attitude towards the Prophetic sunnah. Hazrat Umar, for instance, tried to capture and maintain the spirit of justice in the case of conquered lands instead of imitating the Prophet's apparent action. Regarding 'heart-winning steps' [موءلفنة القلوب], too, he took a stance different from that of the Prophet. He also suspended the hand-chopping sentence during the famine. When he took those steps, he probably thought that in the changed circumstances those steps were much closer to the spirit of justice that was the soul of the Prophet's action. So, if Sunnah is the name of the Prophetic precedents and if it implies the practical initiatives of the Prophet, it is then an ever evolving process, whose visible form is liable to vary with the

changing circumstances or in different time and space. Who can be a greater follower of the Prophet's sunnah than his most revered companions? But, then sunnah was not a frozen object; it was rather an ongoing and evolving process as indicated above. The eyes of the Prophet's companions were firmly fixed on the unvarying spirit of sunnah rather than on its momentary manifestations. To differ from its precedents, therefore, did not amount for them to its neglect or disdain. Nor did anyone dare then to deride them as hadith rejecters [*munkir-e-hadith*].

For their extraordinary love and affection of the Prophet, Muslims, right from the first, took a keen interest in preserving the details of his life and time. There is nothing objectionable about the practice that our beloved Prophet's life and time are recounted in our gatherings and the holy memoirs of those blessed days are allowed to enrich and bless our lives. That was what drove people in hordes to the lectures of hadith scholars. As the companions of the Prophet departed from this world one by one, the need was felt more than ever before to collect and compile the chronicles of those holy and blessed days. Although some people kept their own personal collections, none dared initiating the formal compilation and publication of hadith privately or officially. And this was in submission to the Prophet's injunction, as reported in the *Muslim*, that "Don't write anything from me except the Quran. And one who has written anything from me other than the Quran must erase

it.”¹ In the time to follow, the collections of Bukhari and Muslim gained popularity for their editing merits and chapter division, and Kulaini’s *Usool* and *Furoo’*, for their projection of Shia point of view, gained the status of the foundation of the Shia school. But to prepare and publish these compilations was a personal decision of their authors anyway. This decision did not spring from the common agenda of the ummah, nor was it accomplished at the behest of the ruler of the day. During their day, the above collections, like many other collections of the time, were considered just historical accounts of the Prophet’s time. They were not considered sacred or of legislative value in nature. Nor did they enjoy the status of the infallible source of sunnah. Had this been the case, Imam Muslim would not have thought of breaking up with the former of his two mentors, Zahili and Bukhari, when they had fallen into a mutual dispute. In his disapproval of him he went to the extent of returning all hadith to Zahili he had acquired from him prior to Zahili’s dispute with Imam Bukhari. Around that time, such chronicles were considered disputable political perspectives. Their status was that of reports *attributed* to the Prophet, rather than his utterances in absolute and incontrovertible terms. At places in these books caliphate was said to be the right of the progeny of Abbas and in some other places it was said to be reserved for Hazrat Fatima’s progeny. Somewhere in them the installation of Ali’s imamate at Ghadir Khum was

¹ لا تكتبوا عنى شيئاً غير القرآن فمن كذب عنى غير القرآن فليجحد.

mentioned, and somewhere it was mentioned that Hazrat Umar prevented the Prophet from having his will written down when he so wished on his deathbed. And somewhere it was narrated that Hazrat Abu Bakr and Umar in the absence of Hazrat Ali so hastily concluded the matter of caliphate in favour of the former that the resulting mutual rancor and strife almost presented the spectacle of pre-Islamic *jahiliya*. At that time, such narratives were considered a colouring of history. Such narratives sneaked into the *Sahah Sitta*, *Masnad Ahmad* and other Sunni hadith collections simply because these books then represented our common cultural heritage. However, when in the fourth century the Abbasid, Fatimid and Twelver sects came into existence, owing to the splitting of Abbasid rule and enjoying at the same time the state patronage, these sects separated their books. Shias accorded their four hadith books the sanctity of faith and dogma rather than reading them as political history. And Sunnis, on the other side, bestowed upon Shia's discarded hadith collections the sanctified status of *Sahah Sitta*. It is difficult for us to say at the moment who the actual inventor is of the term *Sahah Sitta* or when this term was first used, but we know for sure that even after a lapse of one thousand years ulama have lacked consensus on which collections to include in the holy list of these 'six authentic books' (*Sahah*). Some opine that *Mu'atta* should be included and some others say *Ibn Majah* deserves that privilege more. As far as the hyperbolic expression 'the most authentic book

after the Book of God¹ is concerned, some say it applied to the *Bukhari* and some others think that the *Muslim* deserves that distinction.

Imam Malik strictly forbade, during the reign of Mansoor, to bestow on his book *Mu'atta* the juristic and legislative status. He realized that a product of human academic endeavor, however astutely compiled, may not be elevated to the level of sharia source. There is no justification therefore that what Imam Malik was hesitant about, despite his proximity in time and space to the Prophet's era, should be licensed for the later-day compilers much removed in time and space from him.

Neo-Factionalism

If the splitting and enfeeblement of the Abbasid caliphate caused the strengthening of the factions like Shia, Sunni, Ismilite, Ibadi etc., and if the temporary acquiescent political steps of that era accorded permanence and sanctity to the camps of the four imams, the vociferous movements that appeared in the aftermath of the fall of the Ottoman caliphate in the twentieth century for filling the political gap caused some new camps to pop up into existence. Just as our predecessors committed the mistake of colouring the political difference with religious dogma as a result of which *one* ummah got split into many ummats, exactly the same mistake

¹ اصح الكتب بعد كتاب الله

is committed by these twentieth century movements in their reformist zeal. Ikhwanul Muslimoon of Hasan al-Banna, Tablighi Movement of Maulana Ilyas, and Maulana Abul A'la Maududi's Jama'at-e-Islami, that rose initially for the revival of the whole Islamic system with the purpose of recharging the ummah with faith and sincerity and organizing it for Islam's real mission, soon were seized by group psychology. So far the Muslims indulged in Shia-Sunni like factionalism or had their social life shredded by conflicting juristic sectarianism and by claimants to spiritual caliphate. Now, instead of consolidating the unity and solidarity of the ummah, these new movements became a source of spitting out still new camps. The founders of these movements initially faced severe public antagonism though. Just as a crowded train passenger expresses reservations and meanness towards every new passenger, almost the same was the treatment that these movements were meted out initially. For instance, during the heyday of Jami'atul Ulama and Muslim League, the attitude of both the ulama of the ummah and the masses was of total rejection towards Jama'at-e-Islami. But, as the Jama'at gradually strengthened its camp, Abul Aala Maudoodi's movement also came to be regarded a part of the mainstream Muslim ummah. The services of the twentieth century movements that rose in the name of revival and reform are certainly commendable. Nevertheless, the survival of the scums of these movements, even after they have exhausted their role, in the form of

persisting ideological groups is doubtless not a good omen. As long as these movements were considered an instant response to the given situation, they posed no threat to the unity of ummah. But, when these movements turned later into perpetual ideological groups inspired by the writings of their founders and started giving off the hue of a cult rather than that of provisional movements, only then one realized the severity of the crisis. Now, it is not easy to haul all these parties to unity or consensus as they possess different interpretations of religion and different plans for the ummah. Each party adheres to an alternative system of leadership and caliphate where the *ameer* demands allegiance from his followers as if he were the real caliph of the time. Besides, lately some such persons have also jumped into the foray who have been trying to establish a new ideological identity with reference to religious interpretation under the labels such as Minhaj International, Al-Risala Mission or Quranain. It is not hard to decipher in all these efforts that in the name of revivalism and propagation all these different groups have only contributed towards streamlining and strengthening the group identity rather than seeking collective unity. Now these group identities appear to be cults much more than movements. So, the ummah which was already facing Shia-Sunni factionalism and which was bleeding for centuries from the wounds inflicted on it by the mutual conflicts of Shafi'is and Hanafis, has further been pushed into chaos as it has to face now also

Tablighi, Jama'ati, Salafi, Jami'atul Ulama, Deobandi, Bareilvi, Qadiani and many other similar internal distractions and dissuasions. The problem is that from the womb of these identities newer identities are taking birth incessantly. When a jama'at splits into two factions, or when the internal turmoil leads a madrasa to be broken up as Darul Uloom and Darul Uloom Waqf, the common Muslims remain at a loss to understand which of the two is just. Whether it is Darul Uloom Deoband or Mazahirul Uloom, Jami'atul Ulama or Salafi Movement, this division within division causes great anxiety as well as confusion to common Muslims. In their minds therefore the question rises with full force whether chaos, dissent and disunity are essential features of Islam and its followers. What could be the ultimate reason that the organizations and madrasas of the holy ulama, who day and night enjoin the need of unity upon the ummah, are all torn apart among themselves and their disputes are pending in the government law courts. Our pastime in the name of religion has thrown us into unending mess, on account of which persuading different parties and sects to attain unity and consensus on the divine mission has become impossible. Where would this situation drive us eventually?

There is a dead end ahead. The thousand year long journey of the sectarian Islam has driven us into a blind alley from which there appears no ready escape. All the efforts made so far towards undoing this chaos and disarray have been

overshadowed by the same sectarian approach and juristic methodology which are actually responsible for churning out those problems in the first place. In our view, the strategy that engendered problems in the first place cannot and should not be further resorted to for the redemption of the situation created by it. We need to make a new beginning in fact. But the problem is that the upholders of the traditional Islam and those scholars who accord the sanctity of faith and religion to our ideological, intellectual and historical incidents are apprehensive of a new beginning. They are suspicious of any real corrective measures in the direction of reformation lest it should raze the edifice of historical Islam to the ground.

آئین نو سے ڈرنا طرز کہن پہ اڑنا
منزل یہی کٹھن ہے قوموں کی زندگی میں

[i.e. To be wary of the new mode and adhere to the old way/
This is a real hard juncture in the life of nations. Iqbal]

Our ideological and intellectual deviation initially started with the political differences. But during the third and fourth centuries it got a chance to fructify and flourish, which continued down the centuries until the collective structure of the ummah tumbled down under the load of its own internal disorder. The internal conflicts were much more operative than the external factors in the downfall of the Umayyad, Fatimid, and Abbasid regimes. The fall of the Mughal, Safawid, and Ottoman regimes also offers us the same lesson that no one can subdue Muslims but Muslims. Even today the greatest

threat to the possibility of united Islamic world and its renaissance emerges from within. Just look around with open eyes and the point will become crystal-clear. Just recall that not too long ago in Afghan Jihad the great courage of Muslims and their extraordinary sacrifices resulted in the defeat of the largest army of the world. But, when the time came to construct a new system, all racial, tribal, juristic, and group prejudices resurfaced leading to mutual bloodshed. Taliban's fiqhi Islam turned out to be a torture-house for other sects. Pakistan had been formed as a laboratory of Islam and in her formation not only millions of lives were sacrificed but Islam's past, present and future in the subcontinent as well. In the same Pakistan we have not achieved a consensus so far as to which Islam deserves to be made the official religion; that is, which sect and which school of jurisprudence should prevail. This persisting situation of 'every faction is happy with what it has got' [كل حزب بما لديهم فرحون] ultimately paved the way for secular democracy. As the politics of 'religion' meaning 'sectarian faith' gradually intensified, for one group of the ummah it became difficult to tolerate the other groups. In the Middle-East the Shia-Sunni hatred has been constantly on the rise under the very state patronage. No one knows when this lava would erupt and engulf, God forbid, this central part of the Islamic world. This is the situation that faces us today. This is what we have inherited as the logical consequence of our

millennium old aberration. The situation is really critical which cannot be contained by mere traditional tactics.

So, What to Do?

A new world of possibilities may open up for us *if*, and only *if*, we are able to realize that these factional versions of Islam which have kept us divided and immersed in ideological chaos and mutual strife and which we have falsely believed as the actual religion has nothing to do with the real message of the Prophet Muhammad. But all this is a residue of the days of our turbulent history. Our disintegration and mutual conflicts are not desirable in the eyes of God nor do they reflect the teachings of the Prophet. The character of the Prophet, which embodies for Muslims the 'most beautiful behavioral pattern' [*uswah-e-hasanah*] cannot be blamed for the self-tailored invocations such as Shia, Sunni, Hanafi, Maliki, Salafi, Zahiri and so on. This point will be easy for us to see if we are familiar with the historical fact that Shia, Sunni, or Isma'ili camps took a formal shape only in the fourth century of Islam. Abbasid caliphate, which became the advocate of Sunni Islam only after the ideological splitting of imamate, initially emerged as an *ahl-e-bait* movement and with the same reference the spokespersons of Aal-e-Abbas got a chance to consolidate their rule. If the Fatimids had not occupied Egypt and the rule of Aal-e-Buwaih had not been consolidated under the very aegis of the Abbasid caliphate, as a political fallout of its

enfeeblement, the separate identities of Shia-Sunni and Isma'ilite would not have been formed. Hence, Ibadis, too, would not have got a chance to introduce themselves as *ahl-ul-adl wa al-istiqamah* [people of justice and firmness]. Our being Sunni or Shia, therefore, is not God-ordained, but it is just a leftover of a historical occurrence. The same is the case of our factional identity, which was not chosen for us by God nor did the Prophet instruct us to follow four or eight imams. Abu Hanifa, Malik and Shafi'i were academically active in the second century Hijri, but around the same time and for long afterwards dozens of scholars of similar stature are on record to be active throughout the then Islamic world. There is a whole galaxy of names such as Sufyan Sorry, Awza'i, Ibn Rahwaih, and Jarir Tabari etc. If King Baibars had not appointed four different jurists to operate simultaneously (representing four schools of fiqh respectively) with a view to circumventing juristic tussle and rivalry and later, in the same vein, if King Barquq had not established four separate prayer areas in the ka'aba mosque, the Sunni Islam today would have been unaware of the term 'four imams' [*a'imma arba'ah*]. Just as we do not find anything missing today in the religion of Islam because of the disappearance of the juristic schools of Sorry, Awza'i, and Tabari, even without the 'four imams' our religious life would have been quite normal and active. Ibn Hambal, who coined the concept of 'four caliphs' during the reign of Mutawakkil to counter which the term 'caliph sans

break' [خليفة بلا فصل] became a Shia catchphrase, was not regarded a jurist or faqih not only during his own time but for long afterwards. Prior to the emergence of the Fatimids on the scene, the Friday sermon used to be an expression of political stance rather than that of religious faith. The Fatimids incorporated the concept of pentacorpus superiority [*tafzil-e-panjtan*] into the Friday sermon, which the Abbasids, with their own claims to caliphate, adopted in such a way that they be regarded true representatives of the mainstream Islam.

The term 'religious sciences' [*uloom-e-shar'ia*], which has played an important role in popularizing the un-Quranic concept of the dualism of *religious* and *secular* sciences, is just nonexistent in the Quran and hadith. Abu Abdullah Alkatib Al-Khawarizmi (d. 378 H.) first of all used the term *uloom-e-shar'ia* which in the days to come created an exclusivist circle of the inheritors of the Prophetic sciences. These Islamic madrasas, divided as they stand in the name of Islam and which we believe today to be the castles of Sunni or Shia Islam, came into being in the first place owing to the political rivalry between and immediate expediencies of the Fatimids and Abbasids. To perpetuate their remnants or to see them as castles of Islam is purely a result of sheer ignorance of history.

The special costumes of ulama in which they appear very different from common humans, rather aliens from outer space, had no trace in the Prophet's or his companions' time. If Qazi Abu Yusuf had not popularized a ceremonial costume for

judges, this spectacle of ulama outfit, different as it is from the dress of common Muslims, would have been unheard of in the Muslim society. The historical accounts that keep Shias and Sunnis split into permanent sects and because of which mutual alienation, rather aversion, has assumed the level of faith, are all found in those history books which were all compiled in the third or fourth centuries. If different sects had not accorded to these narratives the juristic and interpretative status, these compilations too would have vanished into the pages of history just like many other compilations extinct now. Or, if the opponents had laid hand on them at the time of the fall of Baghdad or *Qila'tul Maut* [Death-Castle], our historical perception today would have been completely different.

If rival claimants to caliphate had not inaugurated spiritual caliphate and successive chains thereof in the garb of Sufism and if Fatimid missionaries had not dispatched the missions of their determined callers to Khurasan, Multan, Delhi, and Ajmer, the terms such as *peeri-muridi* and *bai'at-0-khilat* [i.e. allegiance and holy garb] would have been unheard of. Nor would the simpleton Muslims have felt any need to be associated with khanqahs and sufi lodges. The transformation of the remnants of jama'ats and movements into cults is a recent phenomenon when, owing to a general despair resulting from the absence of caliphate, we have started to think that the global unity of Islam is an impracticable notion and so we have to be content with the same petite emirates and caliphates. An

'active participation in virtuous deeds' [فاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ] or charitable works is a part of our faith. Nevertheless, to breathe in cult-like atmosphere and within the same establishing spiritual emirate or caliphate, and to obligate obedience to the cult leader as if he were the real *amir-ul-mu'minin*, and above all the process of perpetuating such cults, are things thrown up by our turbulent history. Having no way out, we can only tolerate them for the time being, but we cannot produce validity evidence for them from the Quran and sunnah.

One wishes we had realized that God only sent His Book and His Prophet. And during the very lifetime of the Prophet the religion of Islam had been perfected. Whatever follows is only the history of the believers in which you have the high moments of glory as well as the low occasions of flaws. If we read the post-Prophet narratives as only history, it may prove for us a great source of learning lessons preventing us from repeating the same mistakes in future. But, if we attribute to those tragic accidents of history any sanctity or juristic value, the rope of God will surely slip off from our hands.

United Islam: Possibilities and Apprehensions

For the last one thousand years we have adhered to the received Islam and absorbed different concepts emerging in different periods of our history. In such a situation the apprehension is quite natural that if the popular religiosity is rolled back, what would happen then to the faith of fiqhi

Muslims. It is generally said that without jurists and traditionists [*fuqaha* and *muhaddisin*] it would become difficult to perform *salah*, fasting, hajj, zakat etc. The delusion is common that as long as exegetes [*mufassirin*] do not inform us on the context of revelation, the meaning of the Quran cannot possibly dawn on us. And without the prescriptions of mystics and Sufis our hearts may not be enlightened with the bliss of contemplation and divine brilliance. It implies as if rejecting popular religiosity would amount to rejecting Islam as such. Such apprehensions, in our opinion, are due to flawed understanding of Islam. Just think, how marvelously the communal and religious life stood on firm grounds and operated in the most perfect way prior to the appearance of those jurists and traditionists and exegetes? Differences on interpretative matters and difference of opinion on policy matters were found even then, but despite that the united corpus of the ummah was intact. It was so because the Quran held the central reference value in the absence of the Prophet. At that time the debates around *makrooh* and *mubah* [detestable and tolerable] had not raised their head, nor was it possible for anyone to put a question mark on a continuous practice (i.e. the established Prophetic deed) by pointing up an oral or single-narrator hadith. At that time, the Book of God was believed to be crystal-clear, manifest, indisputable and self-evident. None doubted even in his wildest thoughts that God has left something lacking in it or a certain point has been left

out unclear or hazy which it is his duty to clarify or elaborate upon. The Prophet had established a society of such selfless people whose mission it was to treat the Quran as *the* trailblazer in every phase of their future history. That is, the Book of God and the invigorating *pattern* of the Prophet had become a living and creative construct in whose presence Muslims would not miss Islamic versions of rabbinism, papalism, or punditva. Those who could get rid of jurists' schism would still experience the same vastness and revitalizing freshness in Islam as one feels at the advent of a new prophet or at the rollback of solidified ritualism. One may probably be not sure whether the obligatory acts in ablution [*wuzu*] are four or six or seven; or what its mandatories and optionals [*sunnah* and *nawafil*] are; or how important is raising hands in the prayer; or how important is reciting *fatihah* behind imam or saying *amin* aloud. Nonetheless, he would face no difficulty in performing ablution or offering *salah*. This is simply because the practice established by the Prophet has been passed on from one generation to the next in such a way that we find ourselves today as a link in a whole unbroken sequence. Differences are nothing but a product of jurists' hairsplitting or fallout of contradictory reports of the hadith transmitters. Just think, how many of us actually possess the knowledge of mandatories or optionals of ablution, nevertheless our prayers are continuing. Tedious and labyrinthine juristic hairsplitting in the name of Islam and enormous and massive volumes

generated thereof have, to be honest, nothing to do with the active practical life of a Muslim, though for juristic disputation and unnecessary contentions they may carry a lot of matter. Important, after all we are not calling for annihilating these voluminous compilations, but we are certainly in favour of removing them from the high status of sharia source, so that once again the central and pivotal position of the Quran may be restored in the Muslim society.

Remember, in the Prophet's absence the Quran is the singular document that stays beyond all suspicions and enjoys the consensus and confidence of all the believers, at least theoretically, as their common manifesto. Where else, if not here, can you find a better description of the Prophet's mission, its priorities, and its ultimate purposes and goals? We also believe that this infallible source of revelation has to offer right guidance to the people of the world until the very end. How callous is it then that this brilliant book be declared null and void by the guesswork of 'abrogator and abrogated,' 'specific and common' or 'revelatory context.'¹ Or, that the commandments of the Quran should be isolated by jurists for their pedantic quibbling, and a large number of verses exhorting on exploration, invention, use of reason and lesson-learning be relegated to the purpose of mere recitation.

We expect that this call to turn to the Quran as *The Trailblazer* would bring it back yet once again to our study

¹ ناسخ و منسوخ، خاص و عام، شان نزول

table. If this became possible, not only the subsidiary sources of Islam would lose their juristic relevance, but also the intrusive dualism about knowledge, that has marred the Muslim society and hampered the progress of our academic voyage for quite long, would be rolled back allowing our sciences yet once again to grow rapidly. In other words, the bulky volumes of jurisprudence, traditions and exegesis [*hadith* and *tafsir*] would remain with us only as a cultural heritage and academic continuum, but in the active presence of the Quran it would not be possible for anyone to present the verdicts of ancient scholars or elucidations and elaborations of exegetes or jurists of the past as final and conclusive. This will bring forth a condition in which no human construal would enjoy the same rank or repute as that of God's 'final verdict' [فلله الحجة البالغة], and this privilege would be reserved exclusively for the Book of God.

As the subsidiary sources would lose their relevance, the sects resulting and getting their nourishment from them would appear to us vanishing into thin air. No separate version of Islam would then be based on Sunni *Sahah Sittah*, nor be there any need to bow down to four Shia books. The compilations of the four imams may still be consulted for their esteemed academic stature, but at the same time, the other interpretive books of Shias, Ismilites, Ibadis, and others would also deserve similar attention since these sects shared a common past with us and who parted ways with us in a certain moment of history

for certain reasons. That is to say, the sectarian tradition based on historical, cultural, and interpretive literature would die its own natural death. So much so, that none would have an excuse to declare themselves a separate band, even in the name of the Quran, and adopt a title like '*ahl-e-Quran*' [people of the Quran] in preference to God-gifted identity 'Muslim.' If the task of arbitration is placed in the hands of the Quran, there will be no room for any factionalism in our belief. Once the sects have vanished, there will be no need either for the workshops of ulama and Islamic clergy. Nobody would feel the need therefore to trace in the books of comparative fiqh the precedents of juristic variations; nor would the act of writing *sharh* upon *sharh* [explanations] of the books of ancient scholars be considered the height of research and scholarship; nor would it be considered necessary to blacken pages upon pages in exploring antecedents of the pronouns. There will be no urge to consult the archaic books of logic and dialectics, even as tools of understanding. Nor would the lives be wasted on exploring as to which reporter's integrity is doubtful and which one of them may actually be considered reliable. So, there will be a lot to do for people. Above all, the dualism of knowledge that has captivated our minds for centuries and which has resulted in the division of sciences into sharia sciences and modern sciences will be rolled back once and for all. This division has in fact engendered two different types of minds amongst us which are perpetually in mutual conflict.

This internal tussle and divisiveness will peter out for good. Every believer will be able to directly profit from the divine revelation to the extent of his capability. In the absence of ulama, jurists, priests and muftis, the seekers of truth will find themselves in a situation defined by the Quran as 'Say, God gives you His directive¹...' where all juristic hairsplitting and human verdicts lose their relevance in front of God's verdict.

Rest assured, when the pure faith appears before us in its pristine form, the same euphoric and invigorating situation will arise as was experienced by the first generation Muslims. Faith actually implies unconditional submission. Contrary to which those who take ritualism for actual faith may generate just an ossified sort of religiosity. In the Prophet's day, when the final message of Islam was being revealed, there was no dearth of religious ritualism. Makkah was in fact a bastion of religious activities such as prayers, fasting, ka'ba circling [*tawaf*] and pilgrimage; all of which was going on in a pretty systematic, ceremonial and enthusiastic way. But, the Quran targeted these religious undertakings for its severe attack, saying:

ارابت الذى يكذب بالذ ...

Did you see one who denies religion (in the garb of religion)?

He is the one who repulses the orphan (with harshness)

And encourages not the feeding of the indigent.

So, woe to the worshippers (musalleen, namazis)

Who are neglectful of their prayers,

¹ يستفتونك قل الله يركم ، النساء

Those who (want but) to be seen (of men), [indulge in showing off]

But refuse (to supply) (even) neighbourly needs [Ma'un: little acts of charity].

When Islam puts on the garb of religion and when the minds of followers are totally focused on the stolid ritualism instead of the actual aims and goals of Islam, a section of such ulama also mushrooms that is ever ready to shape and codify the minutest details of those rituals. This is the backdoor that lets priesthood lodge itself between God and His slaves. Religion is reduced then to the agency of safeguarding the political and economic interests of the clergy. This was exactly the case in the Makkan society prior to the advent of Islam on which we presented above the sharp Quranic criticism by way of an example. And this is not the end of it. The rise of the priesthood becomes an obstacle for us in our direct access to the divine revelation. As a result of according sanctity to the personal understanding of certain humans, different sects start streaming into existence.

The Muslim ummah today, owing to centuries old deviations and digressions, has reached a point, unfortunately, where it has no future ahead without internal reform, let alone rising again as a beacon for the nations of the world. At this juncture of history when the sun of capitalism is about to set and when the ideological and thought vacuum has caused

immense desperation, it is the duty of the bearers of the final message to come forth for the guidance of the mankind. Nevertheless, this is not possible until we ourselves do not rise above ideological divisiveness and internal conflicts and develop the real sense of the Prophetic vision of the united Islam. Until our own house is in order, how can we undertake the task of guiding others to the right path? The time has come for the custodians of the final revelation to rise yet again before the world for the sake of reorganizing the human caravan and setting its direction and speed right.

The early day believers called themselves 'Muslims', which was the only identity that God had bestowed upon them. How on earth did it happen then that this divinely ordained identity was unseated by Shia, Sunni like self-tailored identities?

To retrieve the lost format of Islam and to resurrect it anew is a collective responsibility of all groups of its followers. Not only does our community's future depend on this endeavour but the collective interest of all nations of the world is also linked to it. The purpose of bringing out this booklet is actually to provide a spur to the process of this retrieval.



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