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Religion VS. Secularism

What Cures Humanity?

Ali Akbar Shahbaz



In Europe, the corrupt clergy in its treatment to the people virtually removed all differences between humans and animals.

The dictum 'It is hard to sit in Rome and strive against the Pope', was the result of all this menace. The callous attitude of kings and the lieges was further aggravating the situation and the

whole society presented a picture of insanity and absurdity. Nevertheless, science was also making its way in the society and soon became an overwhelming force that finally ended the power of church as well as the Dark Ages. Scientists came up with ideas and inventions which revolutionized the society. Science got huge popularity against Christianity that had failed to provide appropriate guidelines for politics, economics and other fields of the day. Christianity lost its importance and for masses it was just a code of ethics rather than a religion. Scientists simply told, "Church is irrelevant today". This was the beginning of the ideology that today we call 'secularism'.

Secularism can be defined as: "the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state".

Democracy as a system started in Athens in ancient Greece. Athenian democracy was very much different from liberal, secular or more rightly western democracy. And both these forms were, in turn, far different from Islamic concept of democracy. But, secularism and the secular ideas were approved by the world powers and they so vigorously advocated this concept that today the world is divided on secular and religious lines.

Many world powers and numerous intellectuals claim that secularism is the key to garnering peace, ensuring co-existence, allowing freedom of

It was the dark period in European history when church was supreme in power triangle that comprised church, feudal lords and the king. The church introduced the confession ritual and those who were found guilty were excommunicated and were barred from entering the church thereupon. The inquisition saw tens of thousands of immolations on the basis of a mere suspicion that they held ideas disapproved by the church. Many scientists — Muslims and Jews — fell prey to this inhumane law. Intra-religious wars among the Catholics, the Protestants and other factions of Christianity along with crusades against other religions kept the whole Europe in darkness for almost a thousand years. The ban on and screening of books is another chapter of dogmatic attitudes of the papacy due to which many noble ideas became the victims of censorship.

speech and protecting democratic norms. This ideology professes that religion has no place in the affairs of the people.

It is, avowedly, one's private matter and the state must not interfere in religious matters. Moreover, parliaments should formulate laws that are based on the will of the people under the majority-is-authority rule.

Secular norms have thrived during the last eight centuries to such an extent that they rapidly spread in nook and cranny of the world. But now the very existence of secularism is being challenged by religious elements and secularism is fast losing ground in this battle of ideas.

Secularism has left some significant imprints globally. It had made people, nations and states selfish and materialistic in their

approach to life and to achieving their goals. Firstly, they claim to achieve peace in the world but the two World Wars challenge the veracity of this assertion. The nation states developed in Europe and this concept spread under the sun.

Each nation is now in a cutthroat competition. The system of alliances and rivalries, militarism and nationalism led to the First World War (1914-18) that left 16.5 million people dead. Second World War (1939-45) was also fought along economic, political, military and ideological lines and it also exterminated 60-70 million people. Cold war started between the two superpowers of that time and the whole world was 'divided into alliances'.

Presently, the state of affairs in Ukraine, the Middle East and South Asia is also telling the same old story of world powers. The United States is supporting the rebels in Syria but is opposing those in Iraq. The result is the virtually unstoppable rise of the group known as 'Islamic State'. This monster militant group is led by the people belonging



lessly killed during the Iraq invasion, but were also denied their due share in country's political system. And, remember, deprivation begets rebellion which the West calls terrorism. Superpowers have been invading countries to pursue their vested interests and this has marred and defaced the global peace. More than 50,000 people have lost their

lives only in Pakistan — a major non-Nato ally of the US. Interestingly, almost all these world powers are secular as per their respective con-

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stitutions.

In these countries, religion has become only a set of rituals and has nothing to do with the practical life and people cannot find guidance in it on their problems. It is because of this irreligiousness that people are highly frustrated; the fact which can be verified by the suicide rate that is more in secular states than the non-secular or religious ones. Globally, in every second 40 people commit suicide which, if counted in annual terms, is far more than the annual killings in wars. This shows the despairing social and individual effects of abandoning religion.

Secondly, the idea of co-existence is voided also by the thoughts of 'Clash of Civilizations' and 'Clash of Interests'. In today's world, religious tolerance is waning while the surge of extremism has become uncontrollable. The intellectual terrorism spread by secular minds on the pretext of freedom of speech has created many rifts among peoples of the world. The secular states also endorse this type of activity claiming it as a fundamental right of an individual. How ironic is it that hurting others' emotions and sentiments is considered the basic right of a person in civilized world. In this so-called civilized, cultured world, it's a crime to comment on holocaust but it's the freedom of speech when magazines like Charlie

Muslims' sentiments.

Thirdly, Western powers preach democracy at every platform but, in reality, they are non-democratic in dealings. They want to get anything they wished to, by hook or by crook. They apparently spurn the dictatorships but they openly support it in many countries, especially the Muslim States. They have been patronizing dictators in the Middle East but now the realities are totally different. The United Nations was established with an aim to restore peace and democracy in the world but its principal organ, the Security Council, is utterly non-democratic as five permanent members are vested with the powers to veto everything they dislike. The issues of Kashmir and Palestine are still on agenda but issues of East Timor and Sudan are settled within no time. In fact, the dubious policies of the mighty states have resurrected the old dictum 'might is right'.

Fourthly, the family system in secular states is nearing collapse. The unbridled liberty has left the society in a state of paralysis. These states established institutions like day care centres and old homes but today an urge to come back to family system is rising, though it's not easy now. Moreover, rape incidences too are rampant in secular states. By any ranking, the US, India, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Russia etc., would be on top of this ignoble list. The freedom to establish illicit male-female relationship and the faltering of marriage institution gave birth to some killer diseases like AIDS. Even then the modern world is banning Islamic veil system that is a key to stopping profanity in the society.

Fifthly, America's 'war on terror' has turned into 'war of terror'. In this unending war, those Muslim countries have been hit hard which have some strategic, economic or political importance in world affairs. The 'oil curse' for Middle Eastern countries and 'location curse' for Pakistan have made these areas dangerous even for the



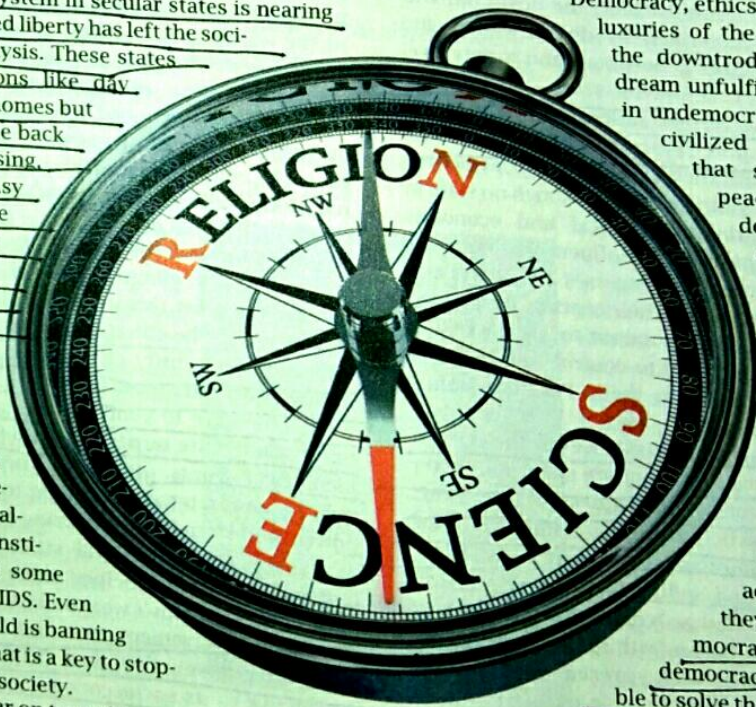
Crusades is gaining ground with the passage of time.

Sixthly, feudalism, colonialism and slave-trading were not eliminated on some ethical grounds.

Feudalism waned in Europe after Industrial Revolution and slave-trading stopped as it was burden for the capitalism to feed the

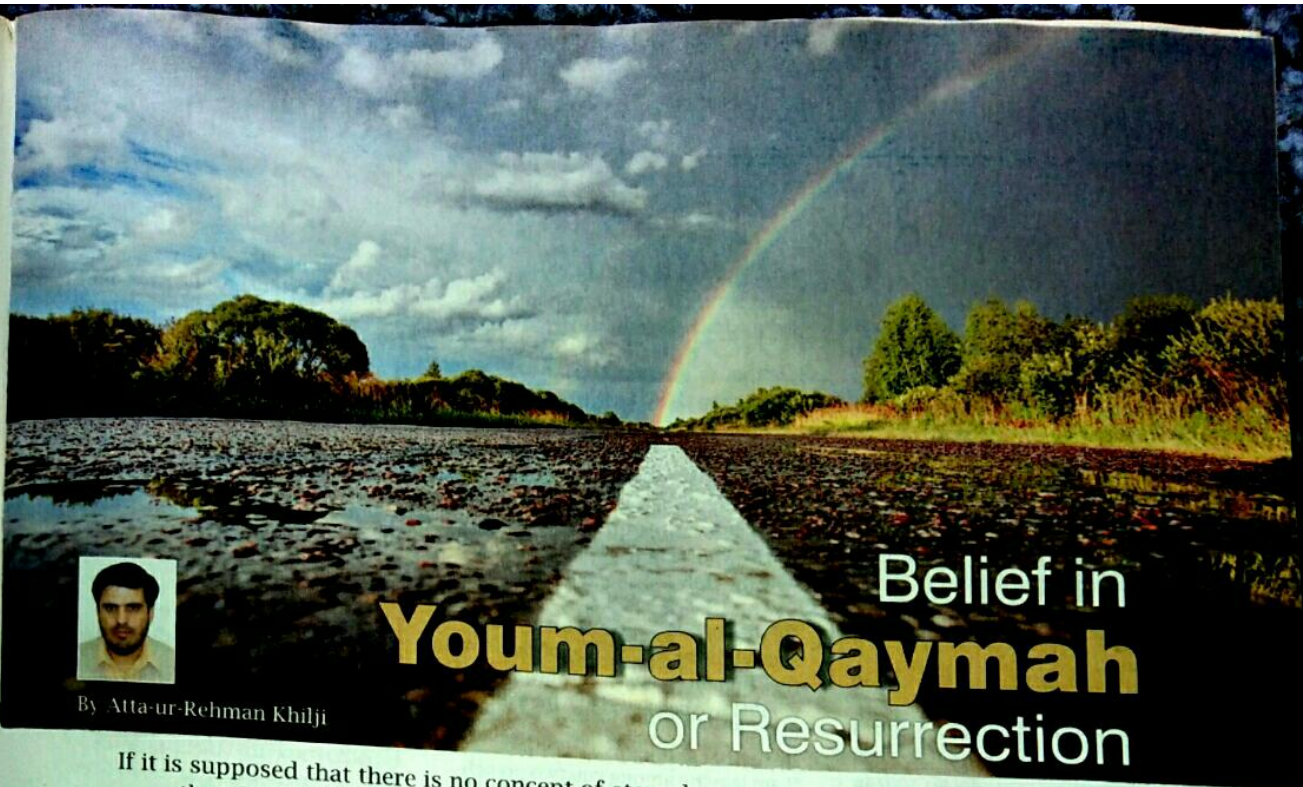
army of slaves. The effects of capitalism and interest-based banking are also evident where the difference between 'haves and have-nots' is still increasing.

Seventhly, in the case of Pakistan, Islam is the state religion while democracy forms the basis of the political system. But this dichotomy has proved counterproductive. One fact that verifies this claim is that the idea of interest-free banking has not still materialized. We find clearly in Holy Quran and Sunnah that interest (riba) is forbidden.



Democracy, ethics and moral values are luxuries of the rich peoples but for the downtrodden ones it's like a dream unfulfilled as they are dealt in undemocratic, barbaric and uncivilized manner. The claims that secularism will bear peace, coexistence, freedom of speech and democratic norms are just false notions. The systems built up on secular basis are losing their vigour and people are feeling the effects thereon. Secular philosophers abandoned the religion to achieve peace and freedom but what actually happened is that they lost the both. If democracy is cured with better democracy then why it is impossible to solve the problems in a religious society with better religious jurisdiction especially in Islam where the door of ijihad is always open?

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By Atta-ur-Rehman Khilji

Belief in Youm-al-Qaymah or Resurrection

If it is supposed that there is no concept of eternal reward and punishment then it implies that those great people who devoted their lives for some noble cause and faced impediments in the way and those who embarrassed martyrdom in the pursuit of their goals have wasted their lives. But this is something that is completely illogical and irrational, which cannot be accepted by a normal human mind. So the faith in resurrection is imperative for the welfare of humanity ✓

The faith in Youm-al-Qaymah or Resurrection is one of the most cardinal and fundamental part of Islam. According to this belief, this worldly life is temporary and mortal and after this life another permanent and never-ending life is waiting for us. Our position/condition in that everlasting life will dependent upon our performance in this worldly life. If we adhere to the injunctions of Islam and lead a life for the betterment of humanity, then the Allah, Almighty would bestow His countless blessings upon us by granting us paradise in the life after death which is place of perfect pleasures. On the contrary, if we flout the tenets of Islam and lead a sinful life then He would punish/reprimand us by sending us to hell, which is a place of extreme annoyance and molestation.

The belief in Resurrection implies

that each and every object of the world has to vanish on a fixed moment prescribed by the Allah Almighty, i.e. on doomsday. An angel, namely Hazrat Israfeel has been assigned a special responsibility in this regard by the Allah Almighty. On Doomsday he would blow trumpet that would bring to an end the process of life on earth and all the living beings would die instantly. After a prescribed time, he would again blow the trumpet at the command of Allah Almighty that would give another eternal life to the human beings for thorough and foolproof accountability. All the human beings would be gathered by the Allah Almighty and they would be rewarded and punished as per their deeds in this worldly mortal life. There would be no fragment of injustice on that

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Awesome article!

day.

This whole process has been summarised and elaborated by the Allah Almighty in Surah Al-Qaria/Chapter the Calamity when He says :-

*"The Calamity!
What is the Calamity?
And what do you know what the Calamity is?
On that Day human beings shall be like scattered moths,
and the mountains shall be like fluffs of carded wool in varying colours.
Then he whose scales weigh heavier (whose good deeds are more than bad deeds) shall have a blissful life;
but he whose scales weigh lighter,
his shall be the deep pit for a dwelling.
And what do you know what that is?
A blazing fire!"*

Death is the end of this life and the commencement of the life after death. Like life, death is also a fact that cannot be denied. Whether we like it or not, we have to confront



and taste it. In this regard the Allah Almighty says in verse No. 8 of Surah Al Juma/Chapter the Friday:-

"Tell them: The death from which you flee will certainly overtake you. Then you will be returned to Him

Who fully knows what is hidden and what is manifest. Thereupon He will let you know all that you used to do."

So this is a crystal clear sign for those who think and it should make us realise that this life is not a lasting one. Furthermore, the teachings of Islam tells us that the taste of death is not some thing pleasant and especially it is a dreadful forced end for those who lead a sinful life. That's why the Holy Prophet (PBUH) stated,

"If the animals had been so conversant with the knowledge of death as the human beings, no fat animal would have been available for eating."

He further stated, "I am leaving among you two preachers—first the quiet preacher, i.e. death and the second the talking preacher, i.e. the Holy Quran."

Therefore, death itself is the most important traditional and rational proof of resurrection.)

The belief in resurrection is imperative for perfect justice as human beings cannot disseminate perfect and comprehensive justice owing to the limited nature of this worldly life. For example, if a person kills one hundred persons, we cannot kill him/her one hundred times. Similarly, if it is supposed that there is no concept of eternal reward and punishment then it implies that those great people who devoted their lives for some noble cause and faced impediments in the way and those who embarrassed martyrdom in the pursuit of their goals have wasted their lives. But this is something that is completely illogical and irrational, which cannot be accepted by a normal human mind. So the faith in resurrection is imperative for the welfare of humanity.

Sleep also reminds us about the here-

after. During sleep, we remain cut off from worldly life and some time we experience immense pleasure or severe pain or tragic grief in dreams.

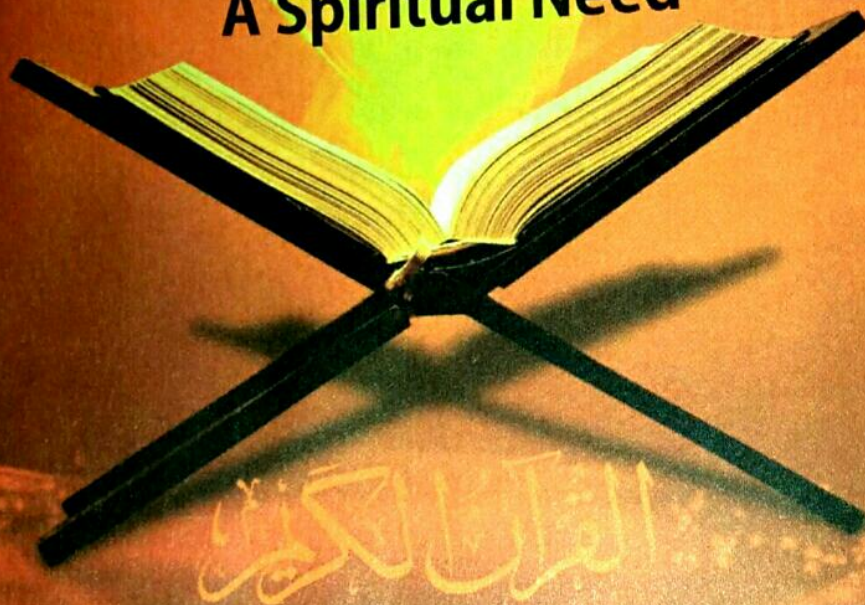
"The belief in resurrection is imperative for perfect justice as human beings cannot disseminate perfect and comprehensive justice owing to the limited nature of this worldly life."

But when we get up we find an entirely different life. So this common practice of human life is another proof of hereafter that is very easy to understand.

The belief in Resurrection has enduring and lasting effects on the human society and goes a long way in its reformation. This belief creates a sense of responsibility among the human beings. Through this belief the human beings get rid of despair and frustration because the hope of eternal reward enables them to face worldly problems with grace and courage, which in turn makes them patient, steadfast and brave who are always ready to sacrifice their bodily and other worldly pleasures for the sake of triumph in the life to come. They prefer the lasting life of hereafter on this mortal worldly life. This belief creates piety and spirituality in the human beings. This belief curtails the fear of death and the tendency of hot pursuit of desires among the believers.

Religion

A Spiritual Need



"And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: Wilt thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not."

(Al-Baqarah:30)

Human beings have a great spiritual thirst and they always seek ways of quenching it. Studies show that even the people who lived in pre-historical times practiced some particular set of beliefs in their individual as well as collective lives. Indeed, they had to fill the vacuum which they felt in their spirit, by worshipping and praying to a strong and perfect being. It is also a known

fact now that when natural disasters struck, people found themselves weak and vulnerable. Therefore, they came to the understanding that the disasters were sent by a powerful creator and some construed disasters as the rage of God. They had to search for a strong being to protect them. Sometimes, they offered sacrifices to save themselves from the wrath of the nature. Thus, a feeling for worship

and reverence was all but natural.

It is aptly said by the Buddha, *"Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life."*

Naturally, human beings develop a strong appetite for religion and moral values. In other words, our souls feel hunger the same way as our body does, and religion seems the only satiating source.

Broadly speaking, religious life may

be divided into three periods: Faith, Thought, and Discovery. In the first period, religious life appears as a form of discipline which must be accepted as an unconditional command without any rational understanding of the ultimate meaning and purpose thereupon. This attitude may be of great consequence in social and political history of a people, but is not of much consequence insofar as the individual's inner growth and expansion are concerned.

Perfect submission to discipline is followed by a rational understanding of the discipline and the ultimate source of its authority. In this period, religious life seeks its foundation in a kind of metaphysics - a logically consistent view of the world with God as a part of that view. In the third period, metaphysics is displaced by psychology, and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the Ultimate Reality. It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal amalgamation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by freeing himself from the fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness.

Undoubtedly, when we imagine of a society devoid of moral values, our mind jumps centuries back to the ancient times or Pre-Islam Arab Peninsula.

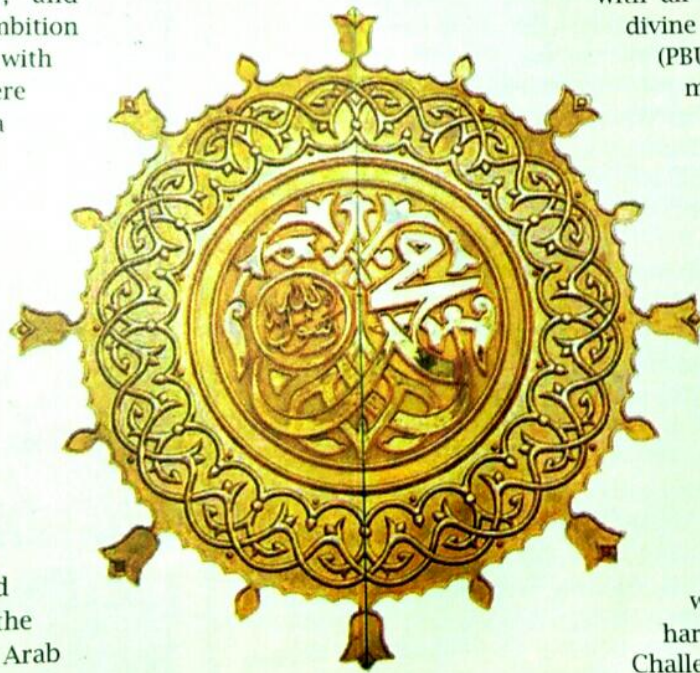
Let us just think of a society where morality was absent. In the later years of the Roman Republic, the center of public spectacle was the gladiator. In the words of historians, gladiator games, which pitched warriors against wild animals, convicted criminals or slaves,

provided the organizers with great opportunities for self-promotion while providing cheap and exhilarating entertainment to the public.

Gladiator contests were common as

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) challenged the social status of Arab lords who were selfish and who exploited the poor.

a means of garnering support for election campaigns and for pleasing clients. The trainers and organizers of the games were entr



preneurs, and the contests, many of which were fought until death, were big business that concerned many livelihoods. In addition, before the emergence of Islam, Arabian Peninsula was deep plunged into the darkness of

barbarity, cruelty and bloodshed. The tribal tension was at all but soaring and the language of the tribesmen was the spur and sword. The rulers oppressed and tortured their slaves, for even a minor mistake, in the worst possible way and the lords exploited the poor. The poorer you were, the more you would suffer. Being poor led to the bitter fate of slavery and tortments.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came to humanize our societies and imbue people with moral standards and religious values. He stood against the cruelties inflicted upon the deprived individuals who lacked property and social status. At a time when Arab society shrouded in the darkness of violence and aggression, the Prophet (PBUH) challenged the filthy system with all vigour and fervour. As

divine messenger, the Prophet (PBUH) had to fulfil his sacred mission of unchaining slaves and of abolishing tyranny from the human society.

When freedom and human rights were missing among Arab aristocrats, he proposed change boldly.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) challenged the social status of Arab lords who were selfish and who exploited the poor. He questioned the humanity of the masters who felt no mercy for hardworking slaves.

Challenging the status quo of the time, Prophet (PBUH) came with the most sublime religious ideology. He advocated justice, equality and morality. The Prophet (PBUH) brought down the foundations of a society where the humans were treated with dignity, and were provided with social rights and freedom. ■

THE HOLY PROPHET (PBUH) AS A MILITARY STRATEGIST

The life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as a role model for human beings encompasses all aspects of life. Besides all other faculties, as a military strategist too, he (PBUH) set the most perfect examples of sagacity and prudence. Throughout his life, he (PBUH) exhibited the most consummate military leadership skills for protecting Muslims as well as the nascent Islamic state. Even before establishing the state of Medina, he (PBUH) was cognizant of the importance of military training of Makkan Muslims where they were being persecuted by the infidels.



When the atrocities of infidels became intolerable, the Prophet (PBUH) allowed Muslims to migrate to Abyssinia during 5th and 6th year of prophethood in 615 and 616 AD respectively. In 621 AD, he (PBUH)

ordered Muslims to secretly migrate to Medina in small bands and in June 622 AD, when the Makkan infidels conspired to murder him, the Prophet (PBUH) also migrated to Medina along with his great companion Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA).

After reaching Medina and establishing the first Islamic city state in 622 AD, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) gave more attention to military organization of Muslims as the infidels were adamant on annihilating them. In 624 AD, a large army of infidels attacked Medina. Both the armies met at the place of "Badr" near Medina. In this first test of his military leadership skills, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) proved the mettle of his most consummate skills at carving out military strategies. He (PBUH) not only sent spies to know the exact

military strength of the enemy, but when it came to fighting he (PBUH) reached the battleground well before enemy, got hold of water source, selected better position and organized army in different ranks as well. This strategy played the decisive role in the victory of

Muslims who were only 313 in number up against a 1000-strong well-equipped force. In this battle, nearly 70 infidels were killed and as many were made Prisoners of War.

These prisoners were treated kindly and humanely and the Holy Prophet (PBUH) freed the literate prisoners on

the condition that each one of them would teach the art of reading and writing to 10 Muslims. This kindness toward POWs was unprecedented in the annals of military history of the whole world. Only a year later, in 625AD, in order to avenge the Badr defeat, the Quraish again attacked Medina with 3000-strong well-equipped military. They encamped near a hill called Ohud, in the north of Medina. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) positioned his army of nearly 70 Muslims on the western slope of the hill with Mount Ohud behind it on the top of which was a little pass. Though the rear was safe due to the hill, yet there was a possibility that the pass could be crossed and circumvented by the Quraish cavalry. Anticipating this danger

the Holy Prophet (PBUH) posted there a band of archers under the command of Hazrat Abdullah bin Jubayr. He instructed them, "Stick to your place, and don't leave it even if you see birds snatching us, till I send for you; and if you see that we have defeated the



infidels and made them flee, even then you should not leave your place till I send for you." ❧

Muslims drew first blood in the battle and the infidels started slowly turning on their heels. Sensing a complete Muslim victory, that 50-man band left the position without the approval of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). When that unprotected pass was noticed by fleeing infidels, they reassembled and attacked Muslims who were busy in collecting the spoils of war from that strategic pass. The Muslims were taken aback, and were defeated. Nevertheless, the battle proved the strength and success of military skills of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) as it was the breach of his command that converted the triumph of Muslims into a defeat.

Two years later, in 627 AD, the Quraish and their allies gathered a large army of more than 10,000 men for exterminating the Muslims, once for all. On the other side, the Muslims could muster an army of only 3000 men. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) made consultations with his companions regarding the preparation of war plans. It was decided that Medina could be protected easily on three sides — on its northern side was shelters of steep cliffs whereas on its eastern and western sides were houses — because the only unprotected side was the southern one.

Prophet's Companion Hazrat Salman (RA) put forward a suggestion to dig a trench on that side. It was accepted and executed thereupon. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) himself took part in digging of the trench that was too broad to be passed by men or horses. When the infidels reached Medina, they were unable to enter the city. Stopped by the ditch, they laid a siege to Medina that lasted for many days. With the passage of time, the annoyance among infidels soared and their supplies too began to run short. So, they had to return unsuccessful. On account of hectic consultations by the Holy Prophet (PBUH), which is an integral part of military strategy, the City State of Medina was saved from destruction. It was the Holy Prophet (PBUH) who successfully used trench as a defence strategy for the first time in the military history of Arabia.

After the truce of Hudaibiyah was broken by the Quraish when they sided with the tribe of Banu Bakr, the

Holy Prophet (PBUH), in 630 AD, led an army of 10,000 soldiers towards Makkah. Since it was a surprise attack, so every precaution was taken to keep the infidels unaware of the coming of the Muslim army.

On the eve of the attack, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) used his unique skills and ordered his soldiers to cook their food individually rather than in a collective kitchen. Resultantly, 10000 fires could be seen from a distance. The Quraish surveyed the scene and concluded that an army of 50000 men was poised to attack Makkah, which shattered their morale and they decided not to put resistance and hence surrendered. So, this excellent military strategy of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) enabled the Muslims to conquer Makkah without bloodshed.

Another unique display of the Prophet's (PBUH) military genius was seen during the conquest of Makkah where he showed mercy for those who had opposed him tooth

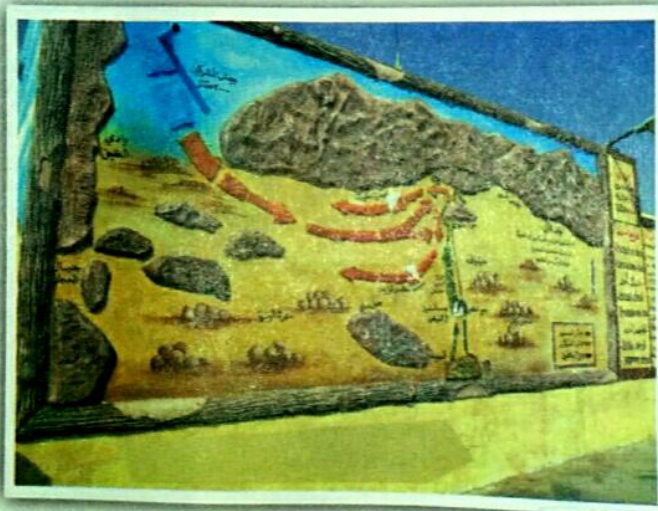
and nail by announcing a general amnesty for all the Makkans. As a result of those merciful and dignified steps, the Makkans entered the fold of Islam in bulk, which buttressed military strength of Muslims and made their defence impregnable.

During his whole life, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) took part in as many as 26 wars, and in all he exhibited excellent military skills. He always led the Muslims from the front and preached that

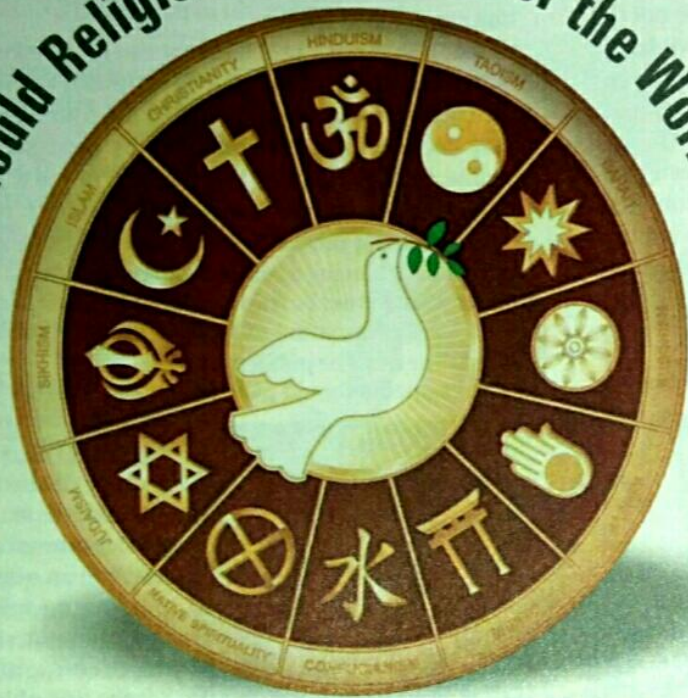
martyrdom was better than turning back in the battlefield. He was careful and cognizant of military preparedness of Muslims and made arrangements for imparting military training to Muslims during peacetime as well. Races of men, horses and camels were organized. Wrestling and archery competitions were held. Some Muslims were sent to Yemen for getting training in the use of weapons for subduing forts.

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) was careful even about trivial matters during wars such as ensuring that the morning sun did not face the soldiers directly and direction of wind did not obstruct the movement of horses and soldiers. Hence, we can easily conclude that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is the most supreme role model for military strategists of all times. ❧

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Should Religion Be Blamed for the World's



Bloodiest WARS?

Not long after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, in which Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became supreme leader, a US official was heard to exclaim: "Who ever took religion seriously?" The official was baffled at the interruption of what he assumed was an overwhelmingly powerful historical trend. Pretty well everyone at the time took it for granted that religion was on the way out, not only as a matter of personal belief, but even more as a deciding factor in politics. Secularization was advancing everywhere, and with increasing scientific knowledge and growing prosperity, it was poised to become a universal human condition.

There is no denying the fact that there were some countries that remained stubbornly religious — including the United States. But these were exceptions. Religion was an atavistic way of thinking which was gradually but inexorably losing its power. In universities, grandiose theories of secularization were taught as established fact, while politicians dismissed ideas they didn't like as

"mere theology." The unimportance of religion was part of conventional wisdom, an unthinking assumption of those who liked to see themselves as thinking people.

Today, no one could ask why religion should be taken seriously. Those who used to dismiss religion are terrified by the intensity of its revival. A noted scholar Karen Armstrong describes the current state of opinion in the following

words:

"In the West, the idea that religion is inherently violent is now taken for granted and seems self-evident."

She further says:

"Religion has been the cause of all the major wars in history. I have heard this sentence recited like a mantra by American commentators and psychiatrists, London taxi drivers and Oxford academics. It is an odd remark. Obviously the two

World Wars were not fought on account of religion."

Experts in political violence or terrorism insist that people commit atrocities for a complex range of reasons. Yet so indelible is the aggressive image of religious faith in our secular consciousness that we routinely load the violent sins of the 20th century on to the back of "religion" and drive it out into the political wilderness.

The idea that religion is fading away has been replaced in conventional wisdom by the notion that religion lies behind most of the world's conflicts. Many among the present crop of atheists hold both ideas at the same time. They will fulminate against religion, declaring that it is responsible for much of the violence of the present time, then a moment later tell you with equally dogmatic fervour that religion is in rapid decline. Of course it's a mistake to expect logic from rationalists. More than anything else, the evangelical atheism of recent years is a symptom of moral panic. Worldwide secu-

means for most of humankind. Modern Western conception of religion is idiosyncratic and eccentric.

In the West, people think of religion as a coherent system of obligatory beliefs, institutions and rituals, centring on a supernatural God, whose practice is essentially private and hermetically sealed off from all 'secular' activities. But this narrow, pro-

The potential for violence exists in faith-based movements of all kinds, secular as well as religious.

vincial conception is the product of a particular history and a specific version of monotheism.

Atheists think of religion as a system of supernatural beliefs, but the idea of the supernatural presupposes a distinct sort of cosmogony that is found in only a few of the world's religions. Moreover, the idea

same was true in pre-Christian Europe. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans ever separated religion from secular life. They would not have understood our modern conception of 'religion.' They had no authoritative scriptures, no compulsory beliefs, no distinct clergy and no obligatory ethical rules.

Throughout much of the history and all of the prehistory, "religion" meant practice — and not just in some special area of life. Belief has not been central to most of the world's religions; indeed, in some traditions it has been seen as an impediment to spiritual life. Vedanta, Buddhism and Taoism caution against mistaking human concepts for ultimate realities.

A religious tradition is never a single, unchanging essence that compels people to act in a uniform way. It is rather a template that can be modified and altered radically to serve a variety of ends. In one form or another, religion is humanly universal, but it is also essentially multifarious.

One of the founders of liberalism, John Locke, found it intolerable that the "wild woods and uncultivated waste of America be left to nature, without any improvement, tillage and husbandry." In-

involved in his own right in the colonization of the Carolinas, Locke argued that "the native 'kings' of America had no legal jurisdiction or right of ownership of their land." Again, the Spanish Inquisition is a notorious example of the violence of religion. There can be no doubt that it entailed hideous cruelty, not least to Jews who had converted to Christianity, often in order to save their lives, but who were suspected of se-

ISLAM

is the religion of peace and mercy

larization, which was believed to be an integral part of the process of becoming modern, shows no signs of happening. Quite the contrary: in much of the world, religion is in the ascendant. For many people the result is a condition of acute cognitive dissonance.

It's a confusion compounded by the lack of understanding, among those who issue blanket condemnations of religion, of what being religious

that belief is central in religion makes sense only when religion means having a creed. Until the British started classifying the people of the Indian Subcontinent by their religious affiliations, there was no such thing as "Hinduism." Instead there was an unfathomably rich diversity of practices, which weren't seen as separate from one another or from the rest of life, and didn't define themselves in terms of belief. The

cretely practicing their faith and consequently, in some cases, burnt. Yet in strictly quantitative terms, the Inquisition pales in comparison to later frenzies of secular violence. Recent estimates of the numbers who were executed during the first 20 years of the Inquisition range from 1,500 to 2,000 people. By contrast, about a quarter of a million people were killed in the Vendée (out of a population of roughly 800,000) when a peasant rebellion against the French Revolution was put down by republican armies in 1794. And some 17,000 men, women and children were guillotined in the purge that ended in July that year, including the man who had designed the new revolutionary calendar. It is indisputable that this mass slaughter had a religious dimension. In 1793, a goddess of reason was enthroned on the high altar at Notre Dame Cathedral; revolutionary leaders made great use of terms such as "credo," "sacrament," and "sermon" in their speeches.

Few movements have been as single-minded in their commitment to modernization as Lenin's Bolsheviks, and few have been so virulently hostile to mainstream faiths. Yet as Bertrand Russell observed in his forgotten 1920 classic "The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism," written after he travelled to Russia and talked with Lenin, Soviet Communism was from the beginning as much a religion as a political project. Oddly, though it was a rerun on a vaster scale of the French revolutionary terror. Together with Nazism, these 20th-century state cults plant a question mark over the very idea of secularization. Certainly

there has been a decline in the old authority of churches, but that does not mean religion is becoming weaker. Simultaneous with the retreat of the mainstream faiths, there has been a rise of a plethora of political religions and an explosion of fundamentalism, sometimes fused in a single movement. The ambiguities of secularization are especially prominent in the Middle East. What does Islamic State stand for — an ultraviolent type of religious fundamentalism, or a radically modern politics? Clearly, it



represents both. The background to the emergence of IS can be traced back to Wahabism, the 18th-century Islamic movement whose founder, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, helped establish the first Saudi state. Since the influx of oil wealth, the Saudis have promoted Wahabism worldwide. IS is one of the offspring of this project: an ogre that is now a deadly threat to the Saudi state. A potential for violence was present in Wahhabism from the start. But it was not inherently violent; indeed, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had refused to sanction the

wars of his patron, Ibn Saud, because he was simply fighting for wealth and glory. The clear implication of the founder's statement is that war would have been justified if it had been waged in the service of faith.

Religion is not the uniquely violent force as demonized by secular thinkers. Yet neither is religion intrinsically peaceful — a benign spiritual quest compromised and perverted by its involvement with power. The potential for violence exists in faith-based movements of all kinds, secular as well as religious. Evangelical atheists splutter with fury when reminded that a war on religion was an integral part of some of the 20th century's worst regimes. How can anyone accuse a movement devoted to reason and free inquiry of being implicated in totalitarian oppression? It is a feeble-minded and thoroughly silly response, reminiscent of that of witless believers who ask how a religion of love could possibly be held to account for the horrors of the Inquisition.

Conventional distinctions between religious and secular belief pass over the role that belief itself plays in our lives. We are meaning-seeking creatures and unlike other animals we fall very easily into despair if we fail to make sense of our lives. We are unlike our animal kin in another way. Only human beings kill and die for the sake of beliefs about themselves and the nature of the world. Looking for sense in their lives, they attack others who find meaning in beliefs different from their own. The violence of faith cannot be exorcised by demonizing religion. It goes with being human. ■

REFORMING THE REFORM

THE SCOPE OF IJTIHAD IN ISLAMIC LAW

Platitudes of all hues capture minds of modern Muslims. Their bent of mind is more akin to faith-inspired hope than to solution-oriented plans, and illustrations of this 'bent' are in abundance. Pakistan is but an example in this regard where every now and then revolutionaries of sorts emerge and make tall claims. They criticize available semblance of order and system without offering any detailed and reasoned alternative. In almost all the prayers about Palestinians' plight in Gaza in recent days, no one from pulpit offered any plan of organization or systematic response to the problem. In this context, there is a strong case in Muslim world to revisit its thinking, which may ultimately translate into action. The standard answer to such a rethinking is to talk about the revival of Islamic Law with the use of 'Ijtihad'.

This article aims at analyzing briefly the concept of 'Ijtihad', and more importantly, to explore possible research avenues about its scope, which are seldom discussed.

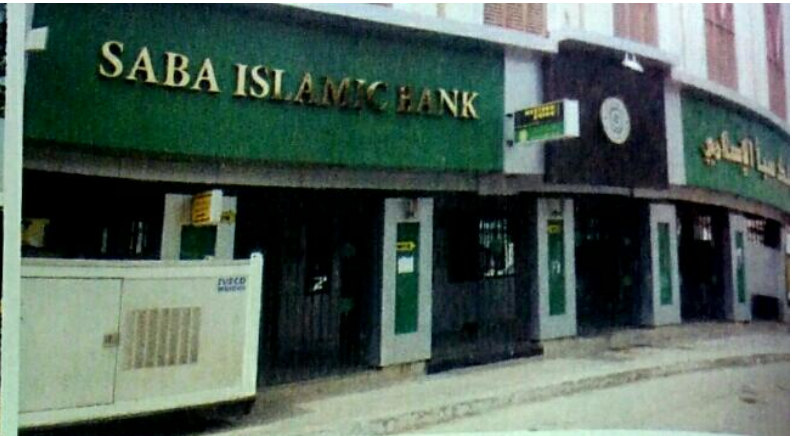
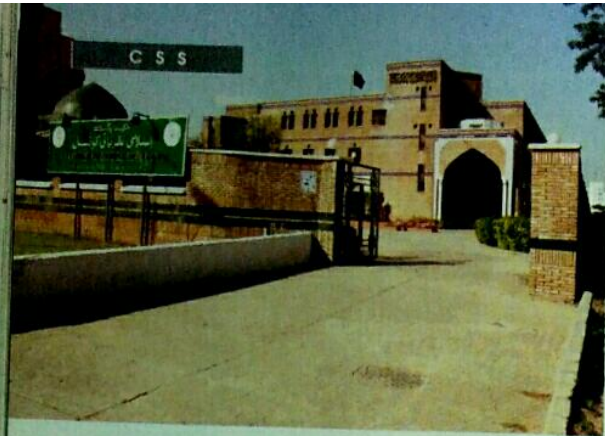
Admittedly, there is no standard and consensus definition of 'Ijtihad'. One thing, however, is clear that it is not a primary source of Islamic Law, and in the hierarchy of rules, it is placed below textual sources i.e. Quran and Hadith.

Second, noticeable point about 'Ijtihad' is that it's not a rule or a definite source of Islamic Law rather it's a methodology of legal reasoning. Nevertheless, for South Asian Muslims well versed in English, an authentic conceptual work on philosophy of Islamic Law is "The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam" a magnum opus by Allama Muhammad Iqbal. The book is primarily a collection of lectures by the great scholar and a visionary poet. Chapter VI of the book is styled as 'The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam' and addresses the concept of Ijtihad. His 'principle of movement' in Islamic Law 'structure' is Ijtihad. Citing from his work will make the concept of 'Ijtihad' clear:

"The word literally means to exert. In the terminology of Islamic Law it means to exert with a view to form an independent judgement on a legal question."

If the elaboration of the concept by Allama Iqbal is taken as a working definition, it becomes clear that the process of 'Ijtihad' involves an element of 'judgement', which is quintessentially a 'thinking process'. He has then proceeded to outline three degrees of Ijtihad, which, in his words, are:

- (1) complete authority in legislation which is practically confined to the founders of the schools,
- (2) relative authority which is to be exercised within the limits of a particular school, and
- (3) special authority which relates to the determining of the law applicable to a particular case left undetermined by the founders."



An analysis of the three 'degrees' shows that Allama Iqbal wanted to explain the levels of 'authority' that are authorized, according to Islamic legal scholars, to make the 'independent judgement'. Building on his explanations, it is imperative that modern Islamic legal scholars, constitutional experts of Muslim countries and researchers strive to undertake two tasks:

First, the abstraction of 'degrees of Ijtihad' needs to be translated into some workable and actionable form. Pivotal questions of 'authority' and 'constitutional power' need to be examined not only in the light of history of Muslim world, but should also take into account mass of the knowledge developed by modern political science. The perpetual tension of determining the source of political power from religious or other sources needs to be carefully researched. The issue of primary, secondary and delegated authorities also needs to be studied in more depth to put into practice the concept of Ijtihad in the modern times.

Secondly, the scope of Ijtihad also needs to be definitely articulated. It is commonplace in Islamic studies, in general, and in Islamic legal studies, in particular, to insist on the use of Ijtihad for providing solutions to emerging issues of modern life. The recent growth of Islamic finance and banking has once again underlined the importance of Ijtihad as a tool of growth and as a 'principle of movement' for 'Islamic structure'. The paradigm of scope also deserves a word of elucidation. In all, there can possibly be three spheres in which all actions of thought and body can be di-

vided: beliefs (aqaid), rituals (ibadaat), societal affairs (muaamilaat) that can further be subdivided into family and non-family affairs. It needs to be examined that what, if any, is the scope of Ijtihad in the three spheres?

Naturally, for a Muslim, there is little or no scope to do Ijtihad in the sphere of beliefs, but this scope must be definitely articulated to make the discussion on Ijtihad in Is-

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lamic Law more practical and workable. The above-stated three spheres have only been referred to for the sake of discussion. Any serious researcher can work on the concept and can refine the contours of conducting research in the area of defining scope of Ijtihad in Islamic Law.

* Thirdly, modern English jurists, like Salmond, prefer to classify legal rules into substantive and adjective laws. The substantive law remains constant for a reasonable time, whereas the adjective law is more conveniently amendable and is more about the formalities. For conspectus, it may be added that Salmond divided adjective laws into procedural, proofs and pleadings to show the full spectrum of adjective

his use of the terminology of adjective law also suggests that this species of rules is not a stand-alone in its existence and like an adjective that is dependent on a noun for its full meaning, the adjective law is dependent on substantive law. Such subtle classifications need to be subjected to research as far as scope of Ijtihad is concerned. The beauty of Islamic Law is that it is assimilative and not exclusionary in nature; therefore, the principle of Ijtihad cannot be conceived of not benefiting from the modern jurisprudential thinking and in the era of modern drafting, it is imperative that such classifications be frequently used to share the Islamic Law. It may, however, be noted that some Islamic legal scholars emphasize that Islamic Law has opted to outline the substantive law and the adjective law is left for respective people, time and space to evolve as Islamic Law is universal and non-temporal in nature. They contend that had it opted to enact the adjective side of the law, its universal nature would have compromised. Even so, the modern life demands certainty and uniformity and therefore, research on adjective rules in Islamic Law deserves full attention.

The above-stated discussion is not an essay in futility. Muslims need to rise above the emotional level of discourse and have to offer pragmatic and detailed solutions to societal and global issues. ■

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