

Generous Tolerance in Islam and its Effects on the Life of a Muslim

Hamza Yusuf

WE FIND OURSELVES in a time of immense conflict and confusion, which has led to widespread unrest and agitation—what the Arabs term *fitna* and *haraaj*. According to several sound prophetic traditions, both these qualities reflect the state of communities and people in the latter days. We should not, however, treat them lightly or justify them in some Islamic framework. In the light of recent events, the greatest tragedy I see is the horrible picture of Islam being presented not simply to Westerners but peoples all over the world.

Take, for instance, the tragic killing of the Nepalese Buddhist cooks in Baghdad that led to the destruction of a four-hundred-year-old mosque in Nepal, a country wherein Muslims and Buddhists have coexisted peacefully for centuries. Both the Maliki and Hanafi schools have traditionally accepted *jizya* and *dhimmī* status from Hindus and Buddhists, as both religions possess Books as the foundation of their religions and retain cosmologies so sophisticated as to instill respect and study in the West with university departments established solely for the study of these religions. The great scholar al-Birūni studied and wrote extensively on both subjects and recognized the level of sophistication in the religious traditions of natives of the Indian subcontinent. It is therefore particularly lamentable to see such callous and criminal behavior from demented individuals, claiming to be adherents of Islam, toward guests in their country simply for their adherence to a faith that has captured the hearts and minds of millions of

people in the East and increasingly in the West. It would seem that the concept of *samāḥa* (tolerance) has never been more important than now in our long history as a religious nation.

What is *Samāḥa*?

Arabic is a profound and complicated language. In fact, the inner workings of this language led one Orientalist to claim, “Arabic preserves a higher degree of likeness [than Hebrew] to the original Semitic language.”¹ Arabic has retained a remarkable ancientness to it, revealing in its Qur’anic period an extraordinary array of possibility in the semantic universe, created by its highly structured system of derivation (*ishṭiqāq*). Most linguists assert that languages actually lose complexity and vastness (*sa‘a*) as they evolve. Due to the preservation of Arabic, in which the language was in essence “frozen” in time as a language of revelation, it has retained, in its Qur’anic form, through the laborious efforts of grammarians, philologists, and etymologists, a permanence not even granted Koine Greek or Biblical Hebrew. The preservation of its vocabulary and the exactness of its meanings, as they have come down through the understanding of pre-Islamic poetry and prose, have enabled us to produce precise glosses of the Islamic terms used by the Qur’an and the Prophet ﷺ (God’s peace and blessings upon him). This miracle is cogently expressed in the Qur’an’s declaration: “We have indeed revealed the Reminder, and We have promised to preserve and protect it.”² No other language has this protec-



tion, and its greatest testimony is in the preservation of the poetry of the pre-Islamic Arabs and the earliest dictionaries of the Arabs, which are unparalleled in other languages of equal antiquity. Lexicologists debate the meanings of many words that exist in both New and Old Testament texts, and they simply do not know what some of those words mean. While difference of opinion exists over Qur'anic meanings, those differences exist only to provide more than one possible interpretation.

Words in Arabic are based upon trilateral roots and, in many cases, bilateral roots that are then nuanced in meaning with the addition of the third letter.³ In the case of *samāḥa*, the trilateral root base is *smḥ*.⁴ Its root dyad is comprised of the letters *sīn* and *mīm*. There are many trilateral root words comprised of this dyad base, but four that stand out in relationship are *smā*, *smd*, *smk*, and *smq*. All of these base roots relate to “elevation and loftiness” (*al-ʿulūwwu wa as-sumuwwu*). The word for “heaven,” *samāʾ* is taken from the base root *smā*. In his book, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Ibn Manẓūr says that *smā* is “to be elevated” (*ʿalā*), *smd*

means “to be elevated” (*ʿalā*), *smq*, in regard to trees and foliage, means “to be elevated” (*irtifaʿa wa ʿalā wa ʿāla*), and finally, *smk* means “to elevate something” (*samakahu ay rafaʿahu fartafaʿa*).⁵

I believe there is a relationship between the root *smḥ*, which is primarily glossed by Ibn Manẓūr and others as “generosity” (*jūd*), and the other *sīn* and *mīm* root based words, glossed as “loftiness”: the concept of tolerance is one of the most exalted of human qualities and shares a relationship with the heavens. When asked, “Which religion is the most beloved to Allah?” our Prophet ﷺ replied, “The gentle Abrahamic one” (*al-ḥanafīyya as-samḥa*).

Samaha or *asmaha* is “to display generosity and nobility” (*ʿatāʿ an karamin wa sakhā*). The idea of tolerance comes from *samaha*’s fourth base form, *sāmaḥa*, which is glossed as, “to be agreeable with others’ wishes” (*wāfaqa ʿalā maṭlūb*).⁶ In his *Muʿjam maqāyīs al-lughā*, the philologist Ibn Fāris says, “The root *smḥ* denotes agreeability and easiness” (*tadullu mādda smḥ ʿalā mā nā as-salāsa was-suhūla*). *Salāsa* in Arabic denotes “affability, ease, and

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malleability” (*inqiyād*). The Prophet ﷺ said, “The believer is of easygoing and gentle disposition; if he is led, he follows” (*Al-mu'min hayyin layyin idhā qīda inqada*). The Arabs say, “The animal was tamed after intractability” (*Asmaḥa an-dābba ba'da istiṣ'āb ay lāna wa anqada*). *At-tasmīḥ* is “easy travel” (*as-sayru as-sahl*). The meaning of *al-ḥanafīyya as-samḥa* is “the religion without any constriction (*ḍayq*) in it.” The essence of *samāḥa* is “an easygoing attitude toward life and others that does not allow for harshness, intolerance, or fanaticism.”

Although the concept of tolerance in today's world is uniquely a European idea—for example, we are taught to “tolerate” people who are “different” from us—it is easy to see how the Arabs, searching for an equivalent word in Arabic, fell upon *tasāmuh* to express the European term “tolerance.” It is important to recognize that modern Arabic has been profoundly affected by English and French due to so many ideas impinging on the mental borders of modern Muslims, especially Arabs. This is particularly recognizable among the desert scholars of Mauritania, who, despite their superb mastery of classical Arabic, are almost entirely at a loss in understanding much of what is written today in Arabic newspapers. I was particularly struck when my own teacher, Murābiṭ al-Ḥajj, who has written a commentary on the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik, a sophisticated text on Arabic grammar recognized in Mauritania for its excellence, responded to a newspaper article I showed him from the *Sharq al-awsat* by asking me, “What language is this?” When I said it was Arabic, he replied, “Not any I am familiar with.”

I believe that the concept that is current in modern Arabic for *samāḥa* is more related to the European concept than many may realize. What is truly ironic is that the very concept of religious tolerance in Europe is a direct result of Ottoman policies in Eastern Europe toward the Christian sects of Protestantism and Unitarianism. It was a Unitarian prince from Transylvania who, under the suzerainty of the Ottoman's Sublime Porte, paved the way for the end of religious wars in Europe. It causes disconsolation to realize that the gift Islam gave to the West is now struggling for survival in the very lands it originated from when Islam was flourishing far and wide.

In the Muslim world, the idea of tolerance, as in current usage, was not common. Tolerance today is synonymous with acceptance. In the West, a tolerant person is one who accepts almost everything unless it is absolutely beyond the pale, such as murder, theft, or other serious crimes. One is expected, in the West, to tolerate even those things one finds deeply distasteful, such as consumerism, pornography in all its forms, popular culture, etc. One is expected to be liberal and display largesse toward such things. While this sense of tolerance has not yet spread throughout the Muslim world, there are ongoing efforts to impose such a view upon people.

In order, however, to truly understand tolerance in an Islamic sense, we must first fully grasp the semantic field this word reveals. There are several terms that revolve around *samāḥa*, each revealing an aspect of the concept itself.

The Semantic Field

In the Islamic universe of discourse, *samāḥa* is related to the following terms: *tashīl*, *taysīr*, *jūd*, *sakhā'*, *karam*, *līn*, *shahāma*, *ṣafah*, *afw*, and *hilm*.

The first two terms are closely related: *tashīl* (to smoothen) and *taysīr* (facilitation). *Tashīl* comes from a root word *sahl*, which is a type of terrain that Arabs preferred over all others. It

was smooth, easy riding terrain as opposed to difficult, hard terrain. The Arabs express their love for this type of terrain in their warmest greeting to the guest: “*Ahlan wa sahlān*,” which, in other words, is to say, “You have found family and smooth traveling from here on out.” *Taysīr* is one of the most important words related to *samāḥa*. *Yusr* is “ease and facilitation.” It is what God wants for humanity from the religion itself: “*Yurīdu bikum al-ʿusr*” (*He wishes ease for you, and He does not wish difficulty for you*).⁷ It stands in juxtaposition to *ʿusr* or “difficulty,” which is another type of derivative relationship. (Both words share the letters *sīn* and *rā* but differ in the *fa* letter: *ʿain* and *yā*). A hadith states, “*Yassirū wa lā tuʿassirū*” (Facilitate and do not complicate). All five of the golden principles of Islamic jurisprudence relate ultimately to the concept of *samāḥa*, further illustrating the idea that Islam is truly “the gentle religion” (*al-ḥanaḥīyya as-samḥa*).

The first principle is “Affairs are determined by their ends and aims” (*Al-umūr bi-maḡāṣidihā*). The ultimate aim of the entire sacred law, according to our *ʿuṣūlī* scholars, is “Accrue of benefit and avoidance of harm” (*Jalb al-maṣāliḥ wa darʾi al-mafāsīd*). Because the primary concern is human benefit, matters that concern individuals and societies will always be viewed with the idea of facilitating human affairs to achieve their

worldly and otherworldly benefits.

The second principle is “Harm must be removed” (*Ad-ḍarar yuzāl*). This principle also indicates the need to facilitate human matters, both individual and societal.

The third principle is “Customs are afforded legal status” (*Al-ʿāda muḥakkama*), in recognition of different peoples’ practices and cultures. While this principle works both ways in practice, it nonetheless recognizes human differences and thus is related to *samāḥa*.

The fourth principle, “Certainty is not removed by doubt” (*Al-yaqīn lā yuzālu bi-shakk*), facilitates many human transactions that might otherwise be hindered by human frailty.

Finally, the fifth principle is “Difficulties demand facilitation” (*Al-mashaqqatu tajlīb at-taysīr*). This principle sums up much of what *samāḥa* is about. All the aforementioned principles and many of the others that follow from them are arrived at based upon the idea of facilitation and a preservation of human relationships, which the sacred law clearly strives to maintain.

Generosity is another aspect of *samāḥa*, which, in essence, is a means by which one person facilitates something for another or which strengthens the bonds between them. Generosity is ease with one’s being and property. The Arabs say, “Generosity is with what is available” (*Al-jūd bil-mawjūd*). This contains a profound aspect of *samāḥa*. Even a smile is an



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act of generosity: “A smile in the face of your brother is charity,” said the Prophet ﷺ. A kind word is also an act of generosity. Islam encourages this type of *samāḥa*, which is in anyone’s power, rich or poor, weak or strong, humble or high. Both the injunction as well as acting upon the injunction display the essence of *samāḥa*.

Two words are used in dictionaries to convey the aspect of generosity in *samāḥa*: *jūd* and *sakhā’*. According to Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī in *al-Furūq al-lughawiyya*, the difference between the two is that *sakhā’* is a type of generosity in which a man is easygoing with people who ask him for help (*yalīnu al-insān ‘indas-su’āl*), and he facilitates the needs of those seeking help. The Arabs say, “soft earth” (*al-arḍ sakhāwiyya ay layyina*). *Jūd*, on the other hand, is generosity that flows without the recipient of the generosity needing to ask for it. For that reason, God is considered *Jawād* but not *Sakhā*, for His generosity flows without our asking. Thus, one who is characterized with *samāḥa* is both generous without having to be asked and soft-hearted and compassionate when sought after for help.⁸

Another related term is *luyūna*, which implies “easiness, softness, and gentility in disposition.” The Prophet ﷺ reportedly said, “The believer is gentle and soft” (*Al-mu’minu hayyininu layyininu*). This quality is an aspect of *samāḥa*. The Qur’an says, “It was a mercy from your Lord that you were made gentle for them, and had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So, pardon them, seek forgiveness for them [from your Lord], and consult them in important matters.”⁹

Commenting on this verse, Imam al-Burṣawī, says,

The use of the particle *mā* before the word “mercy” (*rahma*) is to add further emphasis on the mercy; in other words, “... due to immense mercy (*rahma ‘azīma*) from God.” This mercy is in the fact that the Prophet ﷺ was specifically given a gentle disposition (*layyin al-jānib*) toward humanity. [He] treated them with compassion and care even though they often treated him with cruelty, harshness, and disobedience and often turned him over to his enemies.¹⁰

Furthermore, the meaning of “harsh and hard-hearted” (*fazzan ghalīz al-qalb*) indicates two qualities absent in the Prophet’s character: bad manners and harshness. One can be well-mannered with a cruel heart, and one can be ill-mannered with a compassionate heart, but the Prophet ﷺ had both impeccable character in his outward behavior and true compassion in his inward disposition, as his heart was filled with mercy.

Imam al-Burṣawī goes on to say about the Prophet ﷺ,

Had he been harsh and hard-hearted, knowing that adherence to his practice is an obligation and that abandoning him is disbelief, how would people have been expected to have followed him had he spoken harsh words and had a hard heart? Why should they have obeyed him or followed him? Gentleness in speech always has a more penetrating effect on the heart (*anfadhū fil-qulūb*) and is quicker to achieve a response (*asra’u ilā ‘ijāba*) and more conducive to obedience (*ad’ a ilā at-ṭā’a*). For that reason, God commanded Moses and Aaron to “Go to Pharaoh and speak gently to him” (*Idhhabā ilā Fir’aun innahu tagha fa qulā lahu qawlan layyin*) (20:34). However, one should remember that gentleness and compassion are to be used if doing so does not lead to the neglect of divine rights upon

men. If, however, it does not lead to honoring divine rights, then it is not permissible.

For instance, God says, “*O Prophet, strive against the kuffār and the hypocrites, and be hard on them. Their abode is hell; and what a miserable destination*” (9:73). In regards to the punishment of adultery, God says, “*The adulteress and the adulterer are each to be whipped a hundred strokes; and don’t let compassion for them overcome you, where it concerns obedience to God, if you believe in God and the last day*” (24:2). In the final analysis, the Qur’an is calling to a middle position between neglect and excess (*ifrāt* and *tafrīt*), which are both blameworthy (*madhmūm*). Virtue is a mean between two extremes, so there are times when gentleness is enjoined, and others when severity is enjoined, in order to achieve a proper balance between the two, which is the straight path (*ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*). For that reason, God has praised moderation in the verse, “We have made you a moderate nation” (*Wākadhālikaja’alnākum ummatan wasaṭan*). One should know that the entire purpose of the Revelation and the role of the Messenger is to convey the responsibilities that God has placed upon humanity. This purpose would never be achieved if hearts were not inclined toward the Messenger and minds quieted by his presence; and this would never be achieved unless the Messenger was noble and merciful (*karīm wa raḥīm*). He had to have been someone who overlooked their shortcomings and forgave their breeches of comportment and their transgressions.¹¹

Finally, Imam al-Burṣawī points out a tragic fact regarding the Islamic scholars of the later period:

If the Messenger ﷺ was hard-hearted, people would have fled from his presence, and that is why scholars and imams should follow the Prophet ﷺ in that aspect.

People’s religious commitment is only as good as those they follow, both inwardly

and outwardly. Unfortunately, of late, it is quite rare to find scholars and shaykhs who are characterized by high ethical behavior and beautiful comportment, unless they are among those whom God has protected!¹²

Karam is a profound word that means both “generosity and nobility.” The pre-Islamic Arabs conflated the two concepts. A noble man was generous, and a generous man was noble. They were interchangeable in that sense. But *karam* also indicates dignity. For instance, “*We have ennobled or dignified the Children of Adam.*”¹³ This is an important quality of *samāḥa*, the idea of nobility in the generous act.

Qadi ‘Iyād says in the *Shifā’*,

As for *jūd*, *karam*, *sakhā’*, and *samāḥa*, all share similar meanings.... *Samāḥa* is “the foregoing of one’s rights out of concern for others with a good disposition” (*at-tajāfī ‘amma yastahiqqu al-mar’u ‘inda ghairihi biṭībi nafsihi*). It is the opposite of *shakāsa*. *Shakāsa* is a malicious disposition, quite the opposite of *karam* or *samāḥa*. Someone who is argumentative is called *shākis* in Arabic. The Qur’an says, “*God strikes the parable of a man over whom a plurality of partners are wrangling and a man secure in service to one man: are the two equal in comparison? Praise be to God! But most of them do not know.*” (39:29)¹⁴

The characteristic of easygoingness is further emphasized in the tractability of a person who embodies *samāḥa*, as opposed to disputation and surliness (*shakāsa*). The Qur’an reminds us, after declaring that human beings are one family, “*The noblest in God’s sight are the most conscientious.*”¹⁵ This could also be understood as, “The most tolerant of you are the most God-conscious” (*Inna asmaḥakum ‘inda Llāhi atqākum*). The foundation of Islam is *taqwā*, which is an awareness of God that leads



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to *karam* and *samāha*. The Qur’an says, “God will grant whoever has *taqwā* a criterion (*furqān*).”¹⁶ It is this *furqān* that enables a person to know when to be soft and when to be hard.

Samāha and Vastness

Another extremely important aspect of *samāha* is the concept of vastness (*sa‘a*). One of the many meanings of *samāha* is to “permit,” and the concept of vastness is embedded in that. Imam al-Fayruzabādī says in the *Muḥīt*, “Surely in it is copious room” (*Inna fīhi lamasmaḥan, ay muttasā’an*).¹⁷ Ibn Manẓūr says among the meanings used is “a flexible bow” (*qaws samḥa*), which is the opposite of *kazza*. According to Ibn Manẓūr, *kazaz* is glossed, “that which does not relax” (*lā yanbasit*), as in a contorted face (*wajḥun kazz*), an intractable camel (*jamalun kazz*), or a rigid man (*rajulun kazz*). Interestingly, he also glosses *kazāz* as “miserliness.” So *kazāza* (a type of inflexibility, constriction, and rigidity) is related to the inability to spend one’s wealth generously. As was mentioned, among the meanings of *al-ḥanafīyya as-samḥa* is “the religion without constraint or rigidity” (*ad-dīn alladhī laysa fīhi ḍayqun*). The concept of constriction and its removal is also at the root of the sacred law of Islam. The Prophet ﷺ came to remove constriction, and, in many verses, he is told not to become constricted. For instance, the Qur’an says, “Calmly endure what they say, and remember Our servant David, the

strong; he was always turning to God.”¹⁸ The Qur’an also says,

*And if you inflict punishment, then inflict punishment equivalent to the vengeance wrought on you: but if you are patient, that is certainly best for those who are patient. So be patient; though your patience is only through God. And do not grieve over them, and do not be depressed by whatever they connive; for God is with those who are conscientious and those who do good.*¹⁹

The description that God ascribes to a believer is “one whose breast has been expanded” by God; contrariwise, the one who rejects truth is “constricted in his breast as if moving into higher altitudes.”²⁰

In their greetings of welcome, the Arabs say, “*Marḥaban*,” which means, “You have plenty of room.” The idea of making room for others is deeply rooted in the idea of *samāha*. The Qur’an says, “Believers, when you are told to make room in assemblies, then make room; God will make room for you. And when you are told to rise, then rise; God will raise in ranks the believers among you and those to whom knowledge is given. And God is aware of what you do.”²¹ This is a profound example of the hadith, “The believer is gentle and pliant” (*ḥayyīnun layyīnun*)—in other words *samḥun*—“if he is prevailed upon, he obliges” (*idhā qīda anqad*). The import of “If he is prevailed upon, he obliges” in no way refers to a sheepishness or lack of discrimination but rather to the very meaning revealed in the above verse. If he is

asked to do something to benefit others, such as make room in a gathering, he complies with good cheer.

Once, in Medina, along with the erudite scholar, Shaykh Muḥammad al-Mukhtār ash-Shinqīṭī, I entered the mosque of the Prophet ﷺ; we approached the prayer line and found some space that needed to be expanded by the people sitting to the two sides of it. When the Shaykh attempted to sit down, one man growled, “The place is constricted” (*al-makān ḍayyiq*). To this, the Shaykh replied, “The constriction is not in the place but in the heart.” This is wonderfully illustrated in the following famous Arabic verses:

*Raḥab ul-falāti ma‘a al-‘a‘dā‘i ḍayyiqatun
ṣammu ul-khiyāṭi ma‘a al-aḥbābi maydānu.*

With enemies a vast field is constrained,
but among lovers the eye of a needle is a
vast field.

And

*Li‘ amruka mā ḍāqat arḍun bi ahlihā
wa lākin akhlāq ar-rijāli taḍīqu.*

Lands are not cramped by their people,
but the character of their people can
cramp.

Muslims traditionally were a welcoming people, filled with hospitality. Even the pre-Islamic Arabs disdained those who dishonored their guests; the Arabs would “make room” for their guests, opening not simply their homes but their hearts. The believer’s heart, a vast space that encompasses knowledge of the One whose Throne encompasses the heavens and the earth, is big enough for all when filled with faith. The idea of allowing room for others is not simply of providing them with physical space, as is indicated by the verse, “Believers, when you are told to make room in your assemblies, make room,”²² but it includes a psychological space in the assemblies of one’s mind. To make room for others, even those who do not look or think like us, is to be generous—*sāmih*—liberal, vast.

Immediately after the Verse of the Throne²³ in the Qur’an—which better than any other verse describes the vastness of God’s Throne, encompassing the heavens and the earth, indicating that the vastness of God is simply not humanly possible to either grasp or contemplate—we are told, “*There is no compulsion in the religion.*”²⁴ This great gift from God—faith itself and an adherence to what faith entails—is given without coercion for those who seek it. For those who do not seek it, like God’s Throne, God is vast; He allows them room to move physically, intellectually, and spiritually. This is the idea of *samaḥa*, which is “to permit,” the opposite of which is “to refuse” or “to withhold” (*manā‘a*). The Arabs say, “*Ismāḥ lī*” (Permit me). This religion is indeed *al-ḥanafīyya as-samaḥa*, “the permitting religion,” “the generous religion,” “the soft religion,” “the easy religion.”

The Prophet ﷺ was asked, “What is faith?” and he replied, “Patience and generosity” (*aṣ-ṣabru wa’-s- samāḥa*). The Prophet’s patience and generosity is attested to again and again by his response to cruelty, hardship, and persecution. Never did he allow a desire for revenge to influence his decision. When his humanity revealed itself momentarily, as in the case when the idolaters at ‘Uhud had split his head, causing blood to flow, and had broken his tooth (*rabā‘iyatahu*), he justifiably cried, “How can a people flourish who split their Prophet’s head and break his tooth, while he is calling them to God, the Sublime?” (*Kayfa yufliḥu qawmun shajjā‘ū ra’sa nabīyihim wa kasarū rabā‘iyatahu wa huwa yaḍ’ūhum ‘ila Llāhi ta‘ālā?*) To this, God responded, “*You have nothing to do with the decision of whether God relents toward them or punishes them—for they are wrongdoers. To God belongs everything that is in the heavens and the earth: God forgives whom God wills and God punishes whom God wills; and God is most forgiving and most merciful.*”²⁵ This verse clearly indicated to the Prophet ﷺ that these people would be forgiven for even such a heinous act as persecuting a prophet, and, at this point, he prayed, “O God,

forgive my people, for they know not what they do.” All of this indicates the Prophet’s immense generosity—his *samāḥa*. He embraced his world in spite of some people’s initial revulsion at his call, but, eventually, due to his perseverance and forbearance, they too embraced him.

The essence of *samāḥa* is good character. The Prophet ﷺ said, “I was sent only to perfect noble character.” He embodied what is noble in man and what makes him worthy of being a vicegerent of God on earth. The Prophet ﷺ taught this character not through preaching but through his behavior. His friends and enemies alike saw in him the embodiment of all that he brought. He was the Qur’an walking.

Samāḥa and its Relationship to Forbearance (Ḥilm)

Of all the concepts related to *samāḥa*, none is more profound in its impact and lasting in its effects than forbearance (*ḥilm*). It is the *ḥanafīyya samḥa* that came to replace the *jāhili* milieu of pre-Islamic Arabia. The Prophet ﷺ was described as the most forbearing of men (*aḥlama an-nās*). The word for “tolerance” in Arabic is usually translated as *tasāmuh*, which is from the root *smḥ*. One of the meanings in English for “tolerance” is medical: the ability to withstand the effects of a drug. In Arabic, the word used is *iḥtimāl* from the root *ḥml*. The words *ḥamala* and *ḥalama* are related in Arabic through the “greater derivation.” *Ḥamala* means “to bear something” or “to carry something.” Something physical may be carried, as in “the carrier of firewood” (*ḥammālat al-ḥatab*), or the object can be metaphorical, as in “the bearer of the Qur’an” (*ḥāmīl al-Qur’ān*), which is based upon the Qur’anic verse, “We will thrust upon you a weighty word.”²⁶ *Iḥtamala* is “to bear another person’s behavior.” What is unusual about the word *ḥalama*, however, is its foundational meanings, which are “to come of age” and “to dream.” *Ḥaluma* is glossed as “reaching puberty.” *Hulm* is “a dream.” *Muḥtalim* is “someone who has reached puberty and is now

responsible.” *Ḥilm* is “intellect” as well as “forbearance.” The idea of tolerance and intellect are inextricably bound in the language, indicating that the one who is not tolerant is not intelligent.

There are some other interesting words derived from *ḥlm*, such as *ḥalama*, which means “foliage that grows in soft and flat areas” (*nabātun yanbutu fis-sahl*). Another intriguing definition of the word *ḥalama* is “nipple” (*ra’su ath-thadyi*). According to Abū Hilāl, it is so-called because a mother uses it to subdue her infant (*yuhallimu aṭ-ṭifl*). Furthermore, I believe, it indicates the profound relationship among wet-nursing, the development of a healthy intellect (*ḥilm*), and the vital importance of the first stage of development that Erikson referred to as the phase of “Trust versus Mistrust.” An infant in a disquieted state finds immediate calm in simply latching on to the mother’s breast and sucking (*iltiqātahu ath-thadya wa imtisāsahu iyyāhā*). If a mother or a wet-nurse is always available for the child during the formative two years that the Qur’an recommends an infant be nursed, then a child will move into the next phase without anxiety and distrust about caregivers.

In the West, there is a reference to the “milk of human kindness,” which most likely refers to the transmission of *ḥilm* through the *ḥalama*. The Prophet’s wet-nurse is known as Ḥalīma as-Sa‘diyya, and scholars have often remarked that the names of those associated with the Prophet’s early years are not fortuitous.

Another word derived from *ḥlm* is *ḥālim*, which means “a dreamer,” indicating that a dream can only take place in undisturbed sleep. Also, *Ḥalīm* is a name of God, glossed as “Patient with the transgressions of His servants (*aṣ-Ṣabūr*).” Imam al-Ghazālī says about this divine attribute, “*Al-Ḥalīm* is the One who sees the transgressions of wrongdoers and His own commands flagrantly disregarded but is not unseated by anger (*lā yastafizzuhu ghaḍab*), nor is He overcome with rage (*lā ya’trihī ghayz*).”²⁷

“HAVING MERCY ON THOSE TRIBULATED
WITH SIN MEANS TO PRAY FOR THEM
(THAT THEIR SINS ARE REMOVED),
TO NOT EXAMINE THEIR SINS OR
EXPOSE THEM”

Imam abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī says,

The one who ignores oppression is not considered *ḥalīm*, but rather the Arabs say, “*ḥalumaʿ anhu*,” if one delays taking another to account, or if one pardons another for some wrong (*ahkhkharā ʿiqābahu aw ʿafā ʿanhu*). If, however, a man chooses punishment for the one who wronged him, he is considered just in doing so. Some say the opposite of *ḥilm* (forbearance) is *safa* (impudence and insolence). The word *safī* is used in the Qurʾan to refer to fools as well as children, again enforcing the idea that forbearance (*ḥilm*) is a sign of maturity and intellect. The verse states, “*If the one who has the right due to him is a child...*” (*Inkāna alladhī ʿalayhi al-ḥaqqu safīhan...*). (2:282)²⁸

When some among the Children of Israel asked Moses ﷺ to see God, the earth shook. Moses ﷺ exclaimed, “*Had You [God] willed, You could have destroyed us before. Will You destroy us for what our fools have done? It is only a tribulation from You that You cause through it some to stray and others to be guided.*”²⁹ Moses ﷺ requested God to forego any collective punishment due to the sins of a few. The rhetoricians call the type of question Moses ﷺ asked “*istiḥām istiʿṭāf*”; in other words, he was saying, “Do not punish us for others’ sins.” God punishes a people when the community does not condemn injustices outwardly. The Qurʾan states, “*Fear calamities that don’t simply afflict the wrongdoers among you.*”³⁰ It is due to God’s forbearance (*ḥilm*) that we walk the earth. The Qurʾan also states, “*Had God taken humanity to account for its wrongs, no creature would be walking the earth.*”³¹ Since God treats people based upon how they treat others, the most impor-

tant qualities to inculcate in our attitude and treatment of others are *ḥilm* and *samāḥa*.

Imam Mālik relates in the *Muwattaʿa* that Jesus, the Son of Mary ﷺ, said,

Do not speak much without remembering God, for in not doing so, your hearts will harden. Surely, a hard heart is far from God, and you are not even aware. Moreover, do not look at the sins of others as if you are masters, but rather look to your own sins as if you are servants. For, surely, humanity is of two types: those afflicted with sins and those who are not. So have mercy on those afflicted with sins, and praise God if you are free of them.³²

Imam Zarqānī comments on this:

Looking at our own sins as if we were servants means to fear that our masters will come to know of the sins. Humanity is either sinful, and thus in tribulation, or sinless, and thus in an innocent state. Having mercy on those tribulated with sin means to pray for them (that their sins are removed), to not examine their sins or expose them, and to counsel them with gentleness and kindness.³³

This is one aspect of *samāḥa* and *ḥilm*: a generosity of spirit and an ability to bear others’ shortcomings out of compassion. No one was greater in this capacity than the Messenger of God ﷺ.

Jāhiliyya and the Removal of its Effects

Prior to Islam, Arabian society is referred to in the Qurʾan as *jāhiliyya*. Qurʾanic exegetes put forward two views as to why this is so: one view states that it was an age of ignorance, and thus the word *jāhiliyya* is derived from its primary root word, *jahl*, which is glossed, “ignorance.” The second view has it that the word is derived from *jahāla*, which is “inappropriate reactions to excitement in any given situation” (*an yuf al mā lā haqq an yuf ʿal*), and instead of being the opposite of “knowledge” (*ʿilm*), as in the case of “ignorance” (*jahl*), it is

the opposite of “forbearance” (*hilm*). A line of poetry by ‘Amr b. al-Bāhili illustrates this aspect of the word in a poem about the generosity of his people:

*Wa duhmin tuṣādihā al-walā idu jillatin
idhā jahilat ajwāfuhā lam tahālamī.*

Large black pots our girls cajoled,
then they boiled (*jahilat*) and never
quieted down.

Here, the poet used *jahl* as a metaphor for pots boiling over and never quieting down due to the constant hospitality of the hosts. *Jahl* was a type of response expected of a pre-Islamic Arab when slighted. He had to display rage and vehemence in the face of the slight and use excessive force against his perceived object of animosity. If he did not, he was not honorable. To show weakness was to display inferiority.

One very striking aspect of the word *jāhiliyya* in the Qur’an is that it is mentioned only four times, and each time, it nuances the full meaning of a *jāhili* culture giving a comprehensive understanding that encompasses all of the elements of a *jāhili* people and their culture.

Four Types of *Jāhiliyya*

The first type of *jāhiliyya* is that of understanding. The Qur’an states,

Then calm descended upon you after your affliction, as slumber enveloped a party of you, while another party was anxiously preoccupied with themselves, supposing about God unjustified suppositions of jāhiliyya.

They said, “Have we anything to do with this matter?”

Say: “The matter is entirely God’s alone.”

They conceal in their hearts what they will never reveal to you.

They say, “Had we anything to do with the matter, we would not have lost lives here.”³⁴

What is understood here about *jāhiliyya* is a state of mind cogently revealed in these verses. The *jāhili* mind is preoccupied with itself to the exclusion of others and at the cost of trust

in God. The *jāhili* mind is ignorant of God and thinks ill of God. According to a hadith, God states, “I am in the opinion of My servant, so let him think of Me as he will. Should he think good, he will find good, and should he think ill, he will find ill.” The *jāhili* mind is desirous of control and dislikes others deciding matters, even if the one deciding is more qualified. The remark of the *jāhili*s in the verse above, “*Have we anything to do with this matter?*” is in response to the fact that the Prophet ﷺ decided to take other people’s counsel concerning whether the fighters should defend Medina from inside the city or move out to meet the aggressors. The *jāhili* mind is dissembling and double-hearted. In addition, as seen in their final statement in the above verse, the *jāhili* mind is foolish and obsessed with how things “should have been” as opposed to how they are and what we can therefore do about them practically. Their obsession about how things should have gone leads to personal consternation and disquietude. Engaging in “Had we only done this or that,” they refuse to simply deal with the circumstances and recognize that the past is irreparable. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Do not say, ‘if only,’ for ‘if only’ opens the door for Satan to enter.”

The second type of *jāhiliyya* is that of social organization or community. Because the *jāhili* mind is disquieted and in a state of disequilibrium, the social structures and institutions that it chooses will reflect that state. The Qur’an says,

[God] commands you to judge between them with what God has revealed, and do not follow their vain desires. And beware of them lest they seduce you away from some of what God has revealed to you. So if they turn away, know that God intends to punish them for some of their sins. And most people are rebellious. It is the judgment of the time of jāhiliyya that they are seeking. But for a people whose faith is assured, who can give better judgment than God?³⁵

The pre-Islamic period was one of revenge, tribalism, bloodshed, racism, usury, oppres-

sion, subjugation of women and poor people, and arrogance. Such preconceived views of the world determined how these people would judge. Because they were so divorced from their nature, even the considerations of natural law were not informing their judgments. Neither *samāḥa* nor *ḥilm* had any bearing upon their judgments.

The third type of *jāhiliyya* is that which relates more specifically to women, though not exclusively. Speaking to the wives of the Prophet ﷺ, the Qur'an says,

*Don't be so submissive in your speech that those whose hearts are afflicted will feel lust. Rather, speak with civility and comportsment. And settle down in your homes, and don't show off in public as was done in the displays of jāhiliyya.*³⁶

These verses delineate the *jāhili* woman. She acquiesces to men without thought, leading to misunderstandings. She wishes to reveal herself and display her ornaments in public, desiring to be attractive to everyone. This behavior is the result of being raised in a *jāhili* culture, where her true nature is neither respected nor nurtured. This is pronouncedly clear in the following verses:

Does God take daughters from what God creates and favor you with sons? When one of you is told the good news of the birth of a daughter that you liken to the Merciful, his face darkens, and he is filled with repressed disappointment. Is it that one who is brought up in ornaments and jewelry and who can scarcely speak [be attributed to God]?³⁷

These profound verses reveal the heart of the *jāhili* male-female crisis. Simply stated, *jāhili* men prefer boys to girls, although they attribute girls to God! They are disappointed with a daughter, even if they conceal their dismay. This hidden attitude is revealed in the *jāhili* man's attitude toward his daughters and women in general: a girl is raised in ornaments and jewelry, treated as an appendage to men. Because the culture views her as inferior

to men, she must be enhanced and augmented by trinkets and makeup, or, in modern society, breast implants. Interestingly, Islamic law, while permitting makeup for women's personal use in the house and among relatives and spouses, prohibits its use outside of the house in the larger society.

This outward obsession with how a girl looks and the pressure to be appealing physically for the men's sake results in an underdeveloped sense of self and assurance, which, in turn, often leads to an inability to formulate and articulate individual assessments of situations and personal views about them. The Qur'an indicates, as certain segments of modern society do, that this is entirely a social construct and not a true reflection of reality. When treated as individuals with complete natures and honored, women grow to be fully formed intellectual and spiritual beings, who have spiritual advantages over men in certain ways.

Finally, the fourth type of *jāhiliyya* refers to the *jāhili* man. The Qur'an says,

*Those who rejected the truth put fanaticism in their hearts, the fanaticism of the jāhiliyya, but God bestowed upon the Messenger and the believers His Shechinah (Sakīna), and imposed upon them the sentence of conscience, of which they were most worthy and deserving. And God knows all things.*³⁸

Two qualities emerge in the *jāhili* man: a refusal to accept the truth when presented to him and a response that reveals the extent of his spiritual blindness. His response is one of zeal, obstinacy, and fanaticism. He is intolerant and condemnatory toward those who oppose him. He is a man driven by passion. He is impetuous, without self-constraint. If slighted, his response is entirely out of proportion to the slight. He has no sense of forbearance or largesse. He views such noble sentiments as weakness. He surrenders to the whims of his violent nature and repays a wrong with a greater wrong. The *jāhili* poet 'Amru bin Kulthūm wonderfully describes the *jāhili* man

in his famous ode:

‘Alā lā ya’ lamul-aqwāmu annā
taḍā’ dā’ nā wa annā qad wanīnā.

‘Alā lā yajhalan aḥadun ‘alaynā
fanajhala fawqa jahilil-jāhilīna.

Let not a soul reckon that we’re
defeated or war drive us to the stake.
Should anyone make fools of us,
much greater fools of them we make.³⁹

All of these four elements make up a *jāhili* culture and society. The absence of generosity of spirit (*samāḥa*), patience, and forbearance (*ḥilm*) leads to disequilibrium and a loss of purpose. The aims and ends of human society are lost, and the lowest qualities of man prevail.

The Qur’anic chapter *al-Qaṣaṣ* contains a wonderful description of those who desire to have none of the *jāhili* qualities. God says,

*Yet We have caused the Word to reach them, that they may be reminded. Those to whom We sent the Book before this, they believe in it. And when it is recited to them, they say, “We believe in it, for it is the truth from our Lord; indeed, we were Muslims before this came.” They will be given their reward twice, for being patient, and for averting evil by good, and for giving from what We have provided them. And when they hear vain talk, they turn away from it and say, “Our deeds to us, your deeds to you. Peace upon you! We do not seek after ignorant ones (jāhilīn).”*⁴⁰

These verses delineate the qualities of those who are seeking to distance themselves from what makes one a *jāhili* person. By looking at the opposite of these noble qualities, we can discern a summation of the *jāhili* person:

1. He rejects the truth when he hears it.
2. He was not a good person before the truth came and thus does not recognize it as an affirmation and clarification of what he already understood to be true.
3. He is impatient and rash.
4. He returns a wrong with a wrong like it.
5. He is niggardly with the bounties his

Lord has bestowed upon him.

6. He engages in empty, vain talk.
7. He concerns himself in the matters of others.
8. He is proud to be associated with other *jāhili* people like himself.

This is the *jāhili* man that a *jāhili* culture produces.

In the midst of such a culture came Islam. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ refused to sanction such attitudes and behaviors. He altered the people’s concept of self and self-interest by first changing the way they thought about the world, thus treating the first type of *jāhiliyya*, that of worldview. He began to introduce new criteria for judging peoples and conditions and introduced the novel idea that people were created equal.

Prior to the modern era, there is no known historical documentation wherein any world leader or figure denounced racism as the Prophet ﷺ did when he said, “Humanity is equal like the teeth of a comb,” and, “All of you are from the same parents. There is no preference of a black man over a white man or a white man over a black man except in conscientiousness.” The Prophet ﷺ also introduced fair trade, prohibited usury and unfair lending practices, prohibited abuse of servants, and gave rights to women and children.

The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was also the first human being to introduce humane rules of engagement in war, including the prohibition of attacks on non-combatants. Even the Christian medieval period maintained rules of engagement only for wars among Christians, which they termed *bellum hostile*. For wars against Muslims, infidels, and barbarians, known as *bellum romanum*, the rule was *bellum licit*: “All is lawful in war.” Sven Lindqvist, in his book *A History of Bombing*, writes,

It was Abu Hanifa, a leading legal expert of Persian origin, the founder of a school of law in Baghdad, who first forbade the

killing of women, children, the elderly, the sick, monks and other non-combatants. He also condemned rape and the killing of captives.... A legal expert in Baghdad, [he] attempted to make war more humane by setting forth rules that were not accepted in Europe until several centuries later—rules that were still not accepted, in any case not practiced, when colored people were involved.⁴¹

In fact, it was Abū Ḥanīfa who first codified these rules in a legal system, but all of the rules were taken from injunctions given by the Prophet Muḥammad himself ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ forbade revenge killing, which was common among Arabs, by introducing to the Arabs the Judaic concept of *lex talionis*, or law of retaliation, which is a law of equal and direct retribution to be administered only by legitimate government authorities. This was a radical departure from the *jāhili* practice of blood vengeance (*tha'ar*), which permitted an Arab tribesman to kill any member of another tribe for taking the life of his own kinsman. If a tribe considered itself superior to the offending tribe—which tribes often did—a tribesman would take more than one life to exact what he perceived to be “just retribution.” This, in turn, led to a hostile response from the victim’s tribesmen, and thus the cycles of violence kept revolving. The Qur’an states, “*And if anyone is killed unjustly, We have given his next of kin a certain authority [to demand restitution of the wrong from the government]; but he should not be excessive in the retribution, for the victim is aided also.*”⁴²

More importantly, however, the Qur’an introduced to the Arabs a higher law, that of Jesus the Son of Mary ﷺ, which encouraged the victim’s family to pardon the wrong:

And We prescribed in the Torah for the Children of Israel: a life for a life, and an eye for an eye, and a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth, and injuries in retaliation;

*but if anyone forgoes retribution for charity, that is an expiation for his own wrongs. And those who do not judge by what God has revealed, they are the ones being unjust. And We caused Jesus the Son of Mary to follow [this law] verifying what was in the Torah, but we amended it with the Gospel with guidance and light.*⁴³

This profound new discourse shook the *jāhili* culture of seventh-century Arabia to its core. The ones who most benefited from *jāhiliyya*, the cultural and financial elites, were the Prophet’s greatest enemies, and his support came largely from the greatest victims of the system. According to the Qur’an, this is the nature of the world, and far from being a

THE PROPHET ﷺ FORBADE REVENGE KILLING, WHICH WAS COMMON AMONG ARABS, BY INTRODUCING TO THE ARABS THE JUDAIC CONCEPT OF *LEXTALIONIS*, OR LAW OF RETALIATION, WHICH IS A LAW OF EQUAL AND DIRECT RETRIBUTION TO BE ADMINISTERED ONLY BY LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES.

departure from previous prophetic experiences, the response of the Prophet’s people was no different from earlier peoples to their prophets.

An interesting response in the Qur’an to the divine forbearance toward the polytheists and their exploitative attitudes and repressive responses to the Prophet’s mission and his people is to remind them that they should not hasten the retribution of God, for if they want it, it will surely come. The arrogance of the Meccans was such that they viewed their ability to persecute the Prophet ﷺ as a proof that God was not on the side of the Prophet ﷺ, for if He was, they thought, then surely He would come to the Prophet’s aid by destroying them. They could not see the divine forbearance of *al-*

Halīm granting them respite that “*perhaps they might repent.*” They viewed the Prophet’s own forbearance in the face of their increasingly menacing and hostile attacks as weakness. His non-violence and patience was, in their eyes, a sign of his inferior position, for in their world, “might made right,” and the weak were so because of their own inherent inferiority.

The *jāhili* man is blinded. His self-assured confidence in his way of life and in his opinions and desires beguiles him into thinking that what applies to others does not apply to him. He fails to see the lessons of the past. The Qur’an says,

*And how many communities have We ruined as they were being unjust, so they tumbled down to their foundations; and how many wells lie abandoned where castles still stand! Haven’t they traveled in the earth, that they may have hearts to understand, or ears to hear? Surely it is not their eyes that are blind; what are blind are the hearts that are in their breasts.*⁴⁴

Due to their arrogance and zealous pride, the *jāhili* people fail to see the lessons of injustice from history. They are spiritually illiterate and cannot read the writing on the wall. They mock and scoff derisively, asking the Prophet ﷺ to call on his Lord to hasten their punishment:

*Though they urge you to hasten the penalty, God never breaks a commitment. And one day to your Lord is like a thousand years by your estimation. And how many communities have We let be even as they were doing wrong, and then We punished them! And the journey is to Us.*⁴⁵

Islam, the religion of submission, the religion of generosity and forbearance came to replace *jāhiliyya*. However, according to some commentaries of the Qur’an, the Qur’an speaks of a second *jāhiliyya* that would replace the qualities of Islam that the Prophet ﷺ brought. The Qur’an uses the term “former *jāhiliyya*” (*jāhiliyyat al-ūla*) in the verse, “*Don’t show off in public as was done in the former*

jāhiliyya.”

Sayyiduna ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked Ibn ‘Abbās, “Have you thought about the verse, ‘*Don’t show off in public as was done in the former [first] jāhiliyya,*’ that was directed at the wives of the Prophet ﷺ? Do you think that *jāhiliyya* here refers to more than one?”

Ibn ‘Abbās answered, “Have you ever heard of a ‘first’ without a ‘last’?”

Qadi abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabi relates that, “Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘There will be another *jāhiliyya.*’ It has also been related that the first *jāhiliyya* period was the time between Jesus and Muḥammad ﷺ.”⁴⁶ Imam an-Nasafī says, in his commentary of the Qur’an, “A possible meaning of the ‘first *jāhiliyya*’ is the state of disbelief before Islam, and the ‘latter *jāhiliyya*’ is that of disobedience and corruption in Islam.”⁴⁷ Imam Zamakhsharī says, “It is feasible that the former *jāhiliyya* is disbelief before Islam, and the latter is the disregard of Islam’s injunctions in Islam, as if the meaning is, ‘Do not introduce a *jāhiliyya* in Islam that resembles the *jāhiliyya* of disbelief [prior to Islam].’”⁴⁸

The Muslim world has entered into a second *jāhiliyya* period. The same assumptions of the past; the institutions of the past; the behavior of the women and their empty pursuits of spangles in place of spirit, and display and ornament in place of modesty and depth; the zeal of nationalism, tribalism, vengeance, and lack of introspection that were the hallmarks of the *jāhili* man now prevail throughout the Muslim world.

Jāhiliyya cannot be combated with violence and hatred but must be dealt with by largess and concern for those afflicted by it. For too long, Muslim scholars, leaders, and intellectuals have fixed the blame on forces outside the Muslim world. The blame game is that of the devil who blamed God for leading him astray. Ultimately, in blaming others for our conditions, we are blaming God, for it is God who said, “*We have made some of you a tribulation for others; will you show patience?*”⁴⁹

The current attacks in the West on Muslim

behavior are unjustifiable only in that they equate the behavior with Islam, while, in reality, those behaviors do not reflect the teachings of the Arabian Prophet ﷺ; on the contrary, those behaviors reflect the ascendancy of the very qualities that Islam came to purify society in order to restore celestial equilibrium to man's short sojourn on earth. The behaviors are condemnable in and of themselves. Muslims fail to see just how poorly our responses in the modern world reflect the light of Islam; instead of recognizing our own failings, we focus on how poorly other nations fail to reflect that same light. Indeed, other peoples, especially Jews and Christians, have fallen short of their own teachings. All of Abraham's religions teach justice tempered by mercy. But neither do we see justice prevailing today nor the temperance of mercy. What we have is a world increasingly filled with resentment, which in turn eats away at the soul until man is consumed by it and reduced to the "lowest of the low."⁵⁰ But it is not for Muslims to concern themselves with others unless they are an upright community. When the Qur'an says, "O people of the Book, do not go to extremes in your religion,"⁵¹ the implicit meaning is that we ourselves are a balanced community who can remind others. When the Qur'an says, "O people of the Book, you have nothing until you implement the Torah and the Gospel,"⁵² the a priori implication is, O Muslims, you have nothing until you implement the Qur'an. We have chosen instead to direct our anger about our own shortcomings at others.

The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ advised his nation not to allow anger to overcome them. Sun Tzu, in *The Art of War*, said almost three thousand years ago, "Anger your enemy and throw them into disarray."⁵³ Anger is a fool's response to his condition. It is a *jāhili* response. A believer knows too well that everything is from God: according to a hadith, God said, "O My servants, it is only your deeds that I reckon for you and then recompense you for them. So whoever finds good, let him thank God, and

whoever finds other than that, let him censure only himself."⁵⁴

Some accuse religion of being a means to defer resentment in order for civil society to flourish and inequality to be maintained. This is a materialist view of the world. Religion is indeed the opiate of the believers. Faith is the pain-numbing narcotic of the soul from the divine Healer that enables a fallen humanity to endure the trials and tribulations of life on earth. Life is a divine surgery on the soul that removes the cancer of desire from our hearts, and faith enables us to suffer the procedure peacefully. Faith, trust, and charity are the greatest gifts of a merciful Lord to His creation. It is Promethean hope that enables us to persevere, for nothing is more daring than to hope when all appears hopeless. Only in seeing God in the world in every decree, both bitter and sweet, can we survive with our humanity. To lose sight of God is to lose sight of the highest qualities of man, those of forbearance, meekness, and love, and to fall victim to resentment, false pride, and hatred. Only the devil is pleased with that prospect.

Islam is much maligned these days, and it is incumbent upon those who have even a sense of its sublime nature and heavenly character to defend it by living it, to spread it by embodying it, and to pass it on by preserving it. Our Prophet ﷺ said, "I have come only to complete noble character." It is only through a return to those characteristics that ennobled the first Muslims—those of generosity and forbearance (*samāḥa* and *hilm*)—that our community can hope to restore the prophetic path once again. It is a task worthy of prophets.

NOTES

¹ William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1974), x.

² Qur'an 15:9.

³ The early philologists give many examples of this in their books, and while there is debate on this matter, the evidence appears overwhelming-

ly in favor of this position. An example given is the root stem *hā* and *mām* to which we then add various letters on the ends. For instance, the word *hmy* means “to protect.” The word *hms* is “to be zealous,” which is needed for indignation that leads to action, but if the boundaries are overstepped, we fall into *hmq*, which is “to display stupidity.” *Nūn* and *fa* are another pair of letters that provide a good example. *Nfs* is “to breathe”; *nflh* is “to blow lightly”; *nfh* is “a breeze”; and *nfkh* is “a profound blast.” The base in both cases is a dyadic root, and the third (*lām*) letter (of the *fa* ‘*ayn lām* paradigm) is used to alter the meaning while retaining some basic relationship.

4 Although the Kufans and Baṣrans disagree as to which came first, the verb or the noun, we will use the verbal base for our examples.

5 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab, tahdhīb lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya), 1:621-28.

6 Ibid., 621.

7 Qur’an 2:185.

8 Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *Al-Furūq al-lughawiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya, n.d.), 196.

9 Qur’an 3:159.

10 Imam Isma‘īl Ḥaqqī al-Burṣawī, *Tanwīr al-adhhān* (Damascus: Dār al-qalam, 1988), 1:288.

11 Ibid., 288-9.

12 Ibid., 289.

13 Qur’an 17:70.

14 Qadi Abū Faḍl ‘Iyād, *Ash-Shifā’ bi ta’rīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā* (Beirut: Dār al-arqām, n.d.), 1:99.

15 Qur’an 49:13.

16 Qur’an 8:29.

17 Imam Muḥammad al-Fayruzbādī, *Al-Qāmus al-muḥīt* (Beirut: Mu‘assasa ar-risāla, 1987), 287.

18 Qur’an 38:17.

19 Qur’an 16:126-28.

20 Qur’an 6:125.

21 Qur’an 58:11.

22 Qur’an 58:11.

23 Qur’an 2:255.

24 Qur’an 2:256.

25 Qur’an 3:128-129.

26 Qur’an 73:5.

27 Imam al-Ghazālī, *Asmā Allāh al-ḥusna*

(London: Mu‘assasat tafṣīl al-kitāb, 1998), 64.

28 Al-‘Askarī, *Al-Furūq*, 226.

29 Qur’an 7:155.

30 Qur’an 8:25.

31 Qur’an 35:45.

32 Sīdī Muḥammad az-Zarqānī, *Sharḥ az-zarqānī ‘ala al-muwatta’a* (Beirut: Dār al-ma‘rifa, 1989), 4:404.

33 Ibid.

34 Qur’an 3:154.

35 Qur’an 5:49.

36 Qur’an 33:32-33.

37 Qur’an 43:16-18.

38 Qur’an 48:26.

39 Shaykh Aḥmad al-Amīn ash-Shinqīṭī, *Sarḥ al-mu‘alaqāt* (Beirut: Maktabat al-‘asriyya, 2001), 131.

40 Qur’an 28:51-55.

41 Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 9.

42 Qur’an 17:33.

43 Qur’an 5:45-46.

44 Qur’an 22:45-46.

45 Qur’an 22:47-48.

46 Qadi abū Bakr b. al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur’an* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyya), 3:570. The Qadi himself was of the opinion that the *jāhiliyya* mentioned in the Qur’an referred to only one time period, that which preceded Islam, and that the “first” in the verse was a type of adjective used by the Arabs that specified and strengthened the meaning but did not imply there was another type.

47 Imam ‘Abdallāh bin Aḥmad an-Nasafī, *Madarak at-tanzīl wa ḥaqī‘iq at-tawwīl* (Beirut: Dār ibn Kathīr, 1999), 3:30.

48 Shihābuddīn Sayyid Maḥmūd al-Alūsī, *Ruḥ al-m‘ānī* (Beirut: Dār ihyā turāth al-‘Arabī, 1999), 21:257.

49 Qur’an 25:20.

50 Qur’an 95:5.

51 Qur’an 4:171.

52 Qur’an 5:86.

53 Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), 52.

54 Imam Muḥyiddīn an-Nawawī, *Forty Hadith*, trans. Ezzedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davis (Damascus: Dār al-Qur’an al-Karīm, 1976), 82.