



ROLE OF RELIGION IN PROMOTING
TOLERANCE
FROM POSSIBILITY TO NECESSITY

*From Sixth Assembly of Abu Dhabi Forum For Peace
9th-11th December 2019*

H.E. SHAYKH ABDULLAH BIN BAYYAH



*Generous Tolerance In Islam And
Its Effects On The Life Of A Muslim By*

HAMZA YUSUF



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THE SIXTH ASSEMBLY of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace was hosted in Abu Dhabi, under the generous patronage of the sons of Sheikh Zayed, the founder and late leader of the United Arab Emirates, may God increase them from His goodness. Our assembly took place under the title ‘The Role of Religions in Promoting Tolerance’. It was the right place at the right time, as it was held in the year that the UAE, the homeland of global tolerance, celebrated its ‘Year of Tolerance’.

The year-long celebration, decreed for 2019 by Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Head of State, made tolerance the central value upon which all official initiatives and ventures through the year revolved. Didactic programs and practical, edifying enterprises were launched in the educational and legal realms to instill a culture of tolerance, to consolidate the values of brotherhood, and to promote peace in the wider world.

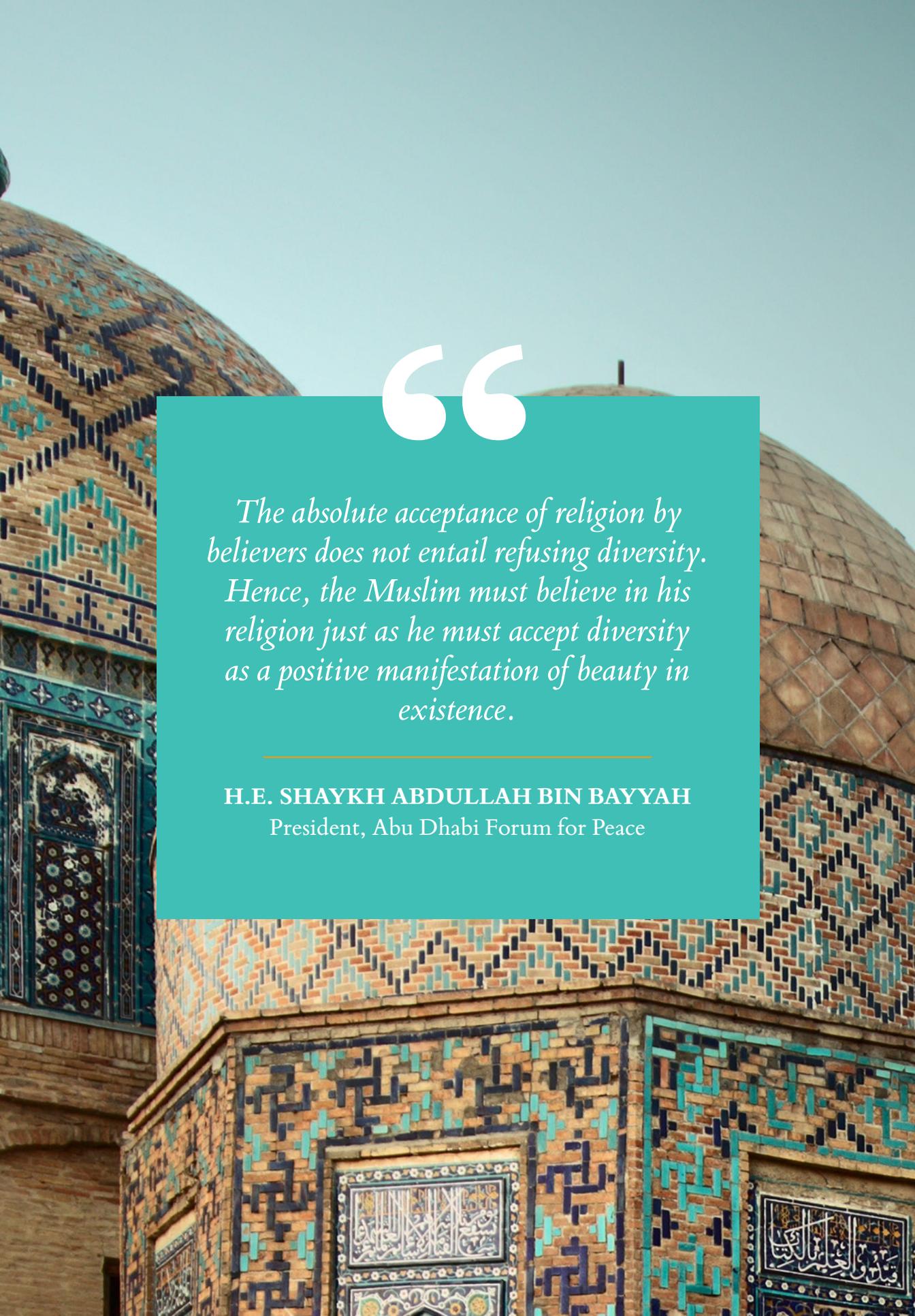
Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace participated in this celebration not only by focusing our own Sixth Assembly on the topic, but by launching the section on tolerance in our Encyclopedia of Peace and taking the principles of tolerance to international forums.



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The absolute acceptance of religion by believers does not entail refusing diversity. Hence, the Muslim must believe in his religion just as he must accept diversity as a positive manifestation of beauty in existence.

H.E. SHAYKH ABDULLAH BIN BAYYAH
President, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

PRAISE BE TO God, the Lord of the Universe. May God's blessing and peace be upon our master Muhammad, the final Prophet, and upon his brothers among the prophets and messengers.¹

Tolerance is without doubt a central value in the moral system of all religions and human philosophies. However, despite its widespread use, the word remains akin to emotional language, that people relate to without being able to pin down. It is contested by various conceptions and multiple narratives.

It may be this ambiguity that has led some thinkers to conclude that the concept of tolerance is a historical concept that has been drained of its creative energy and exhausted of its didactic effectiveness. Nonetheless, we say with Umberto Eco that 'tolerance must be tolerated'. We believe that reality bears witness to the fact that the concept, despite its ambivalence, remains an essential notion requiring renewal and rehabilitation, and the passage of time has not robbed it of its importance and contemporary power.

Tolerance remains an effective concept for establishing positive pluralism through the protection of both the person of faith and freedom of religion.

Instead of seeing tolerance as a mere a possibility available in religion (among multiple other possibilities), it is time to consider it as a religious obligation and duty. We will not be content merely with recognising its compatibility with religion, but we must realise the inherent association between the two, elevating tolerance to a religious duty.



¹ This article is an edited and abridged version of the speech given by H.E. Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah at the opening session of the Sixth Assembly of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, Abu Dhabi, 9 December 2019.



TOWARDS THE FORMULATION OF A NEW CONCEPT



WHILE IT HAS been argued that “tolerance is Protestantism’s gift to the world”, we believe that all religions belonging to the Abrahamic family unmistakably carry in their texts foundations calling for tolerance, acceptance, and charity. Their teachings on peace, coexistence, the universality of human nobility, and respect for religious differences, are all solid platforms for the principle of tolerance.

In Islam, tolerance is expressed in four Qur’anic terms that encompass this semantic field: pardon (*al-‘afw*), overlooking offence (*aṣ-ṣafh*), forgiveness (*al-ghufrān*) and beneficence (*al-iḥsān*). God Almighty says: “Overlook this and pardon them: God loves those who do good.” (Qur’ān 5:13)² Likewise, “But if you overlook their offences, forgive them, pardon them, then God is all forgiving, all merciful.” (Qur’ān 64:14)

² Editor’s note: All references from the Qur’ān in this text, unless stated otherwise, are translated following the translation of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Thus, tolerance in Islam possesses a meaning surpassing mere justice. For whilst justice suffices itself with merely giving people their rights, tolerance ascends to do good without expectation of recompense. Thus, it is like the virtue of *ihsān*, or surpassing goodness, which is the pinnacle of righteousness and the summit of virtue.

The value of tolerance in the original narrative that unites the Abrahamic family is based on a set of foundations, the most important of which is awareness, appreciation and promotion of human commonalities, such as our common human origin. The Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) said: ‘O mankind, your Lord is one and your father is one.’ In this narrative the other is not an enemy or adversary, but as Imam Ali (may God be pleased with him) taught: “men are either your brothers in religion, or counterparts in creation.” The other, as the Arabs say, is a brother with an added ‘r’.³ This is the ‘r’ of *rahma* (mercy), *rafa* (compassion), and *rifq* (gentleness). We are either brethren in our beliefs, or brethren in our shared humanity.

“The Muslim must believe in his religion just as he must accept diversity as a positive manifestation of beauty in existence.”

This is manifested in the admission of dignity as the first human commonality. Human beings of all races, colors, languages and beliefs have been honored by Almighty God with the breathing of His Spirit into their father Adam. “We have honoured the children of Adam and carried them by land and sea; We have provided good sustenance for them and favoured them specially above many of those We have created.” (Qur’ān 17:70) Thus the nobility of humanity precedes both in conception and reality the nobility of faith or belief.

The concept of tolerance is also a functional concept intended to neutralize the negative impact of differences in beliefs, opinions and vision. It establishes positive pluralism by removing the conflict between faith and diversity. The absolute acceptance of religion by believers does not entail refusing diversity. Hence, the Muslim must believe in his religion just as he must accept diversity as a positive manifestation of beauty in existence. This diversity can never be an excuse for mutual scorning or turning away from one another.

This religious pluralism is clearly prefigured in many verses of the Qur’ān and sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) calling for respect of other religions and a duty to protect their houses of worship, and to reject all forms of oppression directed at a religious, ethnic or cultural minority. They likewise reject the exploitation of religion in heinous acts of violence. Almighty God says, “If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God’s

3 Translator’s note: This is a play on words. ‘Brother’ in Arabic is ‘*akh*’ (أخي), whereas ‘other’ is ‘*ākhar*’ (آخر).

name is much invoked, would have been destroyed.” (Qur’ān 22:40) It has been narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī that this verse obliges Muslims to defend the churches of the Christians and the synagogues of the Jews just as they defend their own mosques. Ibn ‘Abbās explained that the reason for this was that God confirmed these places and rites of worship belonged to them, and that He loved to be the object of remembrance even by those who are not Muslim. This interpretation was the preferred position of Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn ‘Āshūr. This is identical to the concept of pluralism if we translate religious idiom into the language of the public sphere, as Habermas would say.

Promoting religious freedom, cooperative relations, and values of tolerance from mere possibility to moral and legal obligation is imposed upon us by our values and our times. Sadly, many of us still live as if we were in the Middle Ages, with its social stratification and segregation, ignoring the present realities of cosmopolitan interaction and coexistence.

All these variables elevate tolerance from a possibility among many possibilities in the tradition to a religious obligation and a duty of faith.

Regarding our emphasis that all houses of worship must be respected, I proposed to the United Nations at a meeting in New York that an international day of the year should be dedicated to the commemoration of attacks on places of worship during which supplications and prayers for peace and human brotherhood would take place.

In the Islamic narrative, tolerance is based on an ethical-spiritual principle, namely that humans must embody the attributes of God in their lives. There is an understanding that God has names we characterize ourselves with, and other names that we aspire to

“The absolute acceptance of religion by believers does not entail refusing diversity.”

with inward poverty as His servants. The latter include names like the Forgiving, the Forbearing, the Most Compassionate, the Generous, the Beautiful, the Clement, and so on, all of which govern man’s life.

Tolerance is also built upon awareness of the weakness of man inherent in our created form. This weakness is the cause of our error, wrongdoing, and sin. This weakness, which each and every one of us intimately feels, teaches us to tolerate the other. This is expressed in the sage advice of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) related in the Muwaṭṭāʾ, in which he states: ‘Do not look at the sins of people as if you are lords over them, but look at your own sins as servants of God. People are either afflicted or healthy, so have mercy upon the afflicted, and thank God for wellbeing.’

We find this view in Voltaire when he writes: ‘What is tolerance? It is an inherent result of our humanity: we are all fragile sinners, so let us tolerate one another and forgive

one another for our lapses and mistakes. This is the first law of nature.’

The main problem remains: how do we instill a culture of tolerance in human beings? Emmanuel Kant said, “There are two human discoveries that one has the right to consider the most difficult of things: the art of governing people and the art of educating them.”

Education in tolerance is not merely the learning of content; it is an integrated path in which the teacher as role model plays an essential role. It may be easy to teach mathematics or biology, but the difficulty arises when we try to raise generations upon a positive and tolerant outlook.

All existing educational means– including primary education and child rearing, as well as public information – must be utilized to spread these values and to restrain violent souls. This will tip the balance in favor of tolerance and the acceptance of others, and will create a spirit of positive coexistence in society.

The work in the educational dimension is very important but insufficient on its own. We must not forget the legal context of tolerance. We should buttress educational efforts with binding legal provisions that raise tolerance from the level of acceptance to the level of an obligation based on foundations of mutual rights and responsibilities that ensures their protection through the legal system.

Perhaps this is what was sought by the UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (published on 16 November 1995) when it linked tolerance to human rights and peace. It elevated tolerance to a legal formulation that seeks protection by member states and the international community.

In addition to the integration of the educational and legal perspectives, we must work to instill a culture of tolerance so that coexistence stems from personal conviction and is not contrived or forced. This personal conviction is what promotes real behavioral controls, sponsors inner peace, and restrains human tendencies towards violence.





FROM ADMITTANCE TO MUTUAL RECOGNITION



ELEVATING TOLERANCE FROM admittance to mutual recognition restores the effectiveness of the concept of tolerance which is the mark of this historical moment shared by the Abrahamic family. After long periods of mutual criticism and controversy, at the hands of great scholars like Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Moses Maimonides - which sometimes exposed these religions' agreement in overall narrative - we believe that it is now time to rise to a more elevated definition of tolerance as mutual recognition and assistance.

Mutual recognition, as the Qurʾān teaches us, is one of the purposes of creation. Almighty God says, “O People, We have created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should get to know one another. The most honoured of you in God’s eyes are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.” (Qurʾān 49:13) This is an invitation to meet and cooperate in a manner that engages the will of both sides.

By getting to know each other, the narrowness of the “I” is transcended into the openness of “Us”. We thus move from the fragmentation of minorities and narrow identities to the unity of the whole as one community, or the great society of humanity. This mutual recognition arises from the awareness of our common destiny: we are all like the passengers in the ship. We are united by our path and destination. There is no survival for one without the survival of the other, no redemption for a nation without the redemption of all others, and no deliverance for one religion without the deliverance of all others. The Holy Qurʾān says: “Help one another to piety and godfearing; do not help one another towards sin and hostility.” (Qurʾān 5:2) Ṭabarī interprets this as universal advice, so Muslims and people of other faiths - and indeed all human beings - are instructed to help, love, and cooperate with one another.

“In the Islamic narrative, tolerance is based on an ethical-spiritual principle, namely that humans must embody the attributes of God in their lives.”

Cooperation is the second, complementary, face of mutual recognition which should guide our understanding of tolerance. Our roles must be integrated, starting from our positions and circles of influence, to contribute to the restoration of the moral conscience of humanity. Thus can we effectively reestablish the values of mercy and assistance, and the meanings of cooperation and charity. In the spirit of tolerance that goes beyond the logic of admittance to the open space of mutual recognition and cooperation, humanity faces a bright future in which each one opens his arms and sees in the other a brother, a counterpart in creation, and a fellow citizen of a homeland. He is not disturbed by the other’s existence or presence. As the poet once said:

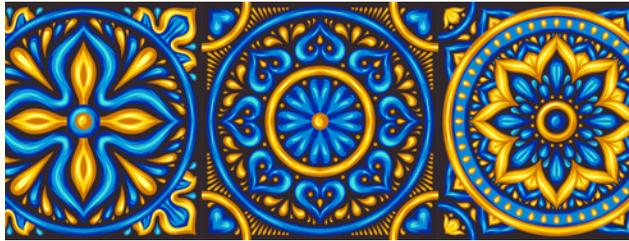
I swear, nations are not limited by the number of their citizens, but by the ethics of their people.

It is our duty to preserve this spirit of tolerance that is full of hope and faith in the face of the dark growth of movements whose ideology is based on an imaginary contradictions between themselves and others, calling for a clash of civilizations. In the embodiment of this model of mutual recognition, the American Peace Caravans have established a new kind of dialogue: the presence of people in shared spaces, even if only for a limited period of time, sharing the moment together, eating together, living together; each performing their rituals in full view of the other. They speak and discuss, but more importantly, they watch, witness, and discover that they share more than they ever imagined.

This experience will continue as a model for mutual recognition and the process of dialogue, and also for the process of positive acquaintance and cooperation as we

embark on a new era in relations between the children of the Abrahamic family, those possessors of enlightened minds who seek to correct the onward march of humanity.

The success achieved by these caravans renews hope and confirms the conviction that we must move forward in the path of establishing this model through the creation of an ethical alliance between the three religions of the Abrahamic family, in all of their denominations, and with the participation of all who seek good from the wider human family. This alliance, named 'the New Alliance of Virtue' after the historical alliance, does not seek to be a forum for interreligious dialogue, but rather one that seeks happy coexistence for its adherents in the world in which we live today. It considers this a necessity and duty advocated by all religions.





H.E. SHAYKH BIN BAYYAH SPEAKING AT GATHERING OF THE 2015 FORUM

FROM DOCUMENT TO CHARTER



OUR ALLIANCE IS an alliance of virtue and an alliance of shared values. The participants seek to embody these values in their relationships and to advocate their dissemination and application in people's lives. The means for doing so is to present an effective example of dialogue, and its goal is coexistence in a state of peace that is unenforced by arms. Rather, it is enforced by ethics and the values of tolerance, justice, love, and respect for humanity.

It was therefore necessary for the parties to draft a charter demonstrating the values and virtues which they called to; recalling their common principles and objectives; and delineating their primary areas of work. From axes developed in the assemblies of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, the leaders of the American Peace Caravans together with members of the Abrahamic family supervised the drafting of the new Alliance of Virtue. Later, in Washington, we began to invite others to join us by signing the draft charter. It was signed by several leaders of the Abrahamic faiths in America.

The Charter consists of a preamble and six chapters comprising seventeen articles which cover the Alliance's motivations, principles, objectives and areas of work. It is based on international covenants and conventions that seek the establishment and promotion of peace, the cessation of conflict, and which support the spirit of harmony and fraternity among countries, peoples and cultures.

It likewise draws and builds upon all the documents and declarations that preceded it, such as the Amman Message; the Common Word Initiative; the Marrakesh Declaration of the Rights of Religious Minorities in Muslim-majority Countries; the Declarations

By getting to know each other, the narrowness of the "I" is transcended into the openness of "Us".

of Abu Dhabi by the Forum for Promoting Peace; the Washington Declaration of the Alliance of Virtue; the Document on Human Fraternity issued earlier this year by The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayeb, and the Holy Pontiff Pope Francis, in Abu Dhabi under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin

Zayed al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the United Arab Emirates Armed Forces; and the Makkah Document, which was supervised by the Muslim World League.

These documents together formed a prominent feature in the process of interfaith cooperation to establish values of coexistence and harmony among the various components of human society, and are buttressed by our Charter.

I will briefly mention the most important objectives and elements of this Charter:

First: A charter of values and virtues

The Charter of the Alliance of Virtue seeks to ascend from a discourse of rights to one of virtue. This is because the concept of a right requires the singling-out of one party, or at least its preference, for some reason or other. Dealing based on rights requires only that the other is granted what is originally theirs, or that we stop infringing on some right of theirs. On the other hand, dealing based on virtue encompasses the values of nobility and beneficence (iḥsān). It is an act of giving without expectation of recompense, and of stepping down for the other regarding something that is not even theirs to claim.

The Charter of the New Alliance of Virtue offers a new conception of kindness that goes beyond the neutral principle of human rights to rise to the positive values of virtue, love, brotherhood, compassion, mercy, altruism, solidarity, helping the needy, poor and disabled without limiting this to a given race, religion or geographical origin.

The children of the Abrahamic family of faiths believe that religious morality remains capable of guiding the world on the path of recovery from its innumerable ailments. With their new alliance, they aim to refute the claim made by many philosophers since the Enlightenment, especially the triad of doubt – as Paul Ricoeur calls them - Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, but also others such as Kant and Darwin, who attempt to link religion and violence, proclaiming religion a mere social construct and calling for a separation between the sacred and the profane as the only means for establishing tolerance and coexistence in society.

Second: A charter that promotes shared values yet respects difference

The Charter of the new Alliance of Virtue is based on the solid ground of shared values within the Abrahamic family and broader human commonalities. This is because the Charter is based on the belief that there are general and specific common values that the Charter aims to promote without denying or rejecting specificities and distinctions.

We, the children of the Abrahamic family, share at the first level the common value of faith, which has appeared in all the messages and calls of our prophets. This revolves around what Muslim jurists have termed the five protected necessities: of religion, life, intellect, personal property, and family. We consider this in Islam to be the basic commonality between all Abrahamic laws and dispensations.

Many of us still live as if we were in the Middle Ages, with its social stratification and segregation, ignoring the present realities of cosmopolitan interaction and coexistence.

We also share a more specific level of values with the rest of humanity. These are the universal values upon which human reason does not differ. It is not affected by changes in time or place, or human tendency. These are the innate natural rights granted to every human being by virtue of their very existence. They are God-given rights granted to every believer and non-believer, as stated in Chapter 1 of the Charter.

Third: A charter for peace

Peace is at the forefront of the goals of the New Alliance of Virtue and one of the purposes for the partnership between its members. The members of the Abrahamic family pledge to promote the values of cooperation rather than the values of conflict. This is because the struggle for survival leads only to annihilation, and cooperation is the sole path forward for humanity.

The Charter also proceeds from the conviction that all religions - and the religions of

the Abrahamic family in particular - represent a positive force for peace. They are a force for reconstruction and prosperity, not a force for destruction and demolition. The members pledge to carry out their duty to cooperate in removing the ethical obscurity promoted by inflammatory discourse and to strip it of the religious legitimacy that it claims, and to demonstrate religion as a force for peace, love and connection among those who otherwise differ. This Charter represents a call for peace, love and harmony, so that humanity can ascend from the pits of conflict to the summit of prosperity and stability.

Fourth: A charter for courteous tolerance and responsible freedom

The new Alliance of Virtue promotes the principles of human dignity, freedom and justice. It calls for tolerance, peace, compassion and solidarity, and establishing a balanced model of courteous acceptance, responsible freedom and positive citizenship.

The Charter is based on a vision linking all rights and freedoms to the strategy of peace. There are no rights and freedoms outside the space of social harmony. This is because absolute tolerance, i.e. tolerance of the intolerant, leads to a lack of tolerance. This is the paradox of tolerance that Karl Popper and others have spoken about.

Tolerance and freedom do not mean lawlessness or infringement on the rights of others. Tolerance and peace are twins or two sides of the same coin.

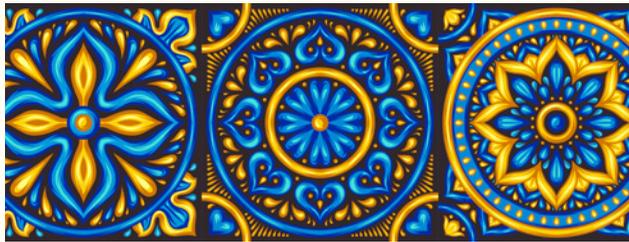
From this point of view, the Charter of the new Alliance of Virtue calls on believers to respect each other's faith by considering that respect for the other's religion is essentially a respect for human dignity. As such our charter is one of mutual respect for religious symbols, sacraments, and houses of worship. It presents in an appropriate manner the balance sought between freedom and peace, between the individual and society, and between the freedom of religion and the freedom of expression.

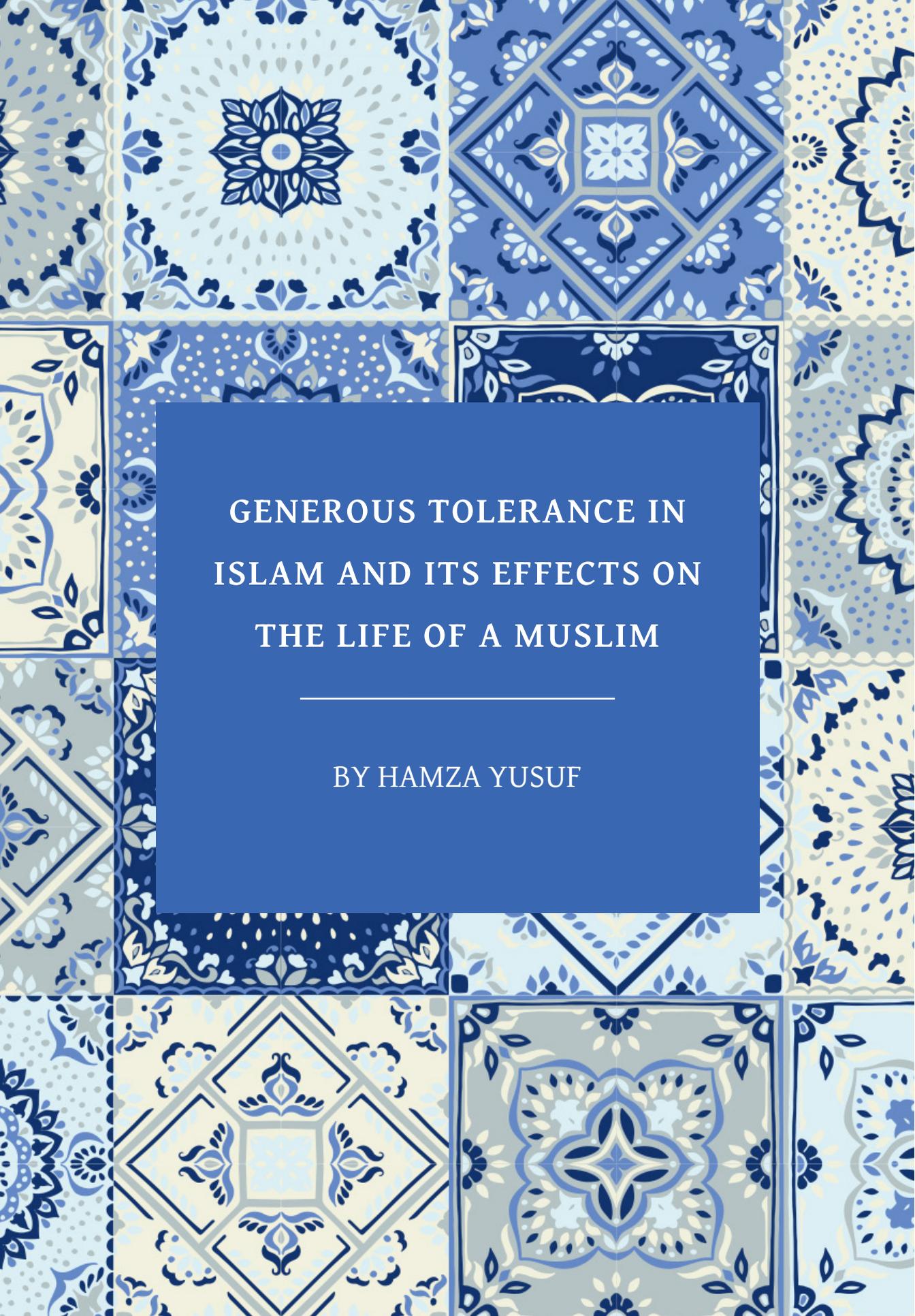
CONCLUSION

The year of tolerance does not mean the end of tolerance, but a renewed beginning for its journey. It is an unstoppable march of irresistible effort. That is the mission of our New Alliance of Virtue, which is agreed upon in this charter.

This Charter is now yours to study, contemplate, and ratify. Each one of us must invite others to it and apply it in their respective fields of work. The Charter of the New Alliance of Virtue which you will be entrusted with is not composed of theoretical principles bereft of effectiveness. Rather it is a document that can be taught in schools, preached in houses of worship, and invoked on the battlefield. It is reassurance for the soul and hope for the heart.

May God's peace, mercy, and blessings be upon you.





GENEROUS TOLERANCE IN
ISLAM AND ITS EFFECTS ON
THE LIFE OF A MUSLIM

BY HAMZA YUSUF



DR. HAMZA YUSUF SPEAKING AT THE 2015 GATHERING OF THE FORUM



WE FIND OURSELVES in a time of immense conflict and confusion, which has led to widespread unrest and agitation—what the Arabs term *fitnah* and *ḥaraj*. 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 400-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-Bīrūnī 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’ānic period an extraordinary array of possibility in the semantic universe, created by its highly structured system of derivation (*ishtiqāq*). Most linguists assert that languages actually lose complexity and vastness

“God is considered Jawād but not Sakhī, 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.”

(*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’ānic 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’ān and the Prophet ﷺ (God’s peace and blessings upon him). This miracle is cogently expressed in the Qur’ān’s declaration: “We have indeed revealed the Reminder, and We have promised to preserve and protect it.”² No other language has this protection, 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’ānic 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 *smḥ*, *smd*, *smk*, and *smq*. All of these base roots relate to “elevation and loftiness” (*al-‘ulūwwu wa assumuwwu*). The word for “heaven,” *samā’* is taken from the base root *smw*. In his book, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Ibn Manẓūr says that

smw is “to be elevated” (‘*alā*), *smd* means “to be elevated” (‘*alā*), *smq*, in regard to trees and foliage, means “to be elevated” (*irtafa‘a wa ‘alā wa tāla*), and finally, *smk* means “to elevate something” (*samakahu ay rafa‘ahu fartafa‘a*).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*). *Samāḥa* or *asmaḥa* is “to display generosity and nobility” (*jāda ‘an karamin wa sakhā’in*). The idea of tolerance comes from *samāḥa*’s fourth base form, *sāmāḥa*, which is glossed as, “to be agreeable with others’ wishes” (*wāfaqa ‘alā al-maṭlūb*).⁶ In his *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, the philologist Ibn Fāris says, “The root *smḥ* denotes agreeability and easiness” (*tadullu mādda smḥ ‘alā ma‘nā as-salāsa was-suhūla*). *Salāsa* in Arabic denotes “affability, ease, and 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 inqāda*). The Arabs say, “The animal was tamed after intractability” (*Asmaḥa al-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 (*ḍīq*) in it.” The essence of *samḥa* 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 *tasāmuḥ* 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-Ḥājj, 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-Awsaṭ* 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*, *ṣafaḥ*, *ʿafw*, and *ḥilm*. 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 saḥlan*," 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

“The Prophet   was asked, “What is faith?” and he replied, “Patience and generosity” (al-ṣabru waʿs-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.”

facilitation.” It is what God wants for humanity from the religion itself: "*Yurīdu bikum al-yusr, wa lā 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-ḥanafīyya as-samḥa*).

The first principle is “Affairs are determined by their ends and aims” (*al-umūr bi-maqāṣidihā*). The ultimate aim of the entire sacred law, according to our ‘uṣūlī scholars, is “Accrue benefit and avoid harm” (*jalb al-maṣāliḥ wa dar’i al-mafāsid*). 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” (*aḍ-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-‘āda 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 sh-shakk*), facilitates many human transactions that might otherwise be hindered by human frailty.

Finally, the fifth principle is “Difficulties demand facilitation” (*al-mashaqqatu tajlūb 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 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-Lughawīyya*, 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 *Sakhī*, 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 hayyininun layyininun*). This quality is an aspect of *samāḥa*. The Qur'ān 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” (*raḥma*) is to add further emphasis on the mercy; in other words, “... due to immense mercy (*raḥma '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” (*fazẓan ghalīẓ 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 (*anfadh-hu fil-qulūb*) and is quicker to achieve a response (*asra'u ilā 'ijāba*) and more conducive to obedience (*ad'a ilā aṭ-ṭā'a*). For that reason, God commanded Moses and Aaron to “Go to Pharaoh and speak gently to him” (*idhhabā ilā Fir'aun innahu ṭaghā fa qulā lahu qawlan layyinan*) (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’ān is calling to a middle position between neglect and excess (*ifrāt and tafrit*), 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 (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). For that reason, God has praised moderation in the verse, “We have made you a moderate nation” (*Wa kadhālika jaʿalnākum ummatan wasaṭan*). One should know that the entire purpose of the Revelation and the role of the Messenger ﷺ 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 ﷺ 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

“To make room for others, even those who do not look or think like us, is to be generous—samīḥ—liberal,

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 ‘Iyāḍ 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.” 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 Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān 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 ʿind Allāhi atqākum*). The foundation of Islam is *taqwā*, which is an awareness of God that leads to *karam* and *samāḥa*. The Qurʾān 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.

Samāḥa and Vastness

Another extremely important aspect of *samāḥa* is the concept of vastness (*saʿa*). One of the many meanings of *samāḥa* is to “permit,” and the concept of vastness is embedded in that. Imam al-Fayruzabādī says in the Muḥīṭ, “Surely in it is copious room” (*Inna fīhi lamasmaḥan, ay muttasaʿan*).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 (*wajhun 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-ḥanaḥiyya 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 Qurʾān says, “Calmly endure what they say, and remember Our servant David, the strong; he was always turning to God.”¹⁸ The Qurʾān 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 *samāḥa*. The Qurʾān 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” (*hayyinun layyinun*)—in other words *samḥun*— “if he is prevailed upon, he obliges” (*idhā qāda anqād*). 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 maʿa al-ʿadāʿi ḍayyiqatun ṣammu ul-khiyāṭi maʿa al-aḥbābi maydānu.
With enemies a vast field is constrained, but among lovers the eye of a needle
is a vast field.

And

Li ʿamruka mā dāqat 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—*sāmiḥ*—liberal, vast.

Immediately after the Verse of the Throne²³ in the Qurʾān— 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

“The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was also the first human being to introduce humane rules of engagement in war, including the prohibition of attacks on noncombatants.”

is the idea of *samaḥa*, which is “to permit,” the opposite of which is “to refuse” or “to withhold” (*manaʿa*). The Arabs say, “*ismaḥ li*” (Permit me). This religion is indeed *al-ḥanafiyya as-samḥa*, “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 waʿs-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 ʿUhud had split his head, causing blood to flow, and had broken his tooth (*rabāʿiyatahu*), 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 qaḥmun shajjāʿū raʿsa nabiyihim wa kasarū rabāʿiyatahu wa huwa yadʿūhum ʿila ʾLlāhi taʿālā?*) 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 Qurʾān 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 *tasāmuḥ*, 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-ḥaṭab*), or the object can be metaphorical, as in “the bearer of the Qurʾān” (*ḥāmil al-Qurʾān*), which is based upon the Qurʾānic 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.” *ḥulm* 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” (*raʾsu ath-thadyi*). According to Abū Hilāl, it is so-called because a mother uses it to subdue her infant (*yuḥallimu at-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 (*iltiqātaḥu 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 Qurʾān 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-Saʿdiyya, and scholars have often remarked that the names of those associated with the Prophet’s early years are not fortuitous.

Another word derived from *ḥilm* is *ḥālīm*, which means “a dreamer,” indicating that a dream can only take place in undisturbed sleep. Also, *ḥālīm* 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-ḥālīm* 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‘tarihi ghayz*).”²⁷ Imam Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī says, The one who ignores oppression is not considered *ḥālīm*, but rather the Arabs say, “*ḥaluma ‘anhu*,” if one delays taking another to account, or if one pardons another for some wrong (*akhhara ‘iqābahu aw ‘afā ‘anhu*). 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 *safah* (impudence and insolence). The word *safih* is used in the Qur’ān 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...” (*In kāna alladhī ‘alayhi 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 “*istifhām isti‘tāf*”; in other words, he was saying,

“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.”

“Do not punish us for others’ sins.” God punishes a people when the community does not condemn injustices outwardly. The Qur’ān 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 Qur’ān 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 important qualities to inculcate in our attitude and treatment of others are *ḥilm* and *samāḥa*.

Imam Mālik relates in the Muwaṭṭa 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 Qur'ān as *jāhiliyya*. Qur'ānic 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 ḥaqq an yuf'al*), and instead of being the opposite of "knowledge" (*ilm*), as in the case of "ignorance" (*jahl*), it is the opposite of "forbearance" (*ḥilm*). 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 taḥālami.

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'ān 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 *Jāhiliyya*

The first type of *jāhiliyya* is that of understanding. The Qurʾān 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 *jāhilīs* 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 Qurʾān 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, oppression, 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 Qurʾān says,

Don't be so submissive in your speech that those whose hearts are afflicted will feel lust. Rather, speak with civility and comportment. 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 Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān 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 ʿAmru bin Kulthūm wonderfully describes the *jāhili* man in his famous ode:

ʿAlā lā yaʿlam ul-aqwāmu annā taḍaʿḍaʿnā wa annā qad wanīnā.

ʿAlā lā yajhalan aḥadun ʿalaynā 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 Qurʾānic 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 noncombatants. 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 Abū Ḥanīfa, 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 noncombatants. 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’ān 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’ān 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’ān, this is the nature of the world, and far from being a 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’ān 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-ḥalīm* 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 nonviolence 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'ān 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'ān, the Qur'ān speaks of a second *jāhiliyya* that would replace the qualities of Islam that the Prophet ﷺ brought. The Qur'ān 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-‘Arabī 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 ﷺ and Muḥammad ﷺ.”⁴⁶ Imam an-Nasafī says, in his commentary of the Qur’ān, “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 on 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 of 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 Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān. 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 ḥilm*)—that our community can hope to restore the prophetic path once again. It is a task worthy of prophets.

END NOTES

- 1 William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Beirut: Librairie Du Liban, 1974), x.
- 2 Qurʾān 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 overwhelmingly in favor of this position. An example given is the root stem *ḥā* and *mīm* to which we then add various letters on the ends. For instance, the word *ḥmy* means “to protect.” The word *ḥms* is “to be zealous,” which is needed for indignation that leads to action, but if the boundaries are overstepped, we fall into *ḥmq*, which is “to display stupidity.” *Nūn* and *fa* are another pair of letters that provide a good example. *Nfs* is “to breathe”; *nftḥ* is “to blow lightly”; *nfh* is “a breeze”; and *nfh* is “a profound blast.” The base in both cases is a dyadic root, and the third (*lām*) letter (of the *fa-ʿayn-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-ʿarab, tahdhīb lisān al-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya), 1:621–28 6 Ibid., 621.
- 7 Qurʾān 2:185.
- 8 Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Al-Furūq al-lughawiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, n.d.), 196.
- 9 Qurʾān 3:159.
- 10 Imam Ismaʿīl ḥaqqi al-Burṣawī, *Tanwīr al-adhhān* (Damascus: Dār al-qalam, 1988), 1:288 11 Ibid., 288–9.
- 12 Ibid., 289.
- 13 Qurʾān 17:70
- 14 Qadi Abū Faḍl ʿIyād, *Ash-Shifāʾ bi taʾrīf ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafāʾ* (Beirut: Dār al-arqām, n.d.), 1:99.
- 15 Qurʾān 49:13.
- 16 Qurʾān 8:29.
- 17 Imam Muḥammad al-Fayruzabādī, *Al-Qāmus al-muḥīt* (Beirut: Muʿassasa ar-risāla, 1987), 287.
- 18 Qurʾān 38:17.
- 19 Qurʾān 16:126–28.
- 20 Qurʾān 6:125.
- 21 Qurʾān 58:11 22 Qurʾān 58:11.
- 23 Qurʾān 2:255
- 24 Qurʾān 2:256 25 Qurʾān 3:128–129.
- 26 Qurʾān 73:5.
- 27 Imam al-Ghazālī, *Asmā Allāh al-ḥusna* (London: Muʿassasat tafṣīl al-kitāb, 1998), 64.
- 28 Al-ʿAskarī, *Al-Furūq*, 226.
- 29 Qurʾān 7:155. 30 Qurʾān 8:25. 31 Qurʾān 35:45.
- 32 Sīdī Muḥammad az-Zarqānī, *Sharḥ az-zarqānī ʿala al-muwāṭṭa* (Beirut: Dār al-maʿrifa, 1989), 4:404.
- 33 Ibid.

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- 34 Qurʾān 3:154.
- 35 Qurʾān 5:49.
- 36 Qurʾān 33:32–33.
- 37 Qurʾān 43:16–18.
- 38 Qurʾān 48:26.
- 39 Shaykh Aḥmad al-Amīn ash-Shinqittī, *Sarḥ al-muʿalaqāt* (Beirut: Maktabat al-ʿasriyya, 2001), 131.
- 40 Qurʾān 28:51–55.
- 41 Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 9.
- 42 Qurʾān 17:33
- 43 Qurʾān 5:45–46.
- 44 Qurʾān 22:
- 45–46. 45 Qurʾān 22:47–48.
- 46 Qadi Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya), 3:570. The Qadi himself was of the opinion that the *jāhiliyya* mentioned in the Qurʾān 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 ʿAbdallāh bin Aḥmad an-Nasafī, *Madarak at-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqāʾiq at-Tāwīl* (Beirut: Dār ibn Kathīr, 1999), 3:30.
- 48 Shihābuddīn Sayyid Maḥmūd al-Alūsī, *Ruḥ al-Maʿānī* (Beirut: Dār iḥyā turāth al-ʿArabī, 1999), 21:257.
- 49 Qurʾān 25:20.
- 50 Qurʾān 95:5.
- 51 Qurʾān 4:171. 52 Qurʾān 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-Qurʾān al-Karīm, 1976), 82.





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As scholars, our duty is to wage war upon war to found peace upon peace. If our intentions are pure, this effort is the best form of worship and the greatest service to our religion.

H.E. SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH
President, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace



BIOGRAPHY OF H.E SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH



H.E. SHAYKH ABDALLAH bin Bayyah is recognized by Muslim scholars around the world as perhaps the greatest living authority on the Islamic legal methodology known as Usul al-Fiqh (Principles of Jurisprudence). Beyond that, he is known for his scholarship drawing on scripture and traditional texts across all four major Sunni schools of jurisprudence to address the crucial contemporary concerns of Muslim communities. In recent years, he has been the driving force behind the establishment of the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace, which seeks to unite Muslim scholars around the world in pursuit of peace, and to address the crises facing Muslim communities worldwide.

Born in eastern Mauritania in 1935, the Shaykh grew up in a family known for its grasp of the Mauritanian classical curriculum. His father, Shaykh Al-Mahfoudh bin Bayyah was a senior judge and chosen twice as the head of Ulema (religious scholars) of Mauritania upon the country's independence. From an early age, the Shaykh demonstrated his exceptional memory and understanding of the Mauritanian texts.

Under his father's tutelage, he developed an advanced understanding of Arabic grammar and rhetoric, and knowledge of pre-Islamic Arab poetry. He also developed an advanced understanding of the Qur'anic sciences: legal theory, syntax, language, orthography and the ten forms of Qur'anic recitation. He specialized in the Maliki school of jurisprudence, and was qualified to give authoritative legal opinions (fatwas).

In his early 20s, he was selected as part of a group of scholars to go to Tunisia for training in modern legal systems, which were to be introduced to Mauritania. He graduated at the top of his group, and on his return to Mauritania was appointed a judge, rising to become Minister of Justice, Minister of Islamic Affairs, and eventually Vice President.

When some government officials criticized his lack of fluency in French, he taught himself the language by listening to French radio with a dictionary in hand. He later surprised his critics by addressing a ministerial meeting in the language. His mastery of French has allowed him to study European thought and the history of ideas. He is rare among contemporary Muslim scholars for his knowledge of the work of Western philosophers and social theorists.

In the 1980s, Shaykh joined King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where he taught several subjects, including Qur'anic studies, jurisprudence, and advanced level of Arabic, for over three decades. This allows him to combine the study of the scriptural sources of Qur'an and Hadith, the various schools' approaches to Usul al-Fiqh (the principles of jurisprudence), and Maqasid al-Sharia (the purposes of Islamic law). This breadth of study has allowed the Shaykh to develop a universal framework in which Islamic jurisprudence can be adapted to local contexts while maintaining its essential principles and purposes and ensuring its continued relevance in the lives of an increasingly diverse global Muslim population.

The Shaykh has developed theories of Islamic jurisprudence in secular or non-Muslim societies, called the Jurisprudence of Minorities (fiqh al-aqalliyyat). He is also an outspoken critic of terrorism, authoring several articles and books exploring Islamic responses to the issue. He has applied this work practically, not least in the successful efforts to secure the release of French war correspondent Florence Aubenas, and her translator Hussein Hanun, in Iraq in 2005.

Over the past 25 years, the Shaykh has taught students who have become some of the most prominent scholars in the Middle East and North Africa. In the late 1990s he started to visit the West, particularly teaching British and American students, gaining a following amongst prominent Western Muslim leaders. He has written several books and hundreds of articles and essays, mostly in Arabic, which are used by scholars around

the world.

The Shaykh's work has not been focused on scholarship for its own sake, but on applying it to address some of the most pressing issues facing global Islam. In 2008, he became the founding President of the Global Centre for Renewal and Guidance (GCRG), a London-based think tank that applies scholarship to strategic solutions to pressing intellectual and spiritual issues facing global Islam. This reflects the Shaykhs belief that ideas can only be defeated by ideas, and that Islamist extremism must be answered by sound reasoning drawn from orthodox, accepted sources of Islamic jurisprudence.

This approach was applied in Mardin, Turkey, in 2010, when his organisation convened a conference to examine a fatwa issued by the 14th century scholar Ibn Taymiyya. His Mardin Fatwa is widely used by jihadi groups to justify attacks on both non-Muslims and Muslims who do not follow their understanding of Islam. The 2010 Mardin Conference revealed that a transcription error had been introduced in a 1909 edition of Ibn Taymiyya's fatwa, turning the verb "to treat" into the verb "to fight" and that jihadi groups were relying on the incorrect version. Under the Shaykh's leadership, the conference published a report entitled, *Challenging the al-Qaida Narrative: The New Mardin Declaration*, correcting the jihadi understanding of the fatwa. Three separate spokesmen of al-Qaida responded to this threat, attacking Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah by name.

In 2014, the Shaykh established the Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace (ADFP) in Abu Dhabi, under the patronage of Sheikh Abdallah bin Zayed, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates. The vision of the ADFP is to address the crises facing global Islam from a framework of Islamic tradition and legal theory, applied to local contexts. Over 1,000 of the world's leading Muslim scholars from a variety of traditions, as well as academics and thought leaders, attended the ADFP's launch. The ADFP is the first global gathering of scholars designed to provide a response to extremism, sectarianism and terrorism.

Since the 2014 Forum, the Shaykh has travelled widely to advance its work, in North Africa, the Middle East, Far East and the West. This included a conference with the African Union on tackling the religious conflict in the Central African Republic, and the release of the Chibok girls by the Nigerian jihadi group Boko Haram. He has led Imam training initiatives in the US, UK and Europe, and spoken widely on the issue of global peace, including at the World Economic Forum in 2015 and 2017, and at the UN Countering Violent Extremism Summit in 2015. In 2014, the Shaykh's work and that of the ADFP were referenced by President Barack Obama at the UN General Assembly. Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah thus became the only Islamic scholar ever to be publicly quoted

by a sitting President of the United States.¹

In January 2016, the Shaykh convened the Marrakesh Declaration, as the culmination of an effort running since 2011 to address the issue of violence and oppression against minorities in Muslim majority countries. The Declaration applied traditional Islamic texts, and in particular the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Charter of Madina, to affirm the Islamic principle of equal citizenship as prescribed by the Prophet ﷺ. It was signed by scholars and politicians from across the Muslim world.

In February 2018, following the Shaykh's initiative, hundreds of American religious leaders, scholars and politicians, as well as others from around the world gathered in Washington, D.C., to discuss the 'Alliance of Virtue for the Common Good'. This conference promulgated The Washington Declaration, calling on the leaders of the Abrahamic faiths to join together in a new Alliance of Virtue, using their shared values to promote the global commonweal.

In 2019 the Shaykh launched The Charter of the New Alliance of Virtue, a voluntary document that seeks to bring together religious leaders of good-will for the benefit of humanity. It is an effort across religions to enable their members to live side-by-side in peace and happiness and cooperate on the basis a theology of God-given human dignity that actualizes virtue and benefit for all. In 2020, the Shaykh used this document to press for an attitude of 'the Spirit of the Ship's Passengers' which is a Prophetic metaphor for the status of human beings as the passengers of single ship with a common destiny. The Shaykh continues to argue that this is the only possible means for facing the challenges of war, pandemics, and climate change that threaten humanity.

The Shaykh has received multiple awards recognizing his work and serves in the leadership of many organizations seeking peace, including as one of four Executive Co-Presidents of Religions for Peace, the largest interfaith organization in the world.



¹ The White House Archives, 2014. See: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/24/09/2014/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly>



ABOUT THE ABU DHABI FORUM FOR PEACE

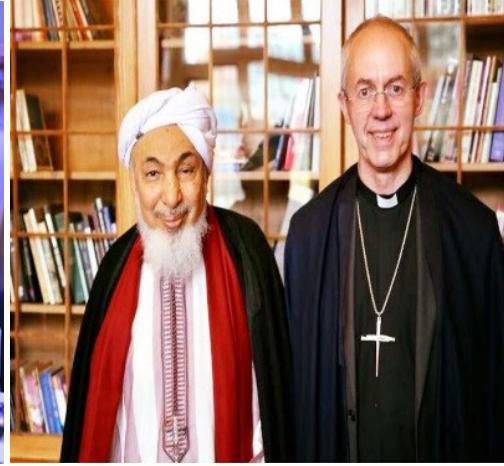
THE ABU DHABI Forum For Peace, under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates was established during the pinnacle of social strife in the Muslim world following the Arab Spring. The Forum works earnestly to bring an end to conflict and establish peace through facilitating spaces for dialogue and the dissemination of a discourse of moderation. It strives to allow its participants to put behind them the differences of the past and focus on a secure, peaceful societies future together.

The Forum takes an academic and theological approach to the problem of violence, holding that any violent act begins as ideology before emerging as action. Wars are waged in the realm of ideas before they devastate the physical world. Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, the Forum's founder, teaches that we must construct defenses of peace in the heart and mind and inculcate a correct understanding of Islam. This is one of the primary roles of the scholarly elite and religious leadership in our time.

Likewise, the Forum focuses on securing the rights and safety of religious minorities living in Muslim lands. The Marrakesh Declaration launched in 2016, calls on Muslim states to accord the rights of equal citizenship to all minorities in their midst on the basis of The Charter of Madina and the Islamic values of benevolence, solidarity, human dignity, peace, justice, mercy and the common good. Most recently, the Forum has focused on elevating interreligious cooperation from the discourse of shared rights and responsibilities to the heights of a common conscience and genuine loving kindness towards the other. This is profoundly showcased in the promulgation of the 2019 Charter for a New Alliance of Virtue and the 2021 Abu Dhabi Charter of Inclusive Citizenship.







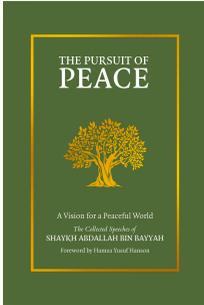


*We need thinkers and leaders to become
the healers of modern society by replacing
the jurisprudence of hate with the
jurisprudence of peace.*

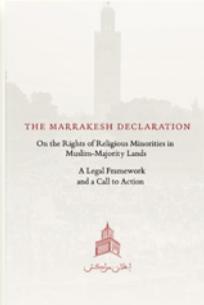
H.E. SHAYKH ABDALLAH BIN BAYYAH

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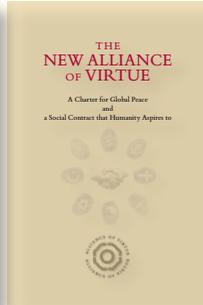
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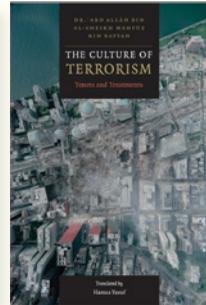
The Pursuit of Peace
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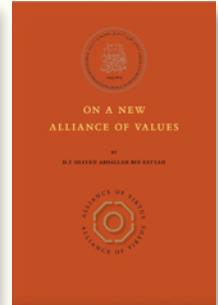
The Marrakesh Declaration
January 2016



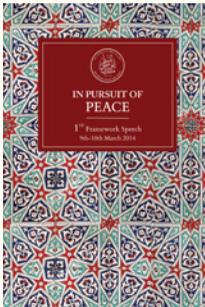
The New Alliance Of
Virtue: A Charter
For Global Peace
28th September 2019



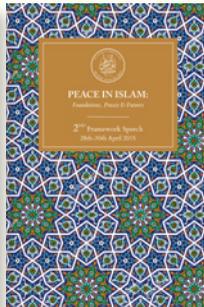
The Culture Of
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November 2014



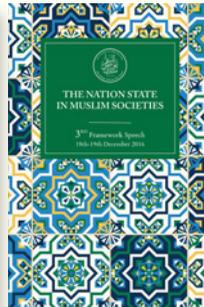
On A New
Alliance Of Values
October 2007



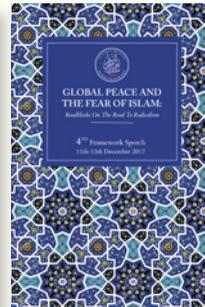
1st Assembly
In Pursuit of Peace
2014



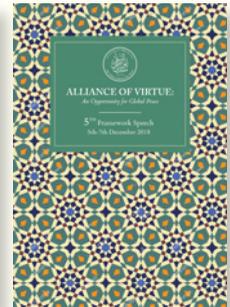
2nd Assembly
Peace In Islam:
Foundations, Praxis
and Futures
2015



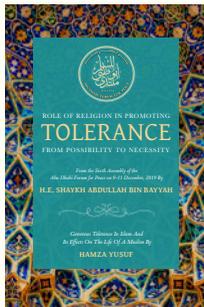
3rd Assembly
The Nation State in
Muslim Societies
2016



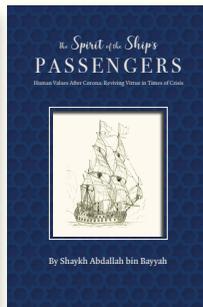
4th Assembly
Global Peace And
The Fear of Islam
2017



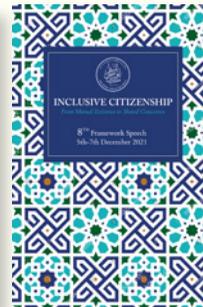
5th Assembly
Alliance of Virtue:
An Opportunity for
Global Peace
2018



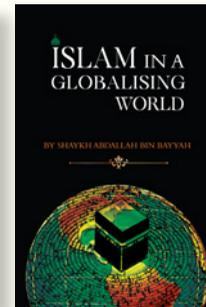
6th Assembly
Role of Religion in
Promoting Tolerance
2019



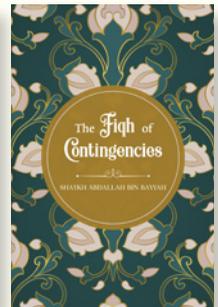
7th Assembly
The Spirit of the
Ship's Passengers
2020



8th Assembly
Inclusive Citizenship:
From Mutual
Existence to Shared
Conscience 2018



Islam in a Globalizing
World



The Fiqh of
Contingencies
2020

