

THE MUSLIM STANDARD

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First Muslims: FROM AFRICA TO THE CARIBBEAN

European imperialism brought the first Muslims to the Caribbean. These Muslims were African slaves who were uprooted from their homeland. The original African slaves died as Muslims but the second generation was deculturised and made Christians. Islam came alive again with the coming of the East Indian Indentured immigrants and continued to live because of the religious freedom allowed them.

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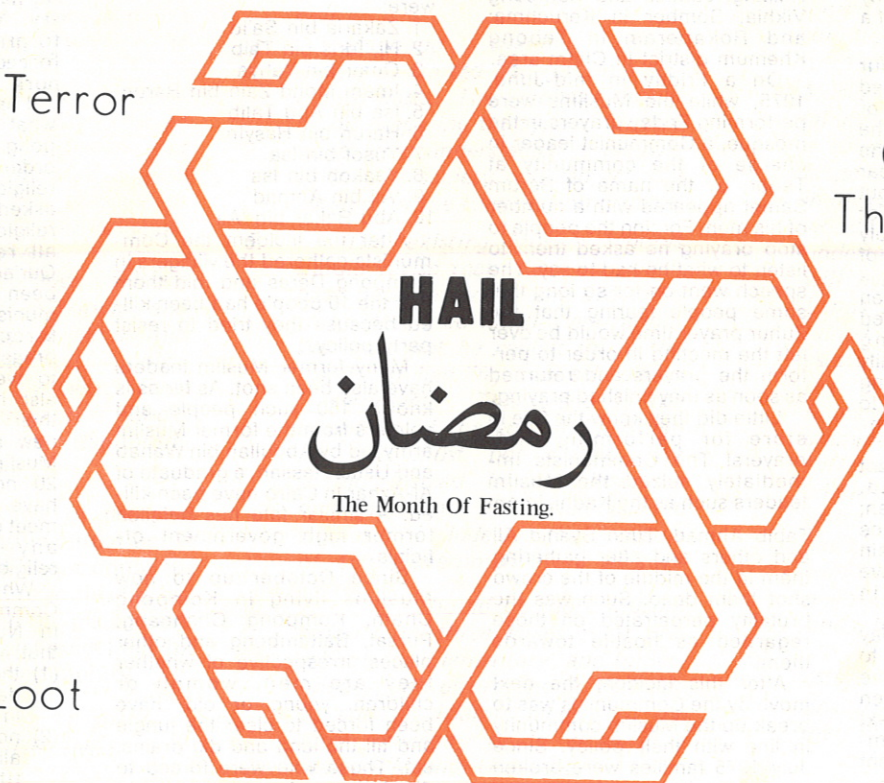
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FASTING IN ISLAM

"Oh you who believe! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you so that you may learn self-restraint."

Read about the significance, benefits and the practice of fasting. Also check and see if and when you are exempted from it.

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MUSLIMS IN CAMBODIA

taste of horror

This is an eye-witness report of a refugee from Cambodia. It explains some of the horrors religious-minded people, particularly the Muslims, are facing since the Communist regime seized power in April 1975.

I escaped from Kompong Cham. The journey to Thailand took 7 months. There were 7 people originally in our group. While making our way to the Thai border we came upon a party of Khmer Rouge soldiers who fired on us killing 6. I was the only one to escape into the jungle and from there made my way to Thailand with the aid of a map and a compass.

Tens of thousands of our Muslim people have suffered terrible hardship as a result of the cruelty and brutality of the Communist Khmers. They (the Muslims) were forced to clear jungle and plant crops without being given enough to eat. For example, one day's food supply for 100 people would consist of 30 milk-tins of rice.

The Muslim people have been broken up. They are not allowed to mix and meet among themselves. Each Muslim family would be forced to live among 19 non-Muslim families and to eat together with the non-Muslims.

Many Muslim ex-government officials have been killed. Among them: Colonel Hamzah; Colonel Sit Met; Second Lt Lee Seman; Nong Mat Cit; Captain Yok Rani; and Representative for Serirod constituency in Pnom Penh, Oh Sulaiman.

17th April 1975 was the day when the Khmer Republic fell to the Communists. Since then the Muslim people have been driven from their homes on the pretext that the move was only temporary to enable the government to reorganise and re-build the villages. As soon as they moved their properties were placed in the custody of the soldiers.

They left their homes with tears streaming from their eyes (knowing that) they would not be allowed to return. There was hardly time to take anything with them. They left with only the clothes they were wearing. What little they managed to collect by way of food and personal things were put in small bags and

wrappings and carried on their shoulders. Those who did not have time to take any food with them consequently starved. It was a very sad thing to witness.

Mosques have been closed, and no one is allowed in to pray. This has happened in Kompong Deras, Beraik Aji, Deria, Suai Khliang, Jumnik and Kompong Vikhia; Sombor in Keruchma; and Rokaperam in Tebong Khemum district in Cham area.

On a Friday in mid-June, 1975, while the Muslims were performing Friday prayers in the mosque, a Communist leader in charge of the community at Tebor, by the name of Berum Samet appeared with a number of his men. Forcing the people to stop praying he asked them to listen to what he had to say. The speech went on for so long that some people fearing that the Zuhur prayer time would be over left the meeting in order to perform the prayers and returned as soon as they finished praying.

Little did they know the fate in store for performing their prayers! The Communists immediately seized the Muslim leaders such as the Kadhi, Imam

Tabib Ahmad, Tuan Syahid Ali and others and after gathering them in the middle of the crowd shot them dead. Such was the brutality perpetrated on those regarded as hostile towards them.

After this incident the next move by the Communists was to break up the Muslim community in line with their policy. Since July 1975 families were broken up; young boys and girls and small children were forcibly separated from their parents. The parents were no longer to be responsible for them since they have been placed in the care of certain organisations who were made responsible for them.

A most terrible fate has befallen our Muslim girls. The Communist soldiers were encouraged to take any girls they liked as their wives without any

marriage formality. The girls were forced to slave for them devoid of human feeling. The young men, on the other hand, were free to choose their own wives and could approach any girls directly without having to go through their parents or a marriage formality.

When the Muslims in Kompong Deras could no longer bear such harsh rule they petitioned the local Khmer Rouge leader asking that the young Muslim men should be allowed to marry the Muslim girls. Unfortunately, in consequence of their action they were arrested and made to dig their own graves along a ditch about 400 metres from the village. A mass killing then took place with the people being shot and their bodies thrown into the holes in a grisly fashion.

Among those murdered were:—

1. Zakaria bin Sa'id
2. Hj. Idris bin Taib
3. Omar bin Yahya
4. Imam Mohd Zain bin Harun
5. Isa bin Abu Talib
6. Harun bin Hasyim
7. Yusof bin Isa
8. Yaakob bin Isa
9. 'Ali bin Ahmad
10. Abu Bakar bin 'Ali

After the incident the Communists gathered the villagers in Kompong Deras and told them that the 10 people had been killed because they tried to resist party policy.

Many former Muslim leaders have also been shot. As far as is known 150 such people and soldiers from the former Muslim army led by Abdullah bin Wahab and Ustaz Hassan, a graduate of Al-Azhar in Cairo have been killed. A similar fate has befallen former high government officials.

Since October up to now Muslims living in Kompong Cham, Kompong Chahnang, Pursat, Battambang and other places, irrespective of whether they are men, women or children, young or old, have been forced to clear the jungle and till the land and dig drains, etc. Those who were forced to dig drains and were required to complete three metres a day. This meant working from 7 in the morning until 9.30 at night. Food was provided for all together — 150 to a group and for every 20 or 30 persons there would be one Muslim included. When meal time came, someone would announce curtly, 'Time to eat'. Whether one heard it or not, it didn't really matter. For every 150 persons, 50 milk-tins of rice were provided. As for

vegetables everyone was expected to find for themselves. For the Muslims it was really difficult because lard was used in cooking and sometimes pork would be introduced in the diet. Muslim women were forced to raise pigs, together with the others as happened in Daung Miah, Pursat.

Those Muslims who could not stand such a life any longer and asked to be excused on religious grounds were told that their request could not be met. The refusal would be announced to the others and the Communists would inform everybody that they refused their request because their policy is 'to treat everybody equally'.

Since 17 April, 1976, the Khmer Rouge soldiers have acted very harshly towards followers of any religion — not only Islam but also Buddhism and Christianity. Religious objects in Churches have been destroyed and Buddhist monks killed. Mosques have been converted into stores or put to some other use, e.g. the Mosque at Kompong, Andong sa, has been turned into a pig sty. Muslims were forbidden to pray but instead they were forced to keep pigs and eat pork.

I have seen with my own eyes what has been done at Kompong Daung Miah, Pursat, in order to wipe out the Islamic religion. For example, they have asked the Kadhis, Imams and religious teachers to hand over all religious books and the Qur'an while they in turn have been forced to become Communists. Muslim women were forced to go about bare-breasted, cut their hair short and to wear pants. Muslims have also been forced to move from their original villages to live in new areas together with non-Muslims — one Muslim family to 20 non-Muslim families. They have also been forbidden to meet or assemble in a group and any form of worship and religious observance forbidden.

When I was forced to enter the Communist indoctrination class in November, 1975, I learnt that:—

- (1) the Communists' aim is to destroy the Muslim religion in Cambodia;
- (2) no religious group would be allowed to maintain its identity and to practise its religion;
- (3) names of kompons indicating any religious or outside influence have been abolished. New names have been given to them. All religious books have had to be surrendered to the authorities. All Kadhis and Imams have lost their positions.

Courtesy: Impact International

Catch Hold The Oppressor

In a Hadith reported by Ibn Mas'ud it was stated that Muhammad, (peace be upon him), slept on a mat. When he awoke there were impressions on his back. Ibn Mas'ud asked, "O messenger of Allah! Why do you not order us to spread a bed for you and to prepare it?" Muhammad, (peace be upon him,) replied, "What is my connection with this world? My relation with this world is nothing except like that of a rider who wants rest under a tree. He takes his rest and then leaves from under the tree."

This Hadith shows that we must consider our stay on earth merely as a rider taking rest under a tree before continuing on our journey. The Hadith shows that we are here but for a fleeting moment. It follows, therefore, that we should make optimum use of our time on earth. What better use can there be but to spend our life doing what Almighty Allah created us to do — to worship Him, to serve Him and to obey Him. Our lives should be spent *fi sabi lillah* — in the cause of Allah.

The cause, service or obedience to Allah means total submission to His Will. It means observation of His Laws in all aspects of our lives. It is something all-encompassing. Everything we do should be done "In the name of Allah".

One particular aspect of this total service to Allah is "Enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong." This is a direct injunction from Allah mentioned in many verses of the Qur'an one of which is in Surah 3, Verse 104 — "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity."

Abu Sayeed al-Khodri reported that the messenger of Allah said, "Whoever amongst you

finds something detestable let him change it with his hand, if he is not able, then with his tongue (he should speak out against it); and if he is not able even to do that, then he should dislike it in his heart, and that is the weakest of faith."

Muhammad, (peace be upon him), also said, "By Him in whose hands there is life, you must enjoin good and forbid evil, otherwise it is certainly near that Allah will send chastisement upon you from Himself. You will then certainly call Him but you will not be responded to."

In another Hadith it was reported by Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud that Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, "When the children of Israel were falling into sins, their learned men prohibited them but they did not turn back. Afterwards the learned men took seat in the assemblies and ate and drank with the sinners. So Allah set up the hearts of some of them against those of others and cursed them through the tongues of David and Jesus, the son of Mary."

In a Final Hadith, Muhammad, (peace be upon him) admonished us, "By Allah, you must enjoin good and forbid evil, and you must catch hold of the hand of the oppressor, give him a severe warning and make him incline to truth or Allah will surely set up the hearts of some of you against others, and then He will certainly curse you as He cursed them."

It can be deduced from the above that we are commanded to stand firmly as witnesses enjoining right and forbidding wrong. Also that anybody who refuses to do this or who mixes with the evil-doers without restraining them will suffer a similar fate like the Israelites. Muslims who refuse to fulfil this obligation will also suffer in a similar manner.

By Omar Gorib

ABU BAKR YOUTH CAMP

The second annual youth camp, The Abu Bakr Islamic Youth Camp, managed by a 'Special Camp Committee' and directed by Brother Hisham Badran, is being held at Balandra, from 22 - 29 July.

Approximately 200 campers, ages ranging from 8 - 20, are attending.

LOCAL ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

A Conference sponsored by the Islamic Missionaries Guild of the Caribbean is being held at the Mucarapo Junior Secondary School, Port of Spain, Trinidad, from 23 - 30 July.

The theme is 'The Muslim family in the Caribbean and South America'.

Dr. Ahmad Totonji, Assistant Secretary General of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth is attending as guest speaker.

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THE ISLAMIC TRUST BOOKSHOP

In this article, Omowale B. Muhammad (Andy Thomas) traces the origin of Muslims in the Caribbean, analyses the Muslim community in Trinidad and Tobago and suggests guidelines for its improvement.

Before going into the subject matter we must take a brief look at Islam in the world context for only against this background can a proper analysis of the Muslim Community in Trinidad and Tobago be made.

At the peak of its development the Islamic Empire extended over three continents — Europe, Asia and Africa covering much more territory than the Roman Empire before it. But European imperialism had always been hostile to Islam and beginning with the Crusades, it disorganised Muslim culture and industry, stopped the development of its art, overthrew its government and caused a general stagnation of its development.

This same imperialism brought the first Muslims to the Western Hemisphere. These Muslims were African slaves who were uprooted from their homeland and shipped to the Caribbean and the Americas. Over 150 million Africans were 'exported' during the slave trade mainly from West African nations which have majority Muslim populations even today.

Afro-American writer, Alex Haley, bore out this fact when he traced his ancestry to the small Muslim village of Juffure in the Gambia. His famous book "ROOTS" is a vivid picture of the tyranny of the Slave Trade and the structure of ancient African Muslim society.

Some historians claim that Muslim explorers from Africa landed here before Columbus but there is no definite historical evidence of this, so we have to accept the Muslim slaves as the heralds of Islam to our shores.

Intellectual development was high in the World of Islam particularly in the West African Mandingo State of Melle (Mali). Its University of Timbuktu and Masjid of Sankure were the intellectual centres of Islam. Many of the slaves brought here were Mandingoes who spoke fluent Arabic and were knowledgeable in the Qur'an and the Muslim sciences.

A report prepared by Robert R. Madden — one of six special magistrates assigned to Jamaica to carry out a scheme of 'Apprenticeship' among slaves in 1833 gave a very good insight into this. Part of the report stated:

"They could all read and write Arabic and one of them showed me a Qur'an written from memory by

FIRST MUSLIMS :

From Africa To The Caribbean

one of them Benjamin Cochrane, a free negro who practised with no little success as a doctor in Kingston, was in the habit of coming to me on Sundays to give me information about the medical plants and popular medicine of the country, a more intelligent and respectable person I do not know. His history is that of hundreds of others in Jamaica Cochrane says that his father was a chief in Mandingo country. Plenty of books in Mandingo country, but not much schools, the great schools are farther up country. He began to learn to be a doctor in Mandingo country. . . .

European historians have distorted the facts to show that Africans were savages without culture or civilization. They have done this in order to keep the African unaware of his heritage and therefore subservient to European domination. This pattern is a carry over from slavery. The slave had to be deculturised in order to accept his enslavement, so total restrictions were placed on his cultural practices. Even family life was destroyed in the effort to prevent the handing down of culture from parents to children.

No slave was allowed to write or speak Arabic or any African language for that matter. Performance of Salaah was punishable by flogging. Congregational prayer was out of the question. Hajj was impossible. Pork was the main diet (apart from vegetables). The only form of assembly that was permitted was to partake in Christian prayers under Christian preachers.

The result of this was that Islam died when the original African slaves died and the second generation of slaves grew up as Christians. They were taught the distorted Christian concept that the black race was cursed by God and condemned to slavery. Thus they came to accept their condition as being ordained by God

Pure Christianity, like Islam, believes that all men are brothers and equal, but in order to uphold slavery the Christian slave-masters had to distort their scriptures. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 16, Page 2000, 1971— "It was the misfortune of the African to be enslaved in America by Christians, who, unable to reconcile their beliefs with the practice of slavery, recast their conception of the Negro so that they came to regard him as property, not as human beings entitled to rights and liberties."

The third edition of 'The Sociology of Social Problems', by Paul B. Horton and Gerald R. Leslie, explains a little more. Quote: "The 'all men are created equal' dictum did not apply to Negroes, since they were property and not men. Theories of a biblical Hamitic curse, of incomplete or separate evolutions, of geographic determinism, and of intelligence tests evidence were successively employed to justify the treatment of Negroes as inferiors. As long as such notions were believed and most people did believe them there was no inconsistency in professing democratic ideals while practising discrimination."

Thus both slavemaster and slave grew to accept slavery and to act out their roles. Of course many African slaves rebelled and some even set up rebel communities of their own. Some of these communities still exist, but they have not preserved the Spirit of Islam since they were isolated from the mainsprings of Islamic culture.

INDENTURED IMMIGRANTS

Islam came to the Caribbean again with the indentured labourers from India in 1845. These labourers came from Lucknow, Punjab, Calcutta, Madras and other parts of India. They were mostly Hindu and Muslim and were brought to fill the labour vacuum that was created when slavery was abolished and the Africans left the plantations.

Some historians say that the Africans regarded the Indentured Indians as 'Strikebreakers', because had they not come the plantations would have failed and would probably have fallen into the hands of the Africans. This may be one of the reasons for the subtle antagonism between Africans and Indians today.

However, the Indentures knew nothing of the politics of the West Indies. They were only interested in earning the small pittance they were promised and eventually owning a bit of the land on which they worked. In fact many Indentures never knew that they were being

taken halfway across the world to be used as scab workers. They were told that their jobs lay just across the bay and that they could return home anytime. They were used just as viciously as the Africans were used.

But with slavery abolished, their lot was a bit easier than the Africans under slavery and they were able to preserve Islamic traditions. Yet there were drawbacks, principal among which were the racial stigma that became attached to Islam and the close identification of Islam with Hinduism. The average non-Indian man in the street in Trinidad and Tobago today believes that a Muslim and a Hindu are one and the same, worshipping idols and observing caste differences. And how many Trinidadian non-Indians can tell the difference between a Masjid and a Mandir?

Islam has remained alive in Trinidad and Tobago because of the religious freedom allowed the Indentured Indians. But the biggest challenge facing Muslims today is to extricate themselves from the meshes of racialism and Hinduism.

Now what caused this state of affairs? How did Islam become so stigmatised?

First of all, there were and still are many more Hindus than Muslims and Hindi was the common tongue of both Hindus and Muslims. We must remember too that the slavemasters used Christianity to deculturise the colonised peoples of the world, so the Christian powers saw to it that Islam remained among the Indian population of Trinidad and branded it as idolatry along with Hinduism.

There were no Muslim scholars or intellectuals among the Indentures, who could analyse what was happening and formulate programmes to counteract. Added to this was the fact that the Muslims felt more affinity to their Hindu brothers than to the other sectors of society, so they became involved in the rituals and festivities of Hinduism and assimilated some Hindu practices in the process.

The oppression they bore did not discriminate between Hindu and Muslim. It was and still is the Indian being oppressed and this joint suffering welded them even closer. Some inter-married and their children grew up with little or no Islamic training.

Christian missionaries stepped up their deculturation programme by opening mission schools in the Indian areas, offering only a Christian education to the Indian children. As a result, some Muslims (and many Hindus) became Christians. Many changed their names

or gave their children Christian first names. Some even became Christian ministers and priests. It is not strange today to hear of priests named Muhammad or Abdullah.

Christian educated Muslim children became unwitting agents of imperialism and they ridiculed Islam in the faces of their mothers and fathers. Christian education made them ashamed of the honoured traditions of their fore-fathers and proud of the traditions of their slave-masters. Imagine a Muslim child being made to think that the European Crusaders were heroes and the Muslims infidels. And the same text books are used in Muslim schools. There is not a single school in Trinidad and Tobago that teaches Islam as the complete social, political, economic and spiritual system which it is.

Today, many Africans realise that their fore-fathers came as Muslims from Africa and their heritage is Islam. Many are now returning to Islam.

Perhaps the worst outcome of all this is the growing materialism and immorality which Muslims have inherited from the decaying Christian society. Muslim girls enter beauty contests, model skimpy clothes, patronise clubs and bars and even indulge in prostitution. Drugs, gambling, alcohol, fornication and adultery have become commonplace. One can hardly distinguish a Muslim from an unbeliever anymore.

It is clear, therefore, that the improvement of the Muslim community in Trinidad and Tobago is of dire necessity.

The Black Power Movement of the late 60's and early 70's brought some historical consciousness to African people in the western world. Many of them, myself included, realised that Islam is their heritage as well. This led to the growth of several Muslim organisations, foremost among which is the Nation of Islam in the U. S.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, however, racial antagonism is hindering the proper assimilation of African and Indian Muslims. And since the African Muslims are ill-equipped to exist on their own, many of the organisations they formed are weakening. Quite a few of their members left, having not been properly grounded in Islam. Some have even become Communists and Rastafarians as

they continue to search for an identity.

The root cause of all the difficulties that face Islam and the world today is the rise of materialism. This began in the Middle Ages when the scholars of Europe rejected their religion - Christianity, which had been oppressing them, and opted for materialism. This happened because the World of Islam failed to use its resources to reach the masses of Europe and solve their spiritual and material difficulties. The result was that the materialistic beast which grew in Europe almost destroyed the World of Islam.

Materialism is threatening the world today and should Muslims make the same mistake again we will all be buried under a form of oppression that would make slavery and colonialism seem like Heaven. In his address to last year's (1977) pilgrims in Mecca, King Khalid of Saudi Arabia said: "We Muslims, the more we hold fast to these eminent ideals, the better is our prospect to get up and bring the world under our control. On the other hand the farther we veer away from our faith the faster we succumb to factors of decay and start suffering from social and political ills and eventually fall prey to the enemies of Islam who are lying in ambush to attack us."

With these words in mind, let us examine the points in favour and against the improvement of the Muslim Community in Trinidad and Tobago and suggest guidelines for progress.

POINTS IN FAVOUR

1. *Human resources are the greatest asset to any form of development and our Muslim population, (approximately 150,000) with its high birth rate is weapon number one. About 99 % of the Muslim population are of Indian descent, but with proper projection of Islam the African descendants in our country will soon come home.*
2. *The economic affinity of Trinidad and Tobago, as an oil producing nation, with the Arab world is, in my estimation, the favourable factor of next importance. Any government of our country would be patronising to Islam for this reason. The climate here would always be favourable to the spread of Islam no matter who is in power, for economic factors always decide the policy of Western governments. We must take full advantage of this.*

(Continued on page 9)

TRAINING FROM FASTING

When we adopt Islam, we are undertaking a covenant, the consideration of which has been promised in the *Akhira* (life hereafter). This covenant implies change, change in belief, values, attitudes and consequently outlook on life. This covenant has been made on the basis of Iman, faith in Allah. The contents of this covenant is the recognition that Allah is one and we submit totally to Him and we will spread Saleh (goodness) on the earth and the fulfilment of this will be salvation in the *Akhira*.

But to spread *Saleh* (goodness), we should first have *taqwa* (righteousness). *Taqwa* basically means fulfilling all divine obligations, in other words, we should be Godconscious. Because of its deep significance, the word *taqwa*, forms the central theme of the month of *Ramadan* (month of fast).

"Oh you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you even as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain taqwa."

Qur'an 2:183.

It is naturally that fasting should be ordained on the *Ummah* (community) which was commanded to pursue the *Siratal Mustaqeem* (straight path) because fasting is an activity whereby a determined and definite effort is made to bring our will to conform to the Divine Will. So too does it serve as an instrument for rising above all the needs of the body, bearing their pressure and weight — out of preference for Allah's pleasure and good rewards.

It is *taqwa* (righteousness) which is awakened in the human heart when the *saum* (fast) is fulfilled. *Taqwa* guards such hearts against destroying the fast by disobedience, even that which occurs in the imagination. We know very well the importance of *taqwa* in the sight of Allah and its weight on our scales. It is a goal to which our souls aspire. Fasting is one of the means and a way leading to *Taqwa*.

Saum is a form of *tazkiya*. *Tazkiya* means literally the purification or the cleansing of all those things which are unwholesome, unwelcome and unwanted. At the same time, it endows the human being with all those things which are essential for growth and development for blossoming and flowering. The *tazkiya* of a person through fasting would mean the developing of his/her character,

his/her thought, his/her behaviour, it would mean the moulding of his/her entire flow of actions to free them from those evils, those unwholesome traits which are obnoxious, undesirable in the eyes of Allah and to endow them with all those virtues which Allah wants to flourish in human life.

During the month of fast, six instruments are available to us for *tazkiya* (purification) which will lead to *taqwa* (righteousness). The month of *Ramadan* trains us to remember Allah, *dhikr*. The importance of *dhikr* lies in the fact that it creates a mental, a psychological 'climate.' In this climate, we can protect ourselves from the evil encroachments and inroads of the external environment wherever we may be. *Dhikr* is not difficult. While we are travelling, while we are on a bus, while we are on a train, whenever we can afford a few minutes, a minute, even half a minute, say "*Allahu Akbar*", or "*Subhanallah inni Kuntu min al-Zalimin*" etc. All this will give us a different mental climate from the anti-Islamic elements. In every situation, we can preserve the Islamic ethos by *dhikr*.

Ramadan is the month of repentance, *istighfar* or *tawbah*. *Istighfar* is repentance for one's sins, mistakes or aberrations. *Tawbah* is turning back to Allah. The month of *Ramadan* gives us an opportunity to reflect and contemplate upon our behaviour so that we may become conscious of our mistakes and sins. Primarily *istighfar* is a state of mind and *tawbah* is a state of resolve. And the greatness of Islam is that it enables us to raise our conduct from the abyss of unconsciousness to the heights of consciousness. If one makes a slip, one should stop, regret it and make a resolve not to commit it again.

Ramadan is also a month of perseverance and patience, *sabr*. To cultivate *sabr* means that we must stick to the path of virtue and come back to it whenever we commit a mistake or any aberration is made. *Sabr* also means remaining steadfast in the face of the tempest of adversity, when temptations are besetting one, when threats are intimidating one.

Ramadan is a month of self-appraisal and self-criticism, *ihatisab*. During this month, we should spend some time in appraising ourselves and we should be as honest and as frank to ourselves as we can. In appraising ourselves, we should

be harsh to ourselves and lenient to others. That should be the cornerstone of our policy and if we stick to it, then only good will result, insha Allah.

Finally, *Ramadan* is a month of supplication, *du'a*, asking Allah's help, asking Him for everything that is needed. *Du'a* is one of the most important instruments of *tazkiyah* because it is a snapshot of all our ambitions. One's entire scale of priorities in life can be reflected in one's *du'a*. We may be very crude in the way we make our *du'a*, but it is much dearer to Allah if we make it with sincerity. The Prophet Muhammad

Fasting

(peace be upon him) once said that some of one's *du'a* are accepted just upon asking for them; some of them are fulfilled not in the form in which one asked for them but even in a better form; and some of them remain unfulfilled and on the Day of Judgement, one will find that the reward for the *du'a* unfulfilled is so great that one would wish that those *du'a* which had been fulfilled had not been and that one could have the rewards of them then. So no part of our *du'a* goes in vain.

All these factors are necessary for the training and preparing of the heart, mind and body, which have to bear the hardships of a road covered with obstacles and thorns, at the sides of which desires and inclinations are strewn about and along which are thousands of temptations beckoning its travellers. *Tazkiya* is our vehicle and *taqwa* our destination.

By Muhammad Mashuq Ally

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, "Every good action of the son of Adam shall be multiplied ten to seven hundred times. The Almighty Allah said, 'Except fasting, because it is for Me, and I shall Myself compensate it. He, gives up his passions and food for Me' For a fasting man, there are two rejoicings: one at the time of breaking his fast and the other at the time of meeting his Lord, and certainly the fragrance of the mouth of a fasting man is more pleasant to Allah than the smell of musk...."

(Space courtesy Mi)

"Oh you who believe! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you so that you may learn self-restraint."

Qur'an 2:183

SIGNIFICANCE OF FASTING

The reasons why Muslims fast can be found directly in the Qur'an, and the Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him). Muslims fast to fulfil a religious obligation and to earn the pleasure of Allah. It has also been reported that the Prophet Muhammed, (peace be upon him) said: "Anyone who

tion, at any time the night before the next day on which he is fasting, approximately as follows: "O God! I intend to fast for the coming day as part of the whole month of Ramadan. O God! Help me to fulfil my duty conscientiously to please You."

He/she may wake up about an hour before dawn for prayer (taha-jjud, salat). He performs ablutions, recites from the Qur'an and performs the prayer, which produces physical, mental, and spiritual fulfilment. This may take from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the individual's wish. Afterwards, the Muslim has a light predawn meal, called Sahoor. Usually Muslims prefer moist foods high in protein and vitamins. Eggs, cheese, yogurt milk, fresh or dehydrated fruits, vegetables and bread are among the foods which may be included in breakfast. It has been reported that eating a meal before dawn is considered to be a blessing to the individual. The meal must be completed, however, before the first light of dawn, and Muslims must then totally abstain from food and drink, smoking and sexual intercourse throughout the day until sunset.

After dawn, anytime during about one and a half hours before sunrise, Muslims perform their dawn prayers (Salatul Fajr), which include two cycles (Rakats), preceded by two supererogatory cycles.

During the day, they pray twice, at noon (Salatul Zuhur) and in the late afternoon (Salatul Asr). Immediately after sunset, they break their fast with liquids, such as water, milk or juice, along with dates taken in odd numbers, after saying: "O God! I have fasted for Your pleasure. O God! Accept my fast and reward me." This breaking of the fast is called Iftar. Then the sunset prayer (Salatul Maghrib) is performed, after which dinner is eaten. It is recommended that the fasting person should not completely fill the stomach with foods and liquids. The night prayer (Salatul Isha) is performed two hours later. During Ramadan, there is an extra night prayer (Salatul Taraweeh).

During the last ten days of Ramadan, Muslims are encouraged to undertake additional devotions. During the time, there is a night called "Night of Power" (Lailatul Qadr), which is better than one thousand months worth of living (Qur'an 97:115). Muslims are, therefore, encouraged to spend the whole of this night praying and reciting the Qur'an individually and/or collectively. During these last ten days, individuals are also encouraged to intensify their religious observation and to retire temporarily for one to ten days in Mosques for prayers, meditation, vocal

recitation of the Qur'an, and spiritual attainment. This is called I'tikaf.

Thus, the food and life habits of a Muslim during the month of fasting are totally changed from the routine. Generally, less food is consumed, as only two instead of three meals are eaten during 24 hours.

The times of meals are also changed—one before dawn, the other immediately after sunset. The hours of sleep during the normal rest period are shortened, due to the night prayers and the early breakfasts before dawn. The behaviour, mood, and personality of the individuals are improved during this period due to the self-control they attain.

EXEMPTIONS FROM FASTING

Fasting throughout Ramadan annually is obligatory on all Muslims past puberty. Children under the age of puberty are exempted, although they are encouraged to fast as many days as they can. The age of puberty for boys is when they start nocturnal emission, while for girls, it would be at menarche.

The following groups are exempted from fasting:

- 1) Sick people with recoverable illness may postpone their fast as long as they are ill and make up for it later, a day at a time for every day missed.
- 2) People who are travelling may not fast, but they must make up later the number of days they have missed. It had been reported that the Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him) said, "It is not piety to fast while travelling."
- 3) Women during pregnancy and lactation... however, later they must make up the number of days which they have missed.
- 4) Women during menstruation (often six to seven days) or women during post-natal discharge (usually forty days). For them, fasting is forbidden, but they must make up for the number of days missed.
- 5) Elderly people who are physically unable to fast. However, they are to give a needy person food for a full day or its value for each day missed.
- 6) Insane and retarded people.
- 7) Those engaged in very hard work, such as soldiers on the battlefield. Although permitted to delay fasting during Ramadan, they must make up the missing day's later.

Continued on page 8

in Islam

fasts the month of Ramadan with good intention for the pleasure of Allah, his/her sins are forgiven (or obliterated)."

Muslims believe that Ramadan confers great blessings. The Revelations of the Qur'an began during this month, and the Qur'an is considered to be a guide to mankind. In this month, the doors of the Heavens are said to be widely open while those of Hell are tightly closed. The supplication of the fasting persons is accepted by Allah. There is a special night in the latter part of Ramadan which is better than a thousand months of a person's life.

Fasting is also considered to be a training in controlling one's needs and desires, in restraining oneself from self-indulgence, and in deepening one's spiritual life. The Qur'an concisely states that fasting is prescribed for Muslims, "so that you may remain conscious of God"

Qur'an 2:183.

Muslims also fast to improve their health, as the Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him) said: "If you fast you will have better health," and also, "Eat less, you will be healthier." The hunger which Muslims experience while fasting also enables them to appreciate the hunger of the poor and the needy.

PRACTICE OF FASTING

The practice of fasting among Muslims follows a sequential daily pattern which may be summarized as follows:

The Muslim makes a verbal inten-

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF FASTING

This is an interview with a Muslim brother who accepted Islam a few years ago. In it he tells us about his first experiences of fasting.

Q. How long have you become a Muslim?

A. I have accepted Islam about six years ago. My heart was opened to this light from Allah only a few days before the month of Ramadan (fasting).

Q. Before you became a Muslim, did you fast at all?

A. No, I have never fasted before. However, I did come in contact with Muslims and some people of a Christian sect - the Baptists who fasted. When I questioned them about it they always said that it was a good thing.

Q. What were your first reactions when you learnt that you had to fast for a whole month?

A. I discussed this new road I was going to travel with some brothers on the block one night and there were mixed reactions. Some of them found that thirty days of fasting too difficult as there were no material rewards. Anyway, a couple of the more courageous brothers and myself decided to fulfil this task.

FASTING IN ISLAM

NULLIFICATION OF FASTING:

Fasting would be nullified if a person deliberately and willingly commits an act which breaks fasting. In such circumstances, the person must repeat the fast at a later time with or without penance. Some of the factors which nullify the fast are:

- 1) Any solid or liquid material, taken intentionally during the fasting periods
- 2) Sexual intercourse.
- 3) Intentional vomiting.
- 4) Continuing to eat and drink or to have sexual intercourse just after dawn, not realizing that the time of fasting has already started, and then discovering the error.
- 5) To break the fast just before sunset, assuming or thinking that the sun has already set.
- 6) Intravenous or intramuscular injections or nutrients for health reasons

Source : 'Al-Khutab'
by Dr. Ahmad Sakr

Always liking to be practical and with a sense of manliness, I casted my vision on the people whom I knew. I saw weak, timid people who did not challenge wrong doings nor the wrong-doers, and I asked myself, "How come I was taking a stand against oppression and the oppressors?"

Nevertheless, this did not deter me from fasting.

Furthermore, the voices of the Socialist, Marxist and Black Nationalist groups, which I was involved in before I became a Muslim, kept ringing in my ears their slogan - 'Religion is the opium of the masses' trying to discourage me from practising Islam.

But no, fasting is a command from Allah and He is against oppression. So I knew that I was on the right road.

Q. What were your impressions of your first fast?

A. My first day of fasting was really testing. The brothers who had decided to fast met early that morning. After rapping a little we received news that a brother from the 'block' was arrested by the police. We were upset by the news and the brothers decided to break the fast. I did not partake of the food that was offered. It was one of the best decisions I had made in my whole life.

A servant who obeys his master, a child who obeys his parents or a pupil who obeys his teacher when commanded to do what is right makes a good decision and will be rewarded by Allah.

Q. How did you benefit from fasting?

A. The rewards of obeying Allah by fasting were:

1. Feeling the pangs of hunger and thirst just as the poor and destitute without crying about these 'discomforts'.
2. Setting a goal (sunset) and striving to reach it without breaking the fast.
3. Making easy what people, without faith in Allah, look upon as hard.
4. Of course, the tongue was silenced from lying, back-biting, idle talk, excessive laughter while the organs that formed the intellect were awakened by the stillness of the tongue.
5. I also learnt that with the other basic commands of Allah such as prayer, Zakaah (charity) and Hajj, a person can do them openly to please other people and not necessarily for the pleasure of Allah, but with fasting it is different. When someone is not in company with others and does not eat, drink or do anything to break the fast, he realises that Allah alone is his witness. In this

case, he does it only for the pleasure of Allah and not for show. This God-consciousness in the month of Ramadan helps him to become more conscious of his duties as a Muslim throughout the year.

Q. Do you have any recommendations to make to people concerning fasting?

A. I notice that many Muslims who are born of Muslim parentage violate this basic command of Allah eating and drinking openly in front of other Muslims when they are supposed to be fasting. When they do this, then, what is the difference between them and the non-Muslims? Certainly, this is a sign of disbelief.

I exhort my Muslim brothers and sisters to fast during the month of Ramadan, in order to renew our covenant with Allah and reap the rewards in the Hereafter, insha Allah. Finally, I end by saying - 'a person will never know how sweet honey is until he has tasted it'.

The Editorial Committee of
The Muslim Standard
wishes to apologise
for the late publication
of this issue.

The next issue will be published
for EID - UL - FITR
in sha Allah.

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FIRST MUSLIMS : FROM AFRICA TO THE CARIBBEAN

3. *Trinidad and Tobago is the economic leader of the Caribbean, therefore, the Islamic community here automatically assumes the position of leadership of Islam in the Caribbean.*
4. *The geographical location of Trinidad and Tobago in the Western Hemisphere makes our country a potential 'Mecca' in the West.*

POINTS AGAINST

1. *The racial stigma and co-identity with Hinduism is the major obstacle in the way of Islamic expansion in our country. Some of our politicians use this racialism and co-identity to further their political aims, harming Islam more and more in the process.*
2. *The Ahmadiyah movement which started in Pakistan but was denounced by King Faisal as un-Islam, has grown here and has caused much discord within the Muslim community.*
3. *Lack of cooperation between local Muslim organisations causes polarisation* and antagonism and hinders the development of a united Community. This is directly in opposition to the Islamic principle of mutual consultation.*
4. *Lack of knowledge of Islam has caused Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago to look to secular politics for solutions to their social, political and economic problems. Even the Muslims are active under political banners of Capitalism, Socialism and so on.*

These are only a few of the pros and cons of the Muslim situation in Trinidad and Tobago. Without doubt the reader can add many more to this list but I feel that I have touched the main issues. So let us go on to suggest guidelines for the improvement of the community.

SOME GUIDELINES

1. *A General Assembly comprising of representatives from each Muslim organisation in Trinidad and Tobago should be formed. This Assembly should meet at least once a month to decide policy and programmes for the whole Community. Such an Assembly would be in keeping with the Islamic principle of mutual consultation.*
2. *A Muslim newspaper ought to*

be published. This would go a long way towards projecting Islam and giving opinions of world news from an Islamic viewpoint. The paper must be addressed not only to Muslims but to the country in general. A newspaper would be more readily acceptable than a magazine for the average man reads newspapers.

3. *Dynamic radio and TV programmes should be broadcast to bring Islam into the homes of the people. These programmes must be broadcast at prime times and must be interesting. This would call for a harnessing of skills and creativity. There is a current trend to overpower Muslim radio programmes with Indian music, advertisements and Hindu culture. This is self-defeating. Radio and TV are the two most effective means of mass teaching. We must use them well.*
4. *Manhood training camps should be started and run on a six-month basis. The emphasis should be on preparing the type of Muslim youth who understands his role in today's society and can act as a catalyst in the Islamization process.*
5. *The existing Muslim schools should revise their curricula which have become secular and provide a truly integrated Muslim education. We must not be caught up in the trend of handing over schools to Government. This trend is the beginning of the end of Christianity. We must not follow. We should, instead, let their losses be our gains and insist that Islamic studies be included in the curricula of the Government run schools.*
6. *There should be more Muslim schools on three levels : (a) Pre-school, (b) Elementary, and (c) Secondary, and efforts should be made to add an Islamic faculty to the local university or to establish a regional Muslim University.*
7. *Emphasis should be laid on pre-school education, for this is the stage at which the Muslim child should be grounded. These schools are easily established and can be supported by Zakaah. Muslim women can be trained to run these schools either in or adjoining the Masjids.*
8. *A national council should be*

formed to institutionalise the principle of Zakaah and operate programmes to rehabilitate the poor, sick, aged and orphaned in a meaningful way. Not just to give hand-outs

9. *A Muslim Orphan Home should be established to take in unwanted children and make them Muslims. These children should then be adopted by Muslim families,*
10. *A Muslim Hospital and Blood Bank should be established where Muslims can be cared for according to Islamic standards. The existing blood banks take blood from anyone and many Muslims have received blood which came from pork-eaters and alcoholics. Such blood is contaminated.*
11. *Muslim Libraries should be set up throughout the country.*
12. *Poor and destitute Muslims should be settled on farms in the country areas. These farms can form the agricultural nucleus of the Muslim Community, providing Halal meat, milk and vegetables and a solid base for further ventures (super-markets, restaurants, canning industries, export, etc.). Handicraft, woodwork, pottery, etc. can be undertaken on the farms which will eventually grow into villages. Lands for these farms can be obtained by purchasing abandoned estates. The Zakaah Council and the proposed Islamic Bank can finance the agricultural programmes until they become self-sufficient. Each farm should be administered by trained agriculturists and run on a cooperative basis. Each farm should have its own Masjid and pre-school. Orphans and aged persons can also find a home on the farms.*
13. *Saving plans should be suggested so that Muslims could work positively towards making Hajj in their life-time.*
14. *Efforts should be made to have Muslim voices in the Senate and at all other levels of Government.*

Insha Allah, the people of Trinidad and Tobago must see Islam, not simply as another religion, but as an all-encompassing social, political, cultural, economic and spiritual system. Failing this, the people would continue to turn to the beast of materialism for their solutions.

IN THE SHADE OF THE QUR'AN

THE NIGHT OF POWER

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Power. And what will convey to you what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. The Angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the permission of their Lord, with all decree. Peace it is until the rising of the dawn.

This surah speaks about that great night, promised in advance . . . which the whole universe marks with joy, happiness and prayers. It is the night of the absolute and perfect contact between this world and the highest abode. It is the night which marked the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an sent to Muhammad (peace be on him); the night of that great event, unparalleled in the history of mankind for its splendour and the significance it brought to bear on the life of mankind as a whole. Its greatness is far beyond human realisation.

Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Power. And what will convey to you what the Night of Power is? The night of Power is better than a thousand months.

The Quranic statements which relate this great event glitter and shine. They flow with a light which is serene and friendly. It is Allah's light shining in His Qur'an:

Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Power''.

It is also the light of the Angels and of the Spirit moving to and fro between the earth and highest abode. "The Angels and the Spirit descend therein with the permission of their Lord, with all decrees". In addition, there is also the light at dawn which the surah portrays harmoniously along with the light of revelation and the angels as well as the Spirit of peace. "Peace it is until the rising of the dawn".

The night which is the subject of this surah is the same night of which mention is made in Ad-Dukhan — The Smoke (Surah 44).

Lo! We revealed it on a blessed night. Lo! We are ever warning whereupon every wise matter is made distinct. This is a command from Our Presence. Lo! We are

ever sending a mercy from your Lord. Lo! He is the Hearer, the All-Knowing.

It is established that it is a night in the month of Ramadan as stated in Al-Baqarah:

The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion. It is the night when the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet, peace be upon him, started in order that he should convey it to mankind. Ibn Ishaq related that the first revelation consisting of the opening of the surah, The Clot, took place in the month of Ramadan. The Messenger of Allah, peace be on him, was then at his devotions in the cave of Hira.

A number of statements placing this night have come down to us; some stress that it is the twenty-seventh of Ramadan, others, the twenty-first, a few others say it is one of the last ten days and some others do not go beyond saying that it is in Ramadan.

Its title 'The Night of Power' may be meant to denote assignment designation and organisation or its value, position and rank. Both meanings are relevant to that great universal event of the Qur'an, the revelation and the message assigned to the Prophet. For it is the greatest and most valuable of all events in this universe. It is also the event which explains more clearly than any other, the place of assignment, designation and organisation in the life of mankind. This night is better than a thousand months. The figure here and in similar places in the Qur'an does not signify its precise number. It is meant to denote a very big number. This night is better than thousands of months in the lives of people. Many thousand months and many thousand years have passed without leaving behind a fraction of the changes and results brought about in that blessed and happy night.

This night is of an essence too great to be understood by human intellect. "And what will convey to you what the Night of Power is". There is no reason to attach any value to the legends circulated amongst the masses concerning this night. It is great because Allah has chosen it for the announcement of the revelation of the Qur'an, the spreading of its light

throughout the universe, the overflowing of peace originating from the Divine Spirit on the conscience and lives of men. It is great because of what the Qur'an includes: an ideology, a perception of values and standards, a way of life and a code of moral behaviour, all of which promote peace in the world and in the mind. It is great because of the descent of the angels and Jibril (peace be on him) in particular, with the permission of their Lord, carrying this Qur'an which was sent down on that night, and their filling all the space between Heaven and Earth in such a splendid universal manifestation, strikingly portrayed in this surah.

If today we look in retrospect, after the lapse of a long chain of generations, to that glorious and happy night, and perceive that fascinating manifestation the world witnessed on that night, and ponder over the essence and dimensions of life on the earth, and on the concepts of hearts and minds, we behold a great reality. We then realise a part of the significance of this Qur'anic reference to that night; "And what will convey to you what the Night of Power is".

On that night every essential matter was made distinct, new values and standards were established, and positions were decided which are greater than those of individuals, because they belong to nations and countries. Positions still greater were also designated and these belong to situations and hearts.

Humanity, out of ignorance and to its misfortune, may overlook the value of the Night of Power, the essence of that great event and the greatness of the whole issue. When humanity ignored all that, it lost the happiest and most beautiful sign of grace which Allah bestowed on it. It lost the real happiness and peace gifted to it by Islam, namely the peace of conscience, family and society. The ways of material civilisation which were opened to it cannot be a compensation for its loss. Humanity is miserable in spite of higher production levels and better means of existence. The splendid light which once illuminated its soul was put out; the brilliant touch of happiness which carried it high up to the Highest Society was smothered; the peace which overflowed on the hearts and minds disappeared and nothing can compensate for the happiness of the soul, the heavenly

(Continued on page 11)

WITH CHILDREN IN MIND

STORY OF LOOT

While Prophet Ibrahim was working so energetically for the religion of God (Islam), a nephew of his by the name of Loot (Lot) was also doing his work. Prophet Loot was working in Sodom, east of the Dead Sea.

Prophet Loot was also strange to the people of Sodom. He was ordered by God to go to that spot and try to teach them God's religion.

Those people were strange and troublesome. They used to steal a lot and do many bad things. Those who lived in tribes used to be jealous of each other and because of this intense jealousy they tried to hurt each other a great deal. They formed gangs, and stole and attacked other innocent people, and they were mean and troublesome. They

THE NIGHT OF POWER

light and the elevation to the loftiest ranks.

We, the believers of Islam, are commanded not to forget or neglect this episode. The Prophet, peace be on him, has provided us with an easy and enjoyable way for the commemoration of this night, so that our souls may always be in close communion with it and with the universal episode which took place in it. He has urged us to spend this night of each year in devotions. We are asked to seek it in the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan. He said, "Seek the Night of Power in the last ten nights of Ramadan." "He who spends the Night of Power in worship, his motive being faith and devotion, will have all his previous sins forgiven."

Islam is not mere formalities. Hence the Prophet, peace be on him, specified that the consecration of that night must be motivated by faith and devotion. This would make its consecration an awareness of the far-reaching implication of what took place in that night and would ensure it being practised in complete devotion and dedication to Allah, praised be He. The consecration of that night causes the heart actually to feel a certain truth related to the concept stressed in the Qur'an.

—Adapted from *Fi Zilal Al Qur'an* by Sayyid Qutb.

even used to kill babies and older people, just imagine!

God through His mercy, chose Prophet Loot to help and correct these people. Prophet Loot preached often and hard and he tried to help and convince them to be good and to love God and worship Him. They listened to him at times but not many of them believed him or believed in his message. Most of them wanted just to continue to do what they wanted to do, and to be as they were. They wanted to continue to steal, and hurt and kill.

So, as you can see, Loot had very troublesome people on his hands, quite nasty and very bad. Loot had left Mesopotamia with Prophet Ibrahim and he came to Palestine, but God's orders were for him to go to this special place of such terrible crimes. In a way those people of Sodom were just as wicked as those of South Mesopotamia and they often refused to listen to Prophet Loot. They tried to hurt him and ridicule him and even torture him and his followers.

Time passed by and Prophet Loot got nowhere with those people. He had only a few followers, and the rest of the people in Sodom continued in their evil ways, stealing and murdering and being so nasty.

Now do you remember the three angels who came to visit Prophet Ibrahim and who gave him the good news that he was going to have a baby through his old wife Sara?

OH, YES I REMEMBER

Well, those three angels came to Prophet Loot and they gave him the special message from Almighty God. The message said that Loot, his family and his followers were to leave town because something very special and dreadful was going to happen. That is, all his family except for Loot's wife, because she turned out to be a disbeliever herself.

So, Prophet Loot gave word to his family and to those who believed in God, to prepare to leave town. When the evening came, they all left with their belongings. It was a long caravan which moved slowly away from that wicked town. With it, Prophet Loot and the good followers of his were going to safety.

As they were getting further and further away, an uproar took place. A sudden tremendous noise that shook the very earth from underneath them. It was a scary thing, a frightening earthquake, something they had never heard or seen before. The houses could be seen from a distance, crumbling and collapsing as if they were broken toys, all the buildings were being smashed to nothing but rubble. Fire was burning here and there and the noise of the people could be heard from a long distance.

Big rocks, were thrown high in the air, then they would fall down with tremendous noise that scared the people very much. Those bad people of the town could do nothing, since everything was so sudden, so severe. They were the people who did not believe in Loot as you know, they were the bad people whom God wanted to punish and he punished them severely.

The houses and the buildings broke to pieces. They fell on the people that were inside and they killed them and smashed them. The rocks that went up in the air hit the others who tried to escape. It was almost like a rain of rocks that was falling down. As a result, all those disbelievers were completely destroyed and those who were saved were Prophet Loot and the good people who believed in him.

They left the town to go to Palestine where Prophet Loot continued to call for the belief of God and to teach God's religion.

Source:
Stories of some of the Prophets,
Vol. 1.
By A.S. Hashim, M.D.

What Islam Stands For!

**FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY;
FREEDOM FROM TYRANNY;
FREEDOM FROM SUPERSTITIONS;
FREEDOM FROM ABSURD BELIEFS and
FREEDOM FROM BLIND SENSUAL PASSIONS.**

Islam stands for liberation from all sorts of slavery such as may inhibit the progress of humanity or may not allow it to follow the path of virtue and goodness. It means man's freedom from dictators who enslave him by force or fear, make him do what is wrong and deprive him of his dignity, honour, property or life. Islam liberates man from such tyranny by telling him that all authority vests in God and God alone; He alone is the Real Sovereign. All men are His subjects and as such He alone controls their destinies, none of them having the power to cause any benefit or avert any distress from his ownself independent of the Divine Will. All men shall be presented before Him on the Day of judgement to account for their performance in this life. Thus Islam brings to man freedom from fear or oppression inflicted on him by men like himself and who, in reality, are as helpless as he is and who are no less subject to the Will of God Almighty than he himself is.

Islam also means freedom from lust, including the lust for life, as it is this very weakness of man which is exploited by tyrants and dictators intentionally or otherwise in enslaving their fellowmen. But for it no man would silently accept subservience to men like himself or sit idle to watch tyranny on the rampage and dare not challenge it. It is a great blessing of Islam that it taught man to fight tyranny and oppression bravely rather than cringe before them in abject servitude.

As against blind passions and appetites, the love of God generates in life the values of love, virtue, truth, and striving hard in His way, the way of all that is good and lofty in life. Islam subjects human passions in the service of these noble goals of life. The love of God becomes the dominant and real directing force in Man's life. Without this no man

can claim to be a true Muslim.

A man steeped in sensual pleasures may entertain the mistaken belief that he enjoys life more than others do. But soon he has to realize his mistake, for he is gradually reduced to a mere slave to his blind passions. He is doomed to a perpetual life of deprivation and restlessness, for animal desires once run rampant become insatiable: the appetite increases with every effort to satisfy it. The result is a craze for the maximization of sensual pleasure. Such an attitude towards life is not conducive to progress, material or spiritual. Humanity cannot approach higher realms of nobility unless it is freed from the dominance of the blind animal appetites. It is only through control of the animal self that man is free to make progress — in the fields of science, arts or religion.

It is for this very reason that Islam attaches such a great importance to the freeing of man from his animal passions. For this purpose it neither favours monasticism nor gives man unbridled freedom to serve the demands of the flesh. It aims at the attainment of the balance between these two extremes. Whatever is there in the world is for man. It is there to serve him and not to dominate or rule over him. He should not allow himself to be made a slave to these, rather he should use them as means to a higher end, i.e. his spiritual perfection by disseminating the word of God amongst his fellowmen. Thus Islam has a two fold objective in view:

- (a) in the individual life it aims at providing to each and every individual a just and adequate share so as to enable him to lead a decent and clean life; and
- (b) in the collective sphere it arranges things in such a way that all the social forces of a society are

directed towards the enhancement of progress and civilization in accordance with its basic outlook upon life and in such a way that the balance between the constituent units and the whole, between the individuals and the community, is established

Islam has had a most liberalizing effect on human intellect as it is diametrically opposed to all sorts of superstition. Humanity has, in the course of history, fallen a prey to a number of absurdities, in theory and practice. Some of these were even described to have some divine origin. All these acted as shackles for the human minds, which groped about in the dark before the advent of Islam. With Islam it attained maturity and freedom from this hodge-podge of nonsense, symbolized in the so-called gods, distorted Jewish traditions, and the imbecilities of the Christian Church. Islam freed man from all superstitions and brought him back to God and established direct relation between man and his Creator.

Islam uses a very simple terminology. Its teachings are very easy to understand, perceive and believe in. It invites man to make use of the faculties given to him and to seek the fullest possible understanding of the world around him. It does not admit of any inborn hostility between reason and religion or for that matter between science and religion. Islam impresses upon man in clear and unequivocal terms that it is God and God alone who has in His immense mercy subjected all the things on this earth to man, and that all the facts that are discovered by scientific investigation and the material benefits that flow from that to man, are in fact blessings from God, for which man should offer his thanks to God, and strive hard so as to become a worthy servant of so Merciful and Beneficent a Master. Thus Islam holds knowledge and science as a part of faith rather than regard them as an evil intrinsically opposed to genuine belief in God.

What is the state of the world today. Has man freed himself from all superstition, imbecilities and absurd beliefs? Has he discovered the man within himself? Has he liberalized himself from the yoke of worldly tyrants indulging in the exploitation of man by man? If such a millenium has not been achieved despite all developments in science and technology, then Islam has still a great and glorious part to play.

by Abul A'la Maududi