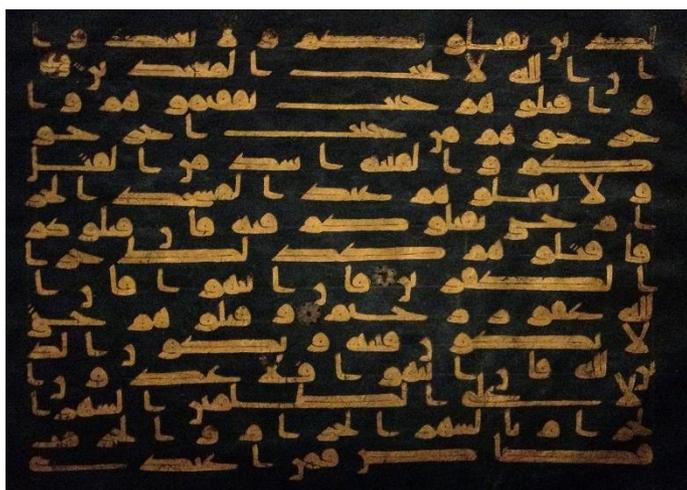


Muslims' Greatest Challenge

Choosing between
Tradition and Islam



Omar M. Ramahi

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُم تَبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلِ تَّبِعُوا

مَا آتَيْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتٍ نَآءُو لَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا

يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

And when they were asked to follow what Allah has revealed, they answered that instead we follow what we have found our forefathers doing. But even if their forefather did not understand anything or were misguided

The Mushaf: Chapter 2, Verse 170

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*Choosing between
Tradition and Islam*

Omar M. Ramahi



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To my father who provided me space to think;



*to all who value the truth more than their parents, family, health,
profession, and religion;*



*to all who do not aspire for superiority, authority, power or gran-
deur;*



*to that person who I met somewhere in the world and encouraged
me to write this book;*



*and to that little giant who initiated my journey,
I humbly dedicate this work.*

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Author's Note

This book is an attempt to find why Muslims are in conflict with themselves, why Muslims have been living in an intellectual isolation and intellectual vacuum. This book is an attempt to find why Islam, as embodied in the Mushaf, calls for sharply different norms than those adopted by the majority of Muslims. To search for the answers, the book uses, as much as possible, two sources: the first is critical reasoning, and the second is the Mushaf. The order of use of these two sources is important. In sharp contrast to the vast majority of books on Islam, this book does not base the validity of any argument on the stature of past or present personalities and scholars, irrespective of their high status and reverence amongst the majority of Muslims. Therefore, the reference for validity is different from what is used in those books.

The book takes a methodical approach to analyzing the techniques that evolved throughout the ages to marginalize the Muslims mind and to project reason as the archenemy of Islam. The book analyzes alleged prophetic narratives (Hadith) and interpretations of the Mushaf (*tafsir*) by prominent jurists to confirm that rationalism and reason were both, and largely, disconnected from Muslims intellectual discourse, at least in the overwhelmingly dominant religious material that has reached us.

This book analyzes fundamental contradictions in the way the vast majority of Muslims perceive Islam, and how the conceived and practiced Muslim or "Islamic" doctrines lack foundation in the Mushaf. The book goes behind the scene, so to speak, to understand the reasons behind such a vast disconnect. The book provides a context to the severe intellectual underdevelopment amongst most Muslims vis-à-vis their understanding of their religion. It looks at canonized practices and doctrines that emerged throughout the ages through dubious scholarship to maintain a docile, hopeless, aimless, and subservient Muslim *umma*. It brings to the forefront stark contradictions between the canonized Muslim doctrines and the Mushaf, contradictions that many Muslims choose to ignore.

The book challenges the use of Hadith as a source of Islamic legislation. It takes an unconventional perspective of the Mushaf's exegeses and reaches conclusions that are based on reason and the Mushaf's direct text, yet contradictory to the conventional Muslims' doctrines.

The book looks at the culture of violence championed by the historically triumphant Muslim scholars, jurists and clergy, whose

“scholarship” triumphed and morphed that of the other scholars who put the Mushaf first and everything else as secondary. It questions whether such culture inspired past and contemporary violent movements. The book revisits fundamental doctrines and canonized laws and looks carefully at their evolution and their connection to the Mushaf. Two chapters in the book address the two most important sources of Islamic Law: Hadith and the Mushaf. The analyses in these two chapters leads to unconventional conclusions, thus establishing a new perspective that stems purely from the Mushaf and critical reasoning. The conclusions in these two chapters put Hadith in a perspective and context completely non-convergent with prevailing Muslims doctrines. The conclusions will also have direct implications on what is typically perceived as Islamic law and the controversial doctrine of Sharia.

The book is not an attempt to reform Islam. The claim to reform Islam is highly offensive to most Muslims simply because reform means change, and typically carries the temporal connotation in the sense of “change to suite the times”. The book is not an attempt to “modernize” Islam. This is because Islam as embodied in the Mushaf is immutable for all times, otherwise, we would witness new revelations and Prophets to provide new revelations to suit the “modern” times. The book advocates the thesis that Islam, as embodied by the Mushaf, the divine revelation, is immutable and absolute. Rather than questioning the suitability of Islam for “the times”, the book advocates an understanding of the Mushaf through a persistent and gradual process that lead to absolute understanding of at least parts of it.

The book is neither an attack on Islam nor an appeasement of Muslims. It is a serious and methodical attempt to create a genuine discussion and reflection on the so-called Islamic doctrines that were developed many years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, doctrines that have thin connection, if not detrimental, to Islam. For the reasons outlined in the book, it is expected that some Muslims, or possibly many, will perceive the material of the book as highly provocative and controversial.

Many books on Islam can be grouped into four major categories. The first category includes books that have strong anti-Islam bias. These include two sub-categories: those with explicit bias and those with implicit bias disguised as pseudo-scholarship. Second, books written by Muslims or non-Muslims who try to justify that everything within Muslims’ religious doctrines is perfect but misunderstood. This category of

books attempt to reinterpret these doctrines to achieve convenient goals (perhaps these books can be considered as an attempt to “modernize” Islam and make it “compatible with the times”, i.e., an *asri* understanding of Islam). Third, books by Muslims (mostly) that show discomfort with “Islamic” doctrines and attempt to present a “modern” understanding of these doctrines rather than challenging the doctrines themselves. Such a “modern” understanding is perceived by some as an attempt to reform Islam. The fourth category includes books by non-Muslims who are genuinely interested in Islam but are deeply confused by the seas of contradictory doctrines. The authors of the last category are careful not to offend Muslims, but find themselves struggling with complex and deeply contradictory doctrines that were considered by most Muslim scholars and jurists as integral to Islam. The vast majority of these books (from the four categories) base their arguments on the Mushaf’s traditional exegeses and what is believed to be authentic Hadith. This book challenges the fundamental “Islamic” doctrines.

Finally, the key feature of this book is that it does not take the commentaries and opinions of famed Muslim scholars (including the most celebrated Muslim jurists) as an integral part of Islam. Some of the ideas and discussion presented in this book will appear controversial to many Muslims and even traditional scholars of Islam. However, in support of my ideas, I used the same two sources mentioned above: God’s greatest gift to humankind and the Mushaf.

There were numerous people who helped me shape my thoughts. To all, I am deeply indebted, especially to those long conversations with many of my brilliant engineering graduate students, whose clarity of thought and unwavering and scrutinizing intellect helped me refine my ideas. It is enthralling how the ideas of this book and the intellectual stimulus that it generated had a profound impact on my research group’s scientific philosophy. This is a strong testimony that for a religion to be meaningful, it has to be based on reality, i.e., the physical world.

Several Mushaf and Hadith databases have been used heavily throughout this work. An indispensable database for any Mushaf researcher is available online at <http://www.readverse.com/home/>. The Tafsir al-Quran (<https://sensortower.com/ios/us/pakistan-data-management-services/app/quran-tafsir-tfsyr-lqran/442158525/overview>) is available as an App on the iPhone platform only. The www.quran.com and

www.sunnah.com are two helpful databases for anyone interested in Islam and especially in the way the vast majority of Muslims view and interpret their religion.

I am very grateful to my daughter Zainab for her review of the first draft and for her superb editing and valuable feedback that helped improve the presentation significantly. I acknowledge most highly Professor Andreas Christmann for reviewing the first draft of the book and his valuable feedback and encouragement. I like to thank Ms. Kelly Comeau for her superb copyediting. Finally, thanks to my son Yousuf for his help in editing the final manuscript.

The most important and overwhelming gratitude I have is for the enormous privilege of having the time and space to think and write. I see so many people in the Muslim world who do not have a minute to sit and think about anything let alone their religion, simply because they are busy making ends meet by working more than 12 hours a day just to get by. Perhaps my modest effort, through this book, may contribute to improving their condition somehow. This silent majority of the Muslim world, identified easily by their deeply sad and silent faces, need to have their say someday.

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2019

CONVENTIONS

Since this is a book about Islam, reference to the Mushaf (conventionally, but incorrectly referred to as the Qur'aan) on which the entire religion is based is essential. The Mushaf, the divine revelation, contains 114 chapters and a total of 6,236 verses. In practically all printed Mushafs, a verse is a text that is separated from other verses within a chapter by two circles. Throughout this book, when a Mushaf verse is stated in Arabic, it is followed by an English translation, which is partially an interpretation since converting one language into another is essentially an interpretation. My approach is to keep the translation/interpretation to a minimum. When I am not convinced of the proper translation/interpretation of a certain Arabic word, it is left untranslated (i.e., transliterated).

Mushaf verses are referenced as Mx:y, where x is the Chapter number and y is the verse number. All Arabic words are italicized. Dates of death for prominent authors, jurists, clergy, scholars, etc., (if available) are presented as x/y where x and y refer to the Hijri and Gregorian calendars, respectively. Only the Gregorian calendar is used for publication dates.

Hadith refers to the collections of narratives attributed to Prophet Muhammad. A single narrative will be referred to as hadith. The Plural would be hadiths. The traditional books of Hadith have been organized into chapters or divisions (*kutub*) and then into sub-chapters (*abwaab*). Online compilation of some Hadith books have tried to preserve the original organization of the Hadith chapters but the task has proven to be difficult. The numbering system of the online database www.sunnah.com will be adopted. For example, the first hadith in Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitaab al-Hajj (Pilgrimage), will be referenced as Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitaab al-Hajj, no. 1513. The sub-chapter designation will be omitted.

Muslims history involves people who contributed to the doctrines that have become accepted by most Muslims as Islam. Some of these people were scholars, some were clergy, some were historians, etc. Some even had overlapping roles. I claim that these roles are distinct and therefore, I will use the label that I see most fit and relevant.

1

THE CAUSE FOR THE BEGINNING

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ
الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ

O those who believed, adhere to equity, and witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and nearest kin.

M4:135

This book chronicles the story of my journey in search of answers to questions that I consider fundamental and essential to my existence as a human being. This book came about as a need to realize meaningful and satisfying answers to so many questions I have encountered in my journey. This work is not entrenched in abstract religion and spirituality but rather in the simple realities that surround me: societal realities; economic realities; and the realities of power, politics, and life in general. The story in this book is my religion, Islam, which embodies the sources that have formed my perspective on life and all things around me, from the tangible to the intangible and from the physical to what we perceive as the non-physical, and even the meta-physical.

Expressing one's life experiences can be cathartic and may connote a sense of completeness and satisfaction. However, my intention here is not to write about my life experience and all its boring and exciting turns and twists. My intention is to bear witness to what I understand to be important and to share it far and wide. This book is part of the human urge to share what we believe to be the truth, not necessarily what we believe to be right. While it might be obvious to many, for emphasis,

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truth and right are not synonyms. Truth is reality and right is a perspective. Without sharing what we believe to be the truth, whether in the fields of chemistry, biology, physics, history, or even archeology, there will be no advancement in human civilization. A static society is indeed the anathema of progress. Movement, dynamism or renewal are fundamentals of the creation in at least its material manifestation. Nothing stays the same. Those mysterious electric charges that make all living and non-living things, after all, are not idle, they are in constant motion, or to use the Mushaf term, they are in constant *tasbeeh*. No one yet knows what would have happened if electrons were frozen in motion. Perhaps we can consider this eternal dynamism (i.e., motion) as the primary axiom of life sciences.

Why should I write another book about religion and in particular about Islam? To many non-Muslims, the topic of Islam is already controversial with perceptions largely conceived and crafted by politically motivated think-tanks and propagated by media venues with multiple political agendas. For the most part, non-Muslims, sadly, have a negative perception of Islam and consequently of Muslims. Such negative feelings towards Islam and Muslims at times are manifested in the most aggressive, repugnant and inflammatory ways, and are at times wrapped with academic gloss and diplomatic façade. Many Muslims, on the other hand, are of the opinion that what they do and say is always right but simply misunderstood and maligned due to media coverage that, according to their common belief, serves all types of mischievous agendas. These Muslims believe that Islam is misunderstood and if only non-Muslims would stay away from mainstream media and independently delve into the religion then they would be able to understand the true greatness of Islam and consequently “see the light”. Despite all this, however, the religion of more than one and a half billion people cannot be meaningfully discussed independently of prevailing perceptions. Whether politically motivated or not, perceptions are not to be dismissed.

Prior to the 1979 revolution in Iran, which was spearheaded by individuals who identified Islam as the overriding force and ideology behind the revolution, the Western media had little interest in Islam. Even during the peak of the Middle East oil crises of 1973, which had significant effects on the economies of Western countries, Islam was not considered a center-stage player by either the media or academic establishments despite religiously-loaded rhetoric from King Faisal of

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Saudi Arabia, whose country spearheaded the embargo. The Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 changed that back seat coverage dramatically. Since then, it seems that any conflict within the Middle East and its geo-political extensions in North Africa and central Asia has been contextualized and framed within something Islamic. All of a sudden, the West discovered all things Islamic, and Muslims found themselves at the center of global attention with conflicting forces pulling them towards all Islamic persuasions as well as revived and newly minted doctrines. A cottage industry of Islamic experts subsequently emerged. For a variety of reasons, money was poured endlessly to study everything that is Islamic. Universities and think tanks hired Islamic experts to decipher and interpret all Islamic and Islamic-inspired phenomena sweeping the Muslim World.

When Islam was a collection of rituals, a simple faith or an exotic spirituality, the global interest in it was minimal. When Islam became relevant to the geo-political game, it became amusing, interesting or dangerous. There is little evidence to suggest that the dramatic explosion in the interest to study Islam occurred for purely noble ends or for genuine understanding of the faith, unlike general fascination with Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism or exotic spiritual cults. There was too much at stake to delegate the interest in Islam to purely noble ends. At stake were things much more important than the correctness or validity of a religion. At stake was political influence, dominance, money, oil, more oil, and a lot of oil.

To the West, since the late 19th Century, the Middle East has two things of grand importance: oil and Israel. The two are strongly, if indirectly, connected. After all, Israel is considered part of the West that happens to be physically located in the Middle East, and oil was referred to in the annals of American colonial political discourse as “our oil.”¹ So by coincidence, Israel and oil happened to be in that area called the Middle East. The East and its Islam had to be rediscovered since the West thought it belonged to it (but happened to be in the Middle East) and all of a sudden had come under threat. Islamic experts had to be minted, and fast. Muslim and non-Muslim experts on Islam mushroomed from everywhere, having proven their efficacy in earlier conquests of the Middle East and North Africa.² Journalists who interviewed some Muslims, academics who studied a group of Muslims, and expatriates who stayed for a short period of time in a Muslim country

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all became highly touted Islamic experts. Think tanks employed academics as mercenaries to interpret Islam in service, mostly, of carefully-orchestrated political agendas.

In hindsight, and after all the bombs had fallen on Iraq, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, Islamic experts proved to be more effective than bombs in decimating Muslim societies and planting the seeds for future perpetual mayhem. University academic programs were regrouped and energized by government funding and grants to complement the agendas of conquest.³ In summary, the West approached the East and its Islam with a colonial lens, all in the context of its vital interests, no matter how widely and broadly defined.

Muslims too became equally interested in the religion they call their very own. Ancient rivalries between antiquated Muslim groups were revived along with the emergence of new rivalries. The Arabic term *kha-warij* (denoting a rebellious group) was revived from the first Muslim century and brought back with full vigor for the same purpose to which it was introduced to marginalize and excommunicate with absolute ease from Islam the “enemies of the state”. Muslims who started to question doctrines that are generally accepted as Islamic and especially those who started to think about the “Islamic” tradition were labeled as Mu’tazalites, another derogatory ancient label.⁴ Centuries old Arabic terms were dusted off and reintroduced to cast a religious gloss on activities and movements that had nothing “Islamic” about them. All of a sudden, a successful revolution in the Middle East posed a fundamental challenge to the post-WWI political dominance of French-British-American imperialism, the dismantling of the Ottoman domain, and ensuring that shipping lanes remained under Western control to guarantee the flow of cheap energy resources to the West and its network of beneficiaries.

Regardless of whether one refers to the 1979 revolution in Iran as Islamic or not, one can safely say that Islam was the primary ideological force behind it. The prominent leaders and ideologues of the revolution were Muslim scholars, sociologists, intellectuals and jurists. Islam was the core of the message for struggle against the Iranian monarchy and against the West’s exploitation of Iranian resources. The fact that the Iranians were predominantly adherents of the Shia school of jurisprudence (a sizable minority amongst Muslims) made things more exciting, and even exotic to the West. The West and those who were

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comfortable with the pre-1979 geopolitical order in the Middle East realized that the challenge to the rise of what was then termed political Islam had to be formidable, effective and swift. Direct military intervention by Western countries could not be used as the only option to put the brakes on the revolution in Iran. Instead, the canonized doctrines that evolved throughout many centuries and that were largely considered as part of Islam had to be used to present the most effective challenge to the expansion of the revolutionary fervor that swept the Middle East in those early years of the 1980s. The West and its allies in the Middle East watched with dread the powerful new Islam that had emerged and noted that it was loaded with political and economic overtones that jeopardized their two most precious “possessions” in the Middle East. This “new” Islam was not the one that existed elsewhere and for the most part did not challenge the status quo. The older “Islam” was sustaining the status quo that was favorable to the West and in fact, it was a tool that reshaped the Middle East to favor the West’s interests.⁵ To address the new phenomenon that created an unprecedented awakening in the Middle East with effects felt from Morocco all the way to the remote Islands of Indonesia, the West fell back on the proven tactic of turning Muslims against each other.

It can be argued that many Muslims had minimal interest in understanding Islam prior to 1979, aside from understanding how to perform the rituals and understanding what will give the faithful worshipper more rewards in the paradise of the hereafter. People’s tendency to direct attention to whatever is powerful and impressive is perhaps innate. When a politician utters something exceptionally imbecilic, a serious debate in the public sphere starts to analyze the merits of his or her comment. If someone without the same fame made the same comment, then it is generally considered unworthy of attention. After the 1979 revolution in Iran, Muslims became interested in Islam for various reasons, including to understand the ideological drive behind the revolution. Some became interested when they recognized the potential of Islam as a means through which the status quo can be changed, and some for realizing that Islam might help to deconstruct the post-WWI geopolitical order imposed by the victors of WWI, the British Empire and France.⁶ Some renewed their interest in Islam simply because it was exciting to be at the center stage after a long absence since the grandeur of the Umayyad, Abbasid, or the Ottoman times. Many felt nostalgic for the “Islamic” glories of the past, glories and grandeur that had nothing fundamentally

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Islamic about them except the politically-motivated appellation. But there were also those Muslims who saw the potential of Islam to bring social justice and legitimate equity and distribution of wealth to a Middle East that was reeling under dictators of kingly and presidential flavors ruling with absolute power not seen since the ancient pharaohs.

Millions of Muslims wanted to turn towards the faith; but which faith to turn to? Here started the competition for the minds and souls of Muslims. Money was poured into the mix by Western countries and Muslim states to persuade the Muslim populace to believe in a particular sect, school of thought, a distinct school of jurisprudence, or an "Islamic" philosophy. Several "Islams" emerged: the radical, the extremist, the conservative, the liberal, the Sufi, and the *wasati* (of a middle ground) to name a few. In the past few years, the number of websites related to Islam has exploded for reasons that had to do with the natural and unprecedented revolution in information sharing fueled by the Internet, but also for reasons related to the equally unprecedented interest in Islam from foes and supporters alike, and to win adherents to the new emerging Islams. The number of TV and radio channels advocating the philosophy of Islamic groups has reached hundreds. Again, so much was at stake indeed, from interests championed by the West to those championed by many Muslim groups and governments. Authors were commissioned to churn books discrediting one sect of Islam for purely political gains. The vast majority of these books were published with heavy patronage from the government of Saudi Arabia, who appeared to agree with the West that the rise of political Islam in Iran was a destabilizing threat to their monarchy and to the geopolitical balance in the Middle East that favors the Saudis and the interests of all their supporters. Evidence cannot be found to substantiate claims that the rise of Shia Islam in Iran, Lebanon or the Persian Gulf was a threat to Islam as understood by non-Shia sects. The Persian Shias of Iran could possibly have had plans to conquer the Middle East and beyond, but there was no evidence to support such claims. The major contribution of the Iranian revolution, whether intended or not, was the sensitization of the people of the Middle East to the fragility of their political systems that were products of Western machinations, secret treaties and connivance.

A word of caution on the use of the term "Muslim sect". For the sake of clarity, it is used in this book to denote a group of Muslims who believe in the primary source of the religion of Islam, namely the

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Mushaf, which represents the entire revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. According to this definition, different interpretations of the Mushaf would not imply exclusion from Islam, and by extension its sects. Consequently, this definition would imply that any group or any philosophy that claims the Mushaf as a non-godly revelation and does not accept the Mushaf is not considered a Muslim sect or belonging to Islam. Aside from these qualifications, it is not only a fruitless exercise to categorize Muslims, but sheer arrogance even if this takes place within the realm of what is typically considered religious studies and most abstract forms of Islamic theology.

Following the Iranian revolution and the overwhelming global curiosity about Islam, many Muslims also became interested in Islam. However, most of those Muslims were living in Muslims-majority countries having social and political environments that were heavily controlled by the state and with very little, if any, freedom of expression. There were competitions for who should truly represent Islam, with confusing and varying interpretations of the religious text (primarily the Mushaf). Those competitions were not natural, but rather driven by political agendas. This is primarily because they occurred under the watchful eyes of highly oppressive dictatorships. From the most politically passive forms of Sufism to the most militant and conservative forms of Wahhabism, there was so much to choose from in this expansive marketplace of “Islamic” ideologies and persuasions.⁷ Most of these sects were vague and contained conflicting religious directives and numerous contradictions. A good friend once told me that Islam can be used to justify anything one wishes to do. He was right only if he was referring to the man-made “Islam”, not Allah’s revelation. Many choices are available within one Islamic doctrine or the other. Here, Muslims are confronted with a dilemma: either accept the multiple choices as being part of Islam, accept only one persuasion, or better yet, follow the *à la carte* approach selecting what one finds most convenient for various situations.

I am not rehashing and giving credence to the plethora of fabricated and alleged prophetic sayings and illusive traditions that intend to prove the superiority of one sect over all others. Again, I do not intend to judge who amongst Muslims is more pious and more rightful than others, which is an exercise of sheer arrogance and elitism. What I am after is to understand how a single faith can lead to dramatically conflicting ideas and principles of governance (an example is the belief by some

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sects that mercy should be granted to prisoners of war while other sects believe they all prisoners should be executed).

Sciences present models to understand the material world and to help make predictions. A scientific theory is considered meaningful if it can lead to correct predictions, but much more importantly, if it does not lead to contradictions. If Newtonian mechanics predict that a specific bridge will fail when twenty trucks drive on it at one time but will not fail if the same number of trucks drive on it an hour later (assuming that the weather has not changed), then Newtonian mechanics cannot be adopted as a system of beliefs for civil or bridge engineers. So either a theory has to be revisited and scrutinized to make sure that it is sound, or must instead be rejected altogether. If Islam embodied by the Mushaf was meant to be a way of life or, as the Mushaf describes itself as a book of guidance (see M2:2 and M2:185), if it leads to contradictions and confusion, then either Islam is not only irrelevant, but possibly ineffective as a doctrine for guidance and community governance.

One of my co-religionists might question what makes me believe that my interpretation of the Mushaf is the right one and that of everyone else's is wrong. This book will show that the problem here does not lie in the Mushaf, or even in its interpretation, but in the body of the parallel doctrines that have been thrust upon the faithful in the name of religion. These doctrines largely formed the interpretation of the Mushaf and effectively became dominant over the Mushaf and, thus in effect, became the primary source of the religion. These new "Islamic" doctrines include incredible compendia of deeply confusing and contradictory material, making the Mushaf pale in comparison in terms of complexity, scope, depth, perceived intrusiveness, and inclusiveness.

The strength of faith is commendable, but if it blinds a person from seeing, understanding and dealing with reality (and I will refrain from saying what is right as that can be a subjective concept with sordid philosophical implications), then faith has the potential to solidify into dogma and an instrument of oppression, control, subjugation, a method of hierarchical classification and justification for superiority. This is the "faith" that many religious antagonists most likely had in mind when they turned against all religions and became agnostics. Or perhaps this is the faith-religion that Karl Marx described as the "opium of the people". If religion is incompatible with the physical laws of nature, then it will not attract intellectuals, thinkers and physical scientists, but only

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those who are least educated and who try to seek refuge from responsibility with superstitions disguised as articles of faith. Charles Darwin turned against the incompatibility between the divinity studies he learned at Cambridge and what he discovered during his voyage around the globe. He could not reconcile the two and he opted for the truth or reality.

There is a difference between faith (as in believing) and truth (as in reality). This difference can be understood by turning to science, where faith plays a central and pivotal role. Faith is typically considered part of religion; something to be frowned upon from a purely scientific perspective. Scientific assumptions are essentially articles of faith as they cannot be proven or unproven. Once certain articles of faith (of the scientific variety) are accepted as assumptions, science is supposed to help us cope with and understand reality, and better yet, adapt and survive socially and physically. Science could not have started with assumptions, but they were instituted later on and essentially became part of the faith of science. These fundamental assumptions cannot in any way contradict the science they lead to or vice-versa.

Therefore, science is firmly based on assumptions. Similarly, in religion, faith and truth should not be jumbled. A religion that is a faith should be differentiated from a religion that is based on faith. In the faith-based religion, the faith is not an end by itself but a foundation on which to build a system for a way of life (in the broader context). If the faith-based religion does not lead to practical consequences to make our collective lives, the lives of not only the faithful but of all of humanity better, then I would argue such a religion has limited utility or effect in one's life. Faith that is a means of individual comfort may be different from a faith that leads to justice and equality. Some religions and faiths give a feeling of satisfaction and contentment, while others agitate its adherents to work for the common good; in other words, to achieve tangible goals based on the core articles of faith.

This book can be thought of as my personal story in discovering my religion while resisting untold intimidation by my co-religionists; a discovery and a journey that would have been made exponentially more difficult and likely impossible had I been living within one of the "Islamic" countries and amongst Muslims who have largely become intolerant to any discussion of Islam that questions historical dogma and canonized doctrines. In fact, a fraction of what is presented in this book might warrant labels of apostasy, heresy or even outright *kufir* (denial of

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Islam). My “story” as narrated in different forms in this book contains parallels to the story of others who discovered that their religion had been thrust to the center stage, and who realized that they were hypnotized into accepting an Islam different from that of the Mushaf. With the magnitude of respect and attention most Muslims, including myself, give to their religion, and to the centrality Islam commands in one’s own life, I spent serious efforts to understand and hopefully dispel any contradictions in the religion that I adhere to and that I call Islam. Guided by my understanding of reality, I felt that a self-consistent understanding of Islam was needed to make sense of it all. The need is even more acute considering the potential Islam has to affect all humanity and Planet Earth, for the better, of course.

To understand anything, most specifically religion, one has to live in an environment where there is no intellectual intimidation or intellectual bullying. To understand anything requires intellectual abilities. If the intellectual processes are inhibited, intellectual freedom does not exist and independent understanding is impaired. Fear and love, for better or worse, are two powerful attributes that can indeed blind one from realizing reality. If intellectual intimidation is a barrier to understanding and learning, then one expects it would stifle creativity and progress. The intellect of the Muslims is practically in solitary confinement in a vast prison. The prison warden is communal with many contributors. The giant potential within Muslims is tamed by overwhelming intimidation and fear. The potential of Islam is suppressed by its very own people. Imagine the following simple thought experiment. Bring an iconic figure with incredible achievements, such as Albert Einstein or Leonardo Da Vinci, then lock him up in a cell. What would be expected to come out such geniuses who have been isolated and imprisoned? Most likely nothing at all. The potential of Islam resembles the contributions of these two iconic figures when let out of imprisonment. Muslims live largely within an atmosphere of severe oppressive intellectual intimidation and fear amounting to intellectual imprisonment. In fact, for many Muslim sects and Muslim governments, the threshold for committing apostasy and *kufir* has been made horrifyingly low to deter any Muslim from exercising uninhibited thinking. Once a person is declared an apostate (a definition equivalent to that of an “infidel” coined by the Church in Medieval Europe.⁸) then shedding the blood of that “apostate” will not be frowned upon, if not outright condoned by a wide range of Muslims. Many chilling examples are available. Once on a TV

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talk show, in the heat of a debate of two Muslims who represented different sects, one of the two guests used his left hand to drink from a glass of water. The opposing guest, who represented the second sect, immediately pointed that one of the signs of *zandaqa* (a horrific-sounding word used throughout Muslim history to refer to people who commit transgression against Islam) was to hold a glass of water in the left hand.

Historical records do not suggest that Muslims have been in this state of intimidation and bullying throughout their history. Major Muslim scholars contributed significantly to philosophy and science, even proposing evolutionary theories many centuries before Darwin. Nevertheless, many Muslim luminaries and scholars were accused of *kufri*, *zandaqa* and apostasy simply because they proposed ideas that were not conventional to the four dominant Sunni sects. The parallel between the attitude of Muslims of the past towards their scholars and thinkers and the attitude of the Church in medieval times towards Galileo and Darwin are amazingly striking. What the world of Christianity experienced before the Renaissance has strong similarity to what Muslims are experiencing today. It is not unreasonable to expect parallel consequences.

My personal story has numerous examples of intellectual intimidation and outright bullying disguised under a variety of instruments and concocted “Islamic” principles, such as “enjoining good and preventing of evil”, or scare tactics such as “you will be misleading many people if your reasoning turns out to be wrong”. Surprisingly, these tactics that are presumably intended to protect Islam from evils, wrongs, and heresy were not applied to the likes of ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373) the most prominent Mushaf exegete (amongst Sunni Muslims) when he claimed that the Prophet transmitted Satanic verses.⁹ In the Canadian town in which I have lived for many years, the elites of the Muslim establishment accused me of *fitna*, an Arabic term that can be translated as mischief, although the religious and historical connotations of the term imply more profound imagery than mere children’s play. My sin deserving of the *fitna* accusation was to inquire about the financial transactions of a local masjid and to support an online petition exposing the possible financial mischief that was taking place in that masjid. On a recent trip to a Middle Eastern country, I committed the “sin” of discussing the “creation” in the Mushaf and made the implication that both transformation and evolution can be a direct implication of the Mushaf text. In a matter

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of seconds, my interpretation was declared by a close relative of mine to be *kufir*: *Kufir*, a term that I will revisit later in this book, appears repeatedly in the Mushaf. It refers to a deeply serious transgression against God that involves denial of truth. Of course, once a person is labeled as *kafir* (the actor of *kufi*), then perhaps shedding his blood would be a matter of time and opportunity. Perhaps the person who take it upon himself to get rid of a *kafir* would be considered a hero and a savior and purifier of the faith.

To make this system of intimidation far-reaching and most effective, it has to be in the name of religion or it has to be structured and embedded within the faith itself. After all, faith is extremely powerful as it needs no proof at all. The faithful cannot prove what he has faith in and the disbeliever has no proof to counteract the faithful. What can be more powerful than something one believes in without any rational proof? It has to be that in itself!

The seeds of a grand conspiracy to create grand intimidation of Muslims were implanted early in the history of Muslims by Muslims who realized the amazing power of faith. Indeed, it is a conspiracy of Eastern origins without infidels. This conspiracy most likely evolved during or immediately after the death of Prophet Muhammad and climaxed and perfected during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties (41/661-656/1258), a conspiracy that was hatched or largely patronized by the power elites to ensure their monopoly on power. The conspiracy succeeded to a certain extent as exemplified by the grand wars that took place in the first Muslim Century (wars that were led by the companions of the Prophet) but needed steady infusion of "Islamic" religious doctrines to keep the multitudes in line and in servitude to the state. The copious body of doctrines produced in the course of this long running scheme has been one of the most formidable challenges to understanding Islam, by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, but more importantly and practically, it has been a force that impeded progress in the Muslim communities and for Muslims at large.

European colonialism of most Muslim countries over the past 300 years contributed significantly to their systemic economic weakness and broad social injustice.¹⁰ Despite its long-term horrific consequences, colonialism contributed only partially to the overall retardation of Muslim societies. It is extremely hard to gauge the effect of colonialism on the prevailing religious doctrines within Muslim nations. Indeed colonial

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powers undoubtedly exercised influence on local governments and religious clergy under their rule, but there is no evidence showing that these colonial powers created religious doctrines to serve their needs.

The present practiced “Islam”, which is a religion sanctioned by practically all states with Muslim majority, and especially by states that define themselves as Islamic, in my opinion, is the cause behind the backwardness and misery that inflicts the Muslim world. This state-sanctioned religion stifles every noble principle Islam came to uphold, most important of which is freedom. It sabotaged the true Islam and diverted it into a doctrine of submissiveness and fatalism. The liberating and energizing concept of agency of humans along with free will, both overly stressed in the book of Islam, the Mushaf, were completely circumvented and replaced with predestination, for no purpose but to turn Muslims into a flock succumbing to the will of the political ruler rather than the will of Allah.

When a person dies under the hands of a careless surgeon, the tendency among Muslims is to accept the tragedy and human loss as a predestined event, an event that was decreed before Allah created the universe or was decided upon when that person was born, or simply an “act of God”. In fact, Muslims typically frown at those who do not accept and exercise patience towards these “acts of God” for their presumed lack of faith, and accepting the untimely death as predestined and unavoidable. Fatalism, to name only one disease, became a de-facto pillar of Muslims religion.

The Arabic language and grammar were retooled to serve a grand plan of turning Islam, whose core principle is upholding truth, into a tranquilizer. The Muslims lost the will to live and to participate in this world, with a restructured ideology that made them oscillate between a fictitious past utopia and the pleasures of the hereafter. Muslims came to resemble an old sick man who lost hope in life.

Laying the blame where it belongs is important, but colonialism is only part of the factors that led to the retardation of the Muslim world. The colonialists are no longer amongst Muslims occupying their lands, however, Muslims with predominant doctrinal thinking inherited from the Umayyad, Abbasid and possibly successive Muslim empires are amongst us. Colonialism of the direct and military type is long gone, but religious doctrines that have no foundation in the Mushaf have remained amongst Muslims and have penetrated their innermost psyche. Those religious doctrines (the Sunnah, Hadith, Usool al-Fiqh, Ijtihad,

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etc.) were so meticulously interwoven within the fabric of the state-sanctioned Islam that one can only counter and negate them, not by mere rejection of these doctrines, but only through serious efforts to understand and engage with the primary source of Islam, the Mushaf.

Many Muslims refuse to believe that there is anything wrong with their understanding of Islam. This happens for a variety of reasons, including institutionalized marginalization and sometimes for fear of a backlash. While decrying non-Muslims lack of patience to understand Islam, any serious discussion of the faith is harshly condemned under a systematic and methodical procedure of intimidation that intends to silence any dissent from classical modes of religious interpretation and thinking.

I am not advocating an Islamic reformation, nor am I advocating a modern (whatever the often-used term “modern” typically invokes) interpretation of the Mushaf. Advocates for modernizing or reforming Islam are mostly non-Muslims who I will not necessarily characterize as Islam antagonists but typically have an impression and a perspective of Islam that was shaped by traditional Muslim doctrines, the types that evolved throughout the ages. Of course, there are some who have hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims for a variety of reasons, but these, I hope, would have gained a more positive impression of Islam had Muslims left aside the inherited dogmas and the “Islamic” tradition.

Am I advocating for an age of Muslim enlightenment or a Muslim renaissance? These are partial possibilities. Yes, Muslims need enlightenment and renaissance of their own. Muslims should not fear or be alarmed by a Muslim, or better yet, Islamic Renaissance or Islamic Enlightenment. If the European historical model is any lesson, Europe went through a transformation where rationality, causality and common sense prevailed over actions that were explained only by invoking the divine and the wisdom of the Church. Europe started to deal with reality first, then the unseen, not the other way around. Yet, through and after the Age of Enlightenment, Europeans did not cease to be religious. There was no purge of the Christians nor of religion from Europe.

What I am after is a serious and rigorous approach to understanding Islam as a religion. I may not be able to provide a fully satisfactory definition for seriousness, but I find it easier to attempt seriousness with potential shortcomings than attempting correctness. Seriousness might

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not be easily defined, but specifying or preaching a correct approach implies elitism and a sense of superiority.

This book is not about the good or bad intentions of non-Muslims. It is not about answering misconceptions held by non-Muslims. It is not about proving that Muslims are right and everyone else is wrong. It is not about interfaith dialogue, yet it hopes to contribute towards that effort. This book is an attempt to answer a question that haunted me for years, about identifying and taking a closer look at the cause behind deeply entrenched stagnation in Muslims' engagement with their religion. This book questions dogma and traditional thinking amongst Muslims that has gone unquestioned for hundreds of years, or perhaps had gone questioned but has been repeatedly silenced whenever and wherever such dissent has surfaced. A cursory look into the history of Muslim thinkers, scholars and scientists reveals accusations of apostasy, *zandaqa*, *kufi*, etc. leveled against many scientists and thinkers such as ibn Hayyan, ibn Arabi and ibn Sina by Salafi sects.¹¹ I expect the attack against Muslim intellectuals and thinkers will continue, however, the monopoly over religion is waning dramatically.

To Muslim readers, a warning is in order: if you believe that everything that needs to be known about Islam is known, then this book is certainly not for you. If you are a Muslim and believe that no one can introduce material to help Muslims and non-Muslims understand Islam better than the multitudes of "Islamic scholars" who have produced thousands of volumes and commentaries on the Mushaf and traditions of prophet Muhammad, then this book is definitely not for you. If you are a Muslim and believe that everything that can be understood about the Mushaf has been explained fully by numerous highly respected exegetes and nothing more can be added, then this book is certainly not for you. If you are a Muslim and believe that it is wrong to challenge famous "scholars of Islam" simply because they are "People of Knowledge", then this book will offend you in many ways. For those Muslims who are happy and satisfied with all that is going on around them, reading this book can be a wasteful exercise. This book is also not for Muslims who are comfortable with the status quo and do not see any reason to be uncomfortable at the unimaginable loss of lives, destruction and helplessness sweeping the "Islamic World" or wherever injustice is taking place. If you are a Muslim and have deep scorn and disrespect for the intellectual ability of humans, this book will aggravate

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you immensely. Finally, for those who believe intellectual inquiry is dangerous, this book is equally dangerous!

To non-Muslim readers, I have no warnings at all. The book will show you that Muslim-made doctrines are largely concoctions that evolved without much scrutiny, that Islam is embodied in one book, the Mushaf, and no one is divinely ordained to be its official interpreter. The non-Muslim reader will even be surprised to learn that even the Prophet of Islam did not provide an interpretation of the Book or an appendix to the Mushaf detailing his commentary. The non-Muslim reader might find comfort in seeing the parallels between how Islam was diverted to become an instrument of control and war and how similar diversions occurred in other religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. Most critically, this book will show that the message of the Mushaf is universal and extends beyond those who embrace Islam. This book will empower non-Muslims to understand the Mushaf without Muslim or non-Muslim intermediaries, an understanding that is essential to know Islam and to dispel man-made mysteries that have become synonymous with Islam.

Finally, this book is not an attempt to modernize Islam, but rather to understand Islam from its original and only source.

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 2. Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage, 1979.
 3. Kurzman, Charles and Ernst, Carl. "Islamic Studies in U.S. Universities". *Review of Middle East Studies*, vol. 46, Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), 2012.
 4. In general, the Mu'tazalites in Muslim history refers to rationalists who believed that the mind has a central role in understanding Islam. Their opponents, the advocates of strict adherence to the Prophetic traditions, succeeded in projecting the Mu'tazalites as heretics or as a fringe group not worthy of respect or even inclusion in the body of the Muslim *umma*. It is important to note that the label Mu'tazalites

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was given to them by their enemy since it connotes isolation or desertion. As the Mu'tazalites evolved, they referred to themselves as Ahl al-Adl wa al-Tawheed.

5. Lacey, Robert. *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981. Lacey gives an excellent expose of the rise of the Saudi dynasty and how the British supported the Wahhabi Muslims of Arabia to rally the Arab tribes in support of ibn Saud conquests.
6. The Sykes-Picot treaty was a 1916 secret treaty between the UK and France to divide and colonize the Middle East.
7. Wahhabism refers to a religious sect based on the writings of Muhammad ibn Abdulwahhab (d. 1206/1792), and borrows heavily from ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and Ahmed ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855).
8. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, infidel refers to non-Christians or those who were not baptised.
9. Ibn Kathir, abu al-Fida Imaduddin Ismail. *Tafseer al-Qur'aan al-Azeem (Tafsir ibn Kathir)*. Dar al-Salaam, 2012.
10. Williamson, Jeffrey G. and Clingingsmith, David. *India's Deindustrialization in the 18th and 19th Centuries (PDF)*. Harvard University, 2005. Accessed 18 May 2017. An example is the decline of India's economic power during the British colonization. Under the British rule, India's share of the world economy declined from 24.4% in 1700 to 4.2% in 1950,^[2] and its share of global industrial output declined from 25% in 1750 to 2% in 1900.
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2

SCIENCE OF MARGINALIZATION

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ
مِّنْ نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ ۚ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ
ط ۚ بِئْسَ الْاِسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ ۚ وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَتُوبْ فَإِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule another people lest they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule other women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by offensive nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after belief. And whoever does not repent - then it is those who are the oppressors.

M49:11

WHO QUALIFIES TO SPEAK ABOUT ISLAM

Who are you to speak about Islam? What qualifications do you have to discuss the Mushaf, let alone write a book about Islam? Are you a *sheikh* (religious figure)? Are you a *mufti* (religious edict issuer)? Are you a *hujjat* (high-ranking jurisprudence scholar)? Are you an *alim* (religious scholar)? Have you studied at al-Azhar, Medina, Najaf, or Qum? Do you have an *ijaza* (certificate) from a *sheikh*? How many Prophetic narratives have you memorized after all? Did you memorize the Mushaf? But what if your claims were wrong, are you not afraid of committing a sin and ending up in hellfire? Are you more knowledgeable

than all those *ulama* (Muslim scholars) to challenge their consensus or their commentaries on religion and their respected knowledge and *ilm* (science)? Are you claiming that everyone else is wrong in his or her understanding of Islam and you are the only one who is right? Are you an expert in the Arabic language to comment on the Mushaf? These are a few examples of the types of interrogatory and intimidating questions that I have encountered whenever I have presented what I believe to be logical, if unconventional, interpretations of the Mushaf, or whenever I questioned prevailing doctrines considered by many as an integral part of Islam. These questions are valuable material for a university philosophy course on common fallacies, therefore, I will leave their analysis from the logical perspective for that venue. These questions are mentioned here only to suggest the type of Muslim culture they reflect: a culture that has largely succumbed to intimidation and bullying; the antithesis of Islam's core philosophy of infinite intellectualism, infinite eternal curiosity and unlimited progress.

Marginalization and intimidation, brewed to perfection since the dawn of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, are two overriding features that color Muslims' religious culture.¹ While I wholeheartedly assume the non-malicious intent of those who ask any of the questions listed above, these questions represent the first line of defense (or denial) one encounters when attempting to provide a logic-based and reality-based interpretation to the Mushaf. These are the same questions one encounters when questioning conventional orthodox doctrines and Islamic jurisprudence principles that were created, as evidence suggests, from whims and opinions. These questions which I have encountered too often are products of a static and intellectually-petrified culture, frozen in time and space, negating intellectualism and fiercely resistant and opposed to intellectual progress. The broad intellectual stagnation amongst Muslims may be rooted in what has evolved as a religious culture deeply embedded in their thinking irrespective of the commitment to religious rituals.

Who is entitled to speak about Islam and what constitutes Islam? What constitute things and practices that are "Islamic"? An analogy to a subject different from religion, such as perhaps mathematics, will help answer these questions. Who is entitled to speak about mathematics? If we circulate this question amongst mathematicians all over the world, what answer would we expect? Should only Harvard mathematicians be

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entitled to speak about math or only those who were mentored by Professor X, the recipient of the grandest prize in mathematics and who is known to be the most brilliant mathematician alive today? In the same vein, one may ask who is entitled to present a paper in the most reputable conference on quantum physics. When a person submits a paper to the conference in question, the material of the paper is scrutinized for accuracy, logic, and validity through a stringent review process (as is the custom in reputable scientific venues, where the higher the reputation of the scientific journal, the higher the scrutiny of the submitted manuscripts). In fact, many conferences and journals submit the contribution to a blind review, which means that what matters most is not the lineage, prestige, fame or stature of the contributor but the soundness and correctness of the contribution. For mathematics, anyone can speak about mathematics as long as that person provides mathematics that makes sense and is correct. It may be safe to assume that mathematicians would be interested to hear from anyone who can solve some of the most puzzling problems in their field, regardless of the attributes and accolades of that person. Similarly, anyone can contribute to biomedical technology, as long as the contribution is validated either by reasoning or by experiment. The mind behind all wireless technology, motor technology, hydropower technology, all navigation technology, and most biomedical devices was a man with very little formal education. When Michael Faraday discovered and formalized the laws of electromagnetic induction, he was not ridiculed for having no formal education. No one has a monopoly over correctness. Correct knowledge is assumed to mean that the knowledge was derived based on reasoning or empirical finding, subject to what scientists refer to as the scientific method. Reason is not only essential to correctness but is the epitome of human existence. (Amongst the Salafis and Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamma'ah, reason was considered inseparable from philosophy which was considered a pillar of atheism).²

An assertion makes sense when it is based on axioms (and in some fields, assumptions) of the field under study and when it builds upon validated knowledge without contradicting that knowledge. The ability of someone to contribute to mathematics is different from the credibility one has to teach mathematics, for the latter needs credentials and certificates testifying to the knowledge of the applicant and the ability to teach a well-defined subject in an institution that has accepted that knowledge. Contributing to a subject can be helped by having specific

credentials but they are not a necessity. Meaningful knowledge contribution needs substantiation and rationality. The one who teaches a subject does not need to be the one who contributes to it. The first reproduces knowledge while the second produces knowledge.

Mushaf uses a spectrum of different terms to distinguish between knowledge, information and inspiration generated by people. For instance, two important verbs in the Mushaf are *qaala* and *talaa*. The first is typically translated as “said” and the second one as “narrated” or “recited”. *Qaala* can imply “have said”, but not always. *Qaala* can mean “produced”, “formed”, or “fashioned new information or knowledge”. (An understanding of the meaning of *qaala* does not only help to understand issues relating to the production of knowledge, but has significant implications on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, as will be explained in Chapter 4.)

The correctness of an argument, as it stands by itself and backed by evidence, had been the only way science was able to express or uncover truths. Modern understandings of what constitutes science are varied. Also, not all methodologies used to discover science are accepted by all scholars and scientists as scientific methodologies. Nevertheless, what defines science is the methodologies.³ Science is a system by which truths are found. Scientists do not create truths, they simply discover them. Scientists also exert effort to understand truths. The Mushaf gives prominence to *haqq* (truth) in more than 263 verses. The opposite of *haqq* is *batil* (falsehood). A statement or a piece of information that represents facts is true whereas a statement that conceals facts is untrue, false or *batil*. To speak about mathematics, one must provide substantiation with mathematical proofs rather than invoking lineage, pedigree, prestige, or any type of authority.

Islam’s goal, if not its ultimate one, is to reach truths. This means that anyone can speak about Islam as long as that person follows a process of rational reasoning that validates the arguments presented. Even a person who does not believe in Islam can talk about Islam. Contribution to the truth can come from anyone irrespective of believing in Allah, Muhammad, both or neither. The person can be of any color, gender, age, creed or nationality. Contrary to popular understanding amongst most Muslims, anyone can comment on the Mushaf. Whether the commentary is worthy of any respect amongst Muslims or non-Muslims depends on whether or not it makes any sense and does not contradict reality. The preconditions widely imposed by Muslims on who

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is entitled to comment on the Mushaf, such as having memorized the Mushaf, having perfected the Arabic language, having studied the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, being aware of the “secrets” of Mushaf, being aware of the what parts of the Mushaf are abrogated (i.e., nullified) are all methods of intimidation and marginalization, all evolved within the Muslim culture or influenced by political rulers.

These intimidation techniques, whether by design or accident, resulted in separating Muslims into classes. If the Mushaf is based on truths, then it can accept commentary from anyone who is interested in the truth and who uses instruments of rationality and reason rather than falsehood in his or her commentary. Even the commentaries on the Mushaf by contemporaries of the Prophet cannot be accepted without substantive and validated arguments. The fact that a certain companion narrated something is not sufficient to establish the truth of the substance of the narrative, no matter how important that companion was.

Of course, any commentary, irrespective of its source, should be subjected to analysis and scrutiny. Commentaries either make sense or not. Philosophy, which has traditionally served to develop a process of reasoning to arrive at truths, had been turned into an archenemy of most Muslim sects. In effect, the majority of Salafi scholars equate philosophy with *zandaqa*, thereby forging a divide between Islam and rationality.⁴

Another important question concerns what constitutes Islam, Islamic knowledge, Islamic studies or anything deserving of the adjective “Islamic”. Many Muslim scholars would argue that the field of Islamic studies refers to evolving Muslim legal doctrines that evolved throughout the ages. At many North American universities, Islamic Studies might also include “Islamic” architecture, art, philosophy, economics, sociology, and mysticism. Some even attempted to “Islamize” knowledge itself.⁵ Ironically, missing from the rush to Islamize things are “Islamic” mathematics, “Islamic” Chemistry, “Islamic” Biology and “Islamic” Physics; after all, these disciplines have connection to the Mushaf in one way or another. Even the body of knowledge that encompasses the jurisprudential output of major Muslim sects (such as Hanbali, Shafi’i, Hanafi, Maliki, Ja’fari, Imami, Zaidi, Abadhi, etc.) was produced after the end of Muhammad’s Prophethood, and thus have nothing “Islamic” about it. The skeptics need to look no further than M5:3

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