

## **WHY EXTREMISM HAS TO BE WIPED OUT FROM ISLAM**

**By Asiff Hussein**

It is apparent more than ever before that the noble image of Islam is often tarnished by the mass media of today. The Media, and particularly western media, often leaves no stone unturned to highlight atrocities and injustices committed by misguided Muslims all over the globe in the name of religion. From terrorism that kills innocents to honour killings and harsh blasphemy laws, these vile acts invite wide media exposure and bring Islam a bad name.

In our haste to respond to this negative publicity and preserve the good name of our community what we Muslims often do is blame the media for highlighting these injustices, alleging that they are biased and are following double standards. This may well be, but at the same time, we must ask ourselves why is it that the media is exposing these injustices. Is it not because they are being perpetrated with impunity? What we must ask ourselves are we giving reason to the media to tarnish our good name. Is this not an injustice we do to our faith? What often escapes us in our zeal to protect the community, even the misguided amongst us, is that we help perpetrate these crimes which only go on to sully our religion's good name more and more. Has it never crossed our mind to put our house in order first. Why is it that many Muslims even today are willing to tolerate and even condone misguided extremist cults such as Al Qaeda, Taliban or Abu Sayyaf who perpetrate such bloodshed in the name of Islam, but pounce upon the slightest western misdemeanour such as how ill-clad an European woman is, as if its any of our business anyway.

Nay, it is high time we called a spade a spade. In the west and even in the US, extremist Christian cults are treated with the contempt they deserve and are hounded. We find that there is hardly any public acceptance for these misfits. This is in the fitness of things for the potential of such groups to create disorder and bloodshed in society is immense. Muslim societies on the other hand, have often been tolerant of such misguided elements, all in the name of a misplaced notion of 'brotherhood'. In this connection what immediately comes to mind is a well known, but unfortunately little practiced Qur'anic passage:

*"Oh you who believe, stand up firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even if it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor; for God can best protect both. Do not follow any passion, lest you not be just. And if you distort or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that you do"* (Quran 4:135).

This suffices to show that all of those who participate in, approve of, or even who do not speak out against evil irrespective of their religion contribute to this evil and this attitude has to change- the sooner the better.

If only we were to indulge in some collective soul-searching we would find that much of the fitna that characterizes the Islamic world does not come from a moderate interpretation of Islam, but rather from extremist ideologies which give rise to cults and dissension in the community. Nor is this anything new. It has been so from the earliest days of Islam beginning with the accursed Kharjites who rebelled against the Islamic Khilafat in the days of Hazrat Ali. But before dealing with these extremist groups let us consider what the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) had to say about extremism in religion. We know for certain that our beloved Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) warned us against religious extremism in no uncertain terms as is apparent from the following ahadith:

The Prophet said, *"Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, the nights."* (Sahih Bukhari ) Narrated Anas bin Malik has also related that the Prophet said *"Facilitate things to people (concerning religious matters), and do not make it hard for them and give them good tidings and do not make them run away (from Islam)"*. We also have the hadith where three men went to the Prophet and wanted to express their sincerity. The first man said, *"I will fast everyday and never eat during the day again."* The second one said, *"I will remain celibate to worship God for the rest of my life"* And the third one proclaimed, *"I will pray all night every night and never sleep again "*The Prophet was not impressed with their zeal. He told them, *"I am the Prophet of God, and I eat and fast, I also marry and sleep at night. Whoever does not follow my path is not one of my followers"* (Sahih Bukhari).

However this is not all, and we find the Prophet condemning extremism in very telling terms: *"Beware of extremism in religion because the only thing that destroyed those before you was extremism in religion"* (Ibn Majah and Nasai). Here we are told that it was religious extremism that destroyed the peoples before Islam (which may well refer to the like of the Jewish zealots who took their lives and that of their families in the aftermath of the Masada rebellion against the Romans) and warned not to take that disastrous path. Yet another saying of the Prophet has it: *"Indeed, this religion is strong and well-established so enter into it deeply yet do so gently. And do not cause the worship of your Lord to become hateful to you. For the one who traverses it harshly will neither reach (his goal) nor will it spare anyone. So do actions like a person who thinks he will never die, and be cautious like a person who fears he will die tomorrow"* (Baihaqi). In yet another hadith Allah's messenger repeated three times: *"The Mutanatti'un are destroyed"*. (Abu Dawud). As Al-Nawawī explains, *"The 'Mutanatti'un' are the overly-strict people, those who go too deep (into religious matters), the extremists, those who go beyond the permissible limits in their statements and actions"*.

Having cited the ahadith highlighting the dangers of extremism, we will now examine what kind of perverse mentality extremism leads to. Here, we don't have to look far. It is all around us- terrorism in the name of Islam, mob rule, rebellion to established authority, honour killings, draconian blasphemy laws all meant to show that Islam is a harsh, intolerant and terrible faith, acts that do no good to Islam and only help the Jews in their objective of portraying Muslims as a brutal and uncivilized people, which unfortunately many in the modern world have come to believe, despite the fact that it is only a very small percentage of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims who indulge in this sacrilege.

And here we have to bear in mind that it is not only misguided Muslims who are extremist. Extremism is a cult in itself and knows no religion. Whether it was the barbarities inflicted by the crusaders in mediaeval times or by the Khmer Rouge in more recent times, extremism has become a law unto itself spewing its poison particularly on the uneducated and weak-minded sections of society based on a very narrow interpretation of scripture or dogma. And herein lies one of the greatest threats to Islam. The mindset it creates is one of utter perversion, filtering out the best in Islam and perverting the texts revealed in particular contexts to suit its perverse ideals, as for instance in the call of many so-called Jihadists to implement Shari'ah by waging Jihad against established Muslim authority or killing Muslims who do not support their views. The difference between a good many Muslims today and the rest of the world is that we have still to comprehend and confront extremism. The non-Muslim world

and particularly the Christian world has dumped it into the dustbin of history. The big question is *When are we going to do it ?* Don't we still have ulama who preach hatred of others and rail against fellow Muslims, even to the extent of labeling fellow Muslims who do not follow their particular persuasion Kafirs. Don't we still have ulama who justify all the rot that takes place in the name of Islam and don't we still have ulama who incite violence and sedition ? This is a fact and it is only an ignoramus who will think otherwise. If change has to come, it should start with the mosques and schools, a change which hopefully will lead to a more purer Islam devoid of the dross that has corrupted it over the ages.

And why we may ask extremism leads to misguidance. This is not a difficult question to answer. The extremist whether he be a Muslim, Christian, Jew or Hindu often comes to look upon his rigid adherence to his faith as an act of blind loyalty to the Divinity making him averse to see reason or justice and in the process bringing out his darker side. He thinks he is the chosen one and takes up a 'holier than thou' attitude in his relations with others. He also becomes very narrow-minded often ready to split hairs over the slightest matter which is why we find extremists falling out from one another and splitting into different groups so often. Most dangerously the extremist thinks he has God's blessings for whatever he does, including taking the lives of innocents without any compunction. And this is not all. The extremist harbours and cultivates hatred for those not of his faith instead of praying that God show them the straight path. Instead of bearing love for mankind and the rest of God's good creation, he in his blind hatred comes to despise them. All this he believes will earn him a place in heaven, not realizing that it is up to God to decide who will go to heaven and who will go to hell. The extremist is very certain he is going to heaven and everybody who differs with him will rot in hell. I personally know of one instance where a professed Muslim once remarked of the unbelievers: "Anyway they are going to hell". I said to myself at that moment "How do you know that Allah will guide those people and lead you to damnation". The sad part is that they already think they're going to heaven ! This then is the critical flaw in extremist ideology – the certainty of earning a place in heaven instead of leaving it to the Almighty to decide on it.

One also finds that extremism often attracts certain types of people- criminals, the low-bred and the weak-minded. It particularly attracts people with criminal tendencies. This is evident when we consider the past record of so-called Jihadists like Zarqawi who created so much fitna in Iraq and so many other Jihadists who purport to fight for Islam. We also find that extremism finds a congenial place among people of low mental capacity and understanding for the simple reason that it is not a difficult task for unscrupulous elements to mislead these bumpkins with incendiary speeches. On a closer examination we would find that the mindset of these people is not that of the flock (of sheep, with which we may compare the obedient believers), but rather that of the herd (of cattle, meaning a bunch of narrow-minded imbeciles following an equally idiotic but nevertheless charismatic leader) which often degenerates to that of the pack (of wolves) which recognizes no law or ethic but the law of the jungle where even life could be taken with impunity. And this is exactly why we find Al-Qaeda having a congenial home in illiterate and narrow-minded tribal communities, whether in Afghanistan, the North Western Province of Pakistan or the tribal belt of Yemen.

And worse, extremism can degenerate to a negation of the very ideals that Islam stands for. Consider the following case in Saudi Arabia where Islam has been used to justify tribalism: "In Saudi Arabia, women of all ages generally need to obtain permission from a male guardian (father, husband, brother, uncle, son) to work, travel, study, marry or obtain medical treatment. Fatima Al-Timani, a Saudi Arabian woman, was forcibly divorced from her husband by a court in 2005 at the request of her half-brothers. The couple's ordeal started when Fatima's half-brothers asked a court to annul the marriage, citing her husband's low tribal background. The judge agreed, even though the couple had been married for over

two years and had two children. Following the ruling, the couple was arrested in Jeddah after going there to seek official help. Fatima and her children spent nine months in a women's prison in Dammam after refusing to go back to her family. In January 2007, Riyadh's Appeals Court upheld a judge's decision to divorce the couple, and Fatima was moved to a women's shelter in the city, where, as of May 2008, she was still living with her two -year-old son, Suliman. Her other child, four-year-old Noha, lives with her husband, Mansour Al-Timani".

We here have a case of a country ostensibly adhering to Islam, not only preventing its women from exercising their right of choosing a partner which was conceded over 1400 years ago by Islam (such as when the our beloved Prophet gave Khansa bint Khidam and the unnamed wife of Julaybib the right to choose their partners), but also recognizing the inequality of man (a jahilliyah trait which Islam abrogated completely as evident in the final Sermon of our beloved Prophet)

### **The Kharjites- the earliest extremists to divide the community**

The Kharjites were the first sect in Islam to propound the doctrine of takfirism (declaring other Muslims as Kaffirs so as to justify their killings to achieve their nefarious objectives) and began as most extremist cults do with their over-emphasis on dogma and hair-splitting over what are seemingly petty issues. When Hazrat Ali sought arbitration to end the conflict between him and an opposing camp of Muslims, these extremists mainly drawn from the Bedouin tribe of Tamim asked: "Are men to arbitrate in the affairs of Allah? There can be no arbitration except by Allah." in support of which they cited the Quranic passage: "*The prerogative of command rests with none but Allah. He declares the truth and he is the best of judges*" (6:57). These rebels numbering several thousands then separated themselves from the rest of the community and elected as their ruler one Abdullah Ibn Wahb Al-Rasibi known for his fervour in reciting the Qur'an and who was nicknamed Dhu al-Thafanat (the one whose kneecaps appeared like two humps of a camel because of the intense and extended nature of his prostration in Salaah). This rebellion eventually degenerated into open hostilities against the larger Muslim community and the killing of innocents, among the first victims of the rebellion being Abdullah ibn Khabbaab al-Aratt, one of the governors of Sayyidna Ali, who along with his pregnant wife, was hacked to death by the mob.

The basic dogma of this heretical sect appears not to have been built upon the teachings of Islam, but on the following:

- a) The declaration of *Kufr* (unbelief) on Ali, Muawiyah, and all those who had participated in and agreed to the process of arbitration
- b) *Takfir* (charging with unbelief) of all those who disagreed with them on any theological issues
- c) The right to kill any of the above.

These Kharijites, we would find sought to legitimise their agenda and justify their killing of Muslims by declaring them as Kafir and hence the territories in which they lived as a *Dar al-Harb* (an abode of war). This they legitimised under the nefarious pretence of "the prerogative of command belongs to Allah." This statement - and more correctly read, in its Kharijite context, as "only we (with our swords) have the prerogative of command" - spawned thousands of madmen who maimed and massacred in the name of the most Merciful.

As has been correctly pointed out the rebellion was inspired by an ill-conceived sense of political isolationism owing to their Bedouin status. The spirit of Islam - as yet - had not served to de-tribalise them. Strength, to them, resided in aggression and belligerence; and not in the deeper recesses of the spirit and soul - the wellsprings of genuine faith (*Iman*). As the Quranic verse has it: "*The desert Arabs say, 'We believe (amanna).' Say: 'You do not as yet have true faith.' Rather say: 'We have only submitted our wills to Allah (aslamna), for not yet has true faith entered your hearts'*" (49:14). Another Qur'anic passage declares: "*The desert Arabs are the worst in disbelief and hypocrisy, and more fitted to be ignorant of the limits which God has sent down to His Messenger. But God is Knowing, Wise*". (Surat At-Tawba, 97).

### **Modern-day Kharjites**

In more recent times we find these ignorant sons of the desert in the form of the Ikhwan and neo-Ikhwan raising their ugly heads in the birthplace of Islam. Many of these tribals who were responsible for bringing the Saud dynasty to power by committing various atrocities against fellow Muslims including wholesale massacre of innocents eventually rebelled against them in 1927-1930 as they felt that they did not measure up to their demand for a rigid interpretation of the faith including a ban on motor vehicles and other aspects of modernization. The rebellion had to be ruthlessly put down in 1930 by King Abdul Aziz bin Saud and the fanatical Najdi Alims whose powerbase were these tribal communities had to retire to the background. But this was not the end of these extremists for more recently we saw the misled followers of Juhayman Al Oteibi who took over the Grand Mosque of Mecca in 1979 and held hundreds of pilgrims hostage claiming that the Saud family had lost its right to rule as they had strayed from the tenets of Ibn Abdul Wahhab upon which the kingdom had been built. Among these rebels demands were among other things; a repudiation of the West; an end of education of women and abolition of television. These rebels boldly proclaimed that the ruling Al Saud dynasty had lost its legitimacy, because it was corrupt, ostentatious and had destroyed Saudi culture by an aggressive policy of Westernisation. The battle to retake the mosque officially left 255 pilgrims, troops and fanatics killed and another 560 injured although diplomats suggested the toll was higher. Military casualties were 127 dead and 451 injured. Juhayman, was captured, and he and 67 of his fellow rebels were tried secretly, convicted and publicly beheaded in the squares of four Saudi cities. Also interesting are the events that led to the assassination of King Faisal by his own nephew. In 1966, this fanatical nephew of the King took it upon himself to attack the newly-established headquarters of Saudi television but was killed by security personnel. This attacker was the brother of Faisal's future assassin Prince Faisal Ibu Musaed who was later to fire three bullets at King Faisal with a pistol at point blank range during a royal audience, fatally wounding him.

When we examine the history of such extremism, we would find that it was the tolerance of these misfits by the authorities that led to the further brutalization of Saudi society. The rebels were only tolerated because they had hijacked Islam to serve their nefarious ends. Many of them were drawn from theology students at the Islamic University in Medina and even included some Muslim African-Americans. They openly preached their radical message in different mosques in Saudi Arabia without being arrested and even after the execution of the rebels the Saudi regime thought it fit to give in to many of their demands leading to the Saudi's state's interpretation of Islam in accordance with Wahhabi ideas becoming more rigid. In fact, when the Saudi regime at one time sought to adopt the progressive approach of talfiq an eclectic choice between the various madhhabs or Islamic schools of jurisprudence so as to bring it in line with a more broader interpretation of Islamic law, it were the parochial-minded ulama of the kingdom who vociferously opposed it contending that the Hanbali Mazhab well known for its rigidity was all that needed to be followed in spite of the fact that it is this very rigidity of this particular mazhab that has never allowed it to spread beyond the confines of

the Arabian Peninsula in contrast to the more tolerant Hanafi and Shafi mazhabs that have a wide following worldwide.

A pity indeed for had the state being bold enough to root out extremism, it would probably not have to face the extremist campaign against it that it is presently facing from Al-Qaeda. Contrast this with the attitude of the Moroccan King Muhammad VI who following the terrorist attacks that rocked Casablanca spearheaded the New Moroccan Family Law of 2004 which recognized the Hanafi ruling that women could contract their own marriages, thereby doing away with the earlier Maliki ruling that prevented them from marrying without the consent of their walis or male guardians. The King rightly recognized that terrorism was the result of oppressive social attitudes such as depriving women of the basic freedoms conceded by Islam. It was therefore in the fitness of things to eliminate this threat by giving the fairer sex their due place in society and the policy has stood the kingdom in good stead since.

This perverse attitude of the ulama of Najd brings to mind a hadith recorded by Imam Bukhari who cites Abdullah ibn Umar who observed that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) once prayed for Shaam (Greater Syria) and Yemen. Some people of Najd also present in the gathering and they requested the Prophet (Sallal Laahu Alaihi Wasallam) to make du'a for Najd also. The Holy Prophet continued saying: "O! Allah, Shower Blessings on Shaam and Yemen," The people of Najd again requested the Prophet to offer prayers for Najd. The Prophet said: "It is a place of tremor and Fitna (Mischief) and the horn of Shaitaan will rise from there."

## **SIGNS OF EXTREMISM**

### **Terrorism in the name of Islam**

The noble Quran views one who murders one soul as if he kills all humanity. Such is the seriousness of taking life without just cause such as for murder. Almighty Allah states in his Holy Book: "Whosoever killed a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind. Whosoever saved the life of one it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind" (Surat al-Maidah, 32). In another verse, the Qur'an tells us "And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein; and the Wrath and the Curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him." (Qur'an 4: 93). But it is not only killing believers that invites such grave punishment. Non-Muslims under the protection of the Islamic state are also guaranteed security of life and limb for the Prophet (PBUH) declared in no uncertain terms: "He who kills a man protected by Islam (Ahl al-dhimah) will not know the smell of Paradise".

But what do we have in the real world ? Do we really find any of these ordinances being adhered to by the so-called Islamist groups that purport to fight in the name of Islam such as Al-Qaeda or the Taliban. One has only to read the daily news to realize who is mostly suffering from the atrocities of these Kharjites. We would find that the vast majority of lives they take are Muslim lives whether it is through suicide bombings, assassinations or execution of hostages. The simple verse "And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell to abide therein; and the Wrath and the Curse of Allah are upon him, and a great punishment is prepared for him"(Qur'an 4: 93) should suffice to instill fear in these terror groups not to take Muslim lives at any cost, but what we find is the very opposite of this where Muslim lives are being taken with impunity at the slightest whim of these misguided elements. The recent case of an innocent Afghan health worker being beheaded by the Taliban because the government did not release the corpse of a slain leader of theirs, Mullah Dadallah bears this out. The logic here - An innocent Muslim life for a corpse.

We would also find that the non-Muslims these misguided groups often massacre are not drawn from among enemy combatants, but ordinary folk who have done no harm to the community. Even if we are to concede that enemy combatants can be killed on the field, they certainly cannot be once they have been captured unless they are guilty of a serious crime such as slaying innocents. They become prisoners of war or in other words, captives and are not to be slain or mutilated in any form. In fact, they are to be clothed with the clothes of the captor and fed with his food. Such is the favourable treatment they are to be given as ordained in the Sunnah. How then can these groups even think of painfully putting them to death often even filming their gory deaths and publicizing it throughout the world. Interestingly the Taliban recently issued a directive to its combatants that in view of diminishing Muslim support for their struggle, excesses should be curbed and that the execution of prisoners of war should be left to the Amir or the Deputy Amir. Why we may ask even consider death for these captives ? Is this the manner which our beloved Prophet (PBUH) treated the many captives he took from among the forces that had been on a war footing with the Muslims ? Nay, he treated them with the utmost kindness with many of these captives ultimately embracing Islam. Such is the way that a war can be won – Winning hearts and minds. One has only to consider how our beloved Prophet (PBUH) treated dumb animals to understand the Mercy Islam has extended to the helpless. When his army was marching to Mecca, he spotted a bitch lying with her pups on the road to the city. Not only did he give instructions that these poor creatures were not to be molested, but even had a sentry posted to ensure that his orders were carried out.

In contrast, consider how the modern terror groups wage their war. Massacring innocents in cold blood, bombing pet markets and killing all those they believe are a threat to their perverse ideology. If we were to study the origins of their brutal methods we would find that it has not been inspired by the true teachings of Islam, but from Jewish bigotry as was evident when the Jewish terror groups Irgun and Stern Gang massacred hundreds of innocent Muslim and Christian inhabitants of the Palestinian town of Deir Yassin prior to proclaiming the State of Israel in 1948 – the first recorded instance of modern-day terrorism in the Middle East.

Consider the long list of Taliban atrocities:

The 1998 massacre of 600 Uzbek villagers.

The 1998 capture of Mazar-e Sharif, which included, according to Human Rights watch, the execution of scores of men and boys and the rape of women and girls. Shop owners, cart pullers, and women and children shoppers were killed.

A 2001 massacre in Yakaolang, which included, according to Human Rights Watch, the executions of at least 170 men. .

Eight boys, killed because they laughed at soldiers.

100 Afghans, slain and hung from lamp posts to warn would-be defectors

Also consider the following report: Taliban authorities burned three dogs to death in a public square in the war-ravaged town of Taloqan. The dogs were dressed in Western neckties and waistcoats and each had the name of a leader despised by the Taliban painted on its shaved head: "Bush," "king" (for Afghanistan's exiled king) and "Rabbani," a leader of the Northern Alliance. After setting the dogs

alight, regional Taliban commander Arif Khan proclaimed, "This is what we do to the dogs who oppose Islam." Those who did not cheer the immolation were beaten, witnesses said.

One has also to consider the danger posed to Muslims by those of the likes of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of the Afghan *Hizb-i Islami* party, and a severe Islamic conservative known for his support for the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and for promoting the strict Arabian Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence over the less rigid Hanafite school common in Afghanistan. Hekmatyar remained the leading recipient of American military aid via the increasingly Islamist Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and preferred to conserve his precious American arms and munitions in Pakistan while his political rivals, such as Tajik Islamist Burhanuddin Rabbani, exhausted themselves fighting the Soviets. Eventually, Hekmatyar settled on demolishing Kabul with rockets from the heights he controlled nearby, killing thousands of Afghan civilians with weapons he had failed to use on the Soviets. Here we have yet another extremist turning his arms not against the enemy, but against fellow Muslims. Incidentally it was this same Hekmatyar who gained notoriety in the 1970s for throwing acid on the faces of Afghan women who did not wear the all-encompassing burka as demanded by him.

Other extremist outfits are no less ruthless. Consider the case of the European tourists who were massacred at Luxor for no reason. A declaration by Egypt's religious authorities had this to say about this mindless massacre of innocents: "Egypt was extremely shocked at what happened in Luxor recently. A group of criminals and murderers, seduced by the Devil, opened fire blindly on whomever they laid their evil eyes. They killed tens of innocent men and women who came to Egypt for tourism, to view its sights. Without doubt, this traitorous act, carried out by butchers, cannot be approved of by any religion, nor by anyone of sound mind. Such behavior is not the behavior of true manhood. This is the influence of the Devil and his followers upon these stupid cowards. The law of Islam views as a guest anyone who visits Egypt legally. All the Egyptians should watch over him the same as they watch over themselves, because the Egyptian is the host and the guest is under his hospitality. These tourists who came from Europe and other countries to view the sights of Egypt did no harm to anybody, nor any wrong to Egypt. Contrary to all religion, law, custom or logic they were savagely attacked in a traitorous way out of black hatred"

This ruthlessness continues to this day. And it has even targeted those who have not even been a threat to them. In 1996, religious fanatics butchered 300 girl-children in Libya for pursuing the 'un-Islamic' practice of attending schools while in Afghanistan Taliban gunmen recently killed two women teachers for educating girls, along with their mother and their grandmother. A couple of months ago, a girl was brutally killed by fanatics for attending school and another girl student Kulsooma of class IX was blinded by throwing acid in Kashmir.

These unsavoury developments in certain parts of the Muslim world are partly the state's lackadaisical attitude in combating groups that purport to fight for Islam and partly the result of narrow social attitudes.

In this connection it is worthwhile noting how those who cultivated extremist attitudes have ultimately suffered because of it. A notable example as we have seen earlier is Saudi Arabia whose rulers Bin Laden has been bold enough to declare Kaffirs, leading the Grand Mufti of the Kingdom Sheikh Bin Baz to declare Bin Laden a Kharjite. Such is the evil end of those who espouse extremism. To these modern-day Kharjites, it is not the Jews who are Islam's greatest enemy, but rather Muslim regimes that they deem are not doing enough to impose Shari'ah. It was in such a context that Al-Qaeda ideologue Zawahiri wrote a treatise 'The Road to Jerusalem goes through Cairo' (Al Mujahidun April 1995) where he propounded the ridiculous idea that Jerusalem will not be liberated unless the battle

for Egypt and Algeria is won. The real enemy according to this perverse logic was not the Jews, but the Egyptian state. We also recently had an audio message, reportedly from al-Qaida leader Naser Abdel Karim al-Wahishi, urging Yemeni citizens to unite and fight the government. Such is the fitna these extremist heretics are capable of causing. Their watchword seems to be Muslim against Muslim. Well, the Jews must be having a field day, leading us to the conclusion that the Jewish Zionists and the 'Muslim' Extremists are brothers in arms.

Of course extremism in the Muslim world has ancient roots as we have seen earlier with the rise of the Kharjites. The problem is particularly acute among the tribal peoples of Saudi Arabia and although one cannot fault that well known reformer Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab for it, it is quite evident that the movement he built drew upon the support of Najdi tribals that were later to evolve into the extremist Ikhwan so that even today we often have Saudi Ulama expressing some rather extremist views. Particularly interesting are the views of the Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdul Aziz bin Baz in a letter that was a response to an article by the rector of Al-Azhar, Shaikh Jad ul-Haq who had sought to justify good relations between Muslims and others and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. Bin Baz boldly declared in response 'Undoubtedly, God has made it incumbent upon the believers to hate, and to be enemies with, the disbelievers and has forbidden them from loving them'. Surprisingly it was Sheikh Bin Baz who in a notorious fatwa known as 'The American Fatwa' fatwa legitimized the presence of American troops on Saudi Arabian soil to fight the Iraqi army. Saudi Arabia eventually hosted nearly half a million members of the American armed forces Some noted that this was in contrast to his opinion in the 1940s, when he contradicted the government policy of Islamically allowing non-Muslims to be employed on Saudi soil. In fact his usual policy was Muslims should not work or socialize with non-Muslims. Such indeed are the pitfalls of extremism – From one extreme to the other ! Another instance of this extremist folly was seen in 1969 when Bin Baz issued a fatwa arguing that the earth is a flat disk around which the sun revolves and that any belief otherwise was heresy to be severely punished. He corrected himself after Saudi Prince Sultan Bin Salman took a ride in an American space shuttle and told Bin Baz that he had personally witnessed the roundness of the earth.

If only these learned ulama could see the tolerance Islam has conceded in its proper perspective then we would certainly have a better world, for mankind and for Islam. As the Qur'an says "*God does not forbid you regarding those who have not fought you on account of the Religion, and have not expelled you from your homes, that you should be virtuous to them and be equitable with them; surely God loves the equitable. God forbids you only regarding those who have fought you on account of Religion, and have expelled you from your homes, and have given support in your expulsion, that you should take them for friends; and whoso takes them for friends, those are the wrong-doers* (Quran: 60: 8-9).

In this connection let us consider how Shaykh Jaddul Haqq, the Grand Mufti of Egypt refuted the extremist ideologue Faraj's proclamation of takfir against Muslim rulers in his *Al-farida al-gha'iba*. Sheihk Jaddul Haqq deconstructed Faraj's argument point by point, asserting the existence of "the greater *jihād*" (the spiritual struggle, repudiated by Faraj), and denying that "armed struggle" was the only possible interpretation of *jihād*, as suggested by Faraj. The *mufti* was especially opposed to the idea that Muslims had the right to declare other Muslims apostate (*takfir*) for the long list of reasons given by Faraj. In al-Haqq's view, only the failure to acknowledge *tawhid* (the unity of God) could render a Muslim apostate. The evolution of Islamic society in Egypt had placed the responsibility for *jihād* upon the army of the state: "The character of *jihād*, so we must understand, has now changed radically, because the defence of country and religion is nowadays the duty of the regular army, and this army carries out the collective duty of *jihād* on behalf of all citizens".

The call of certain extremist groups to impose Shari'ah law becomes obsolete when we find that it is these very groups who have fragrantly violated the Shari'ah by killing innocents and sowing discord in society. In fact, the Qur'anic punishment for these rebels is crucifixion or cross amputation, that is, the amputation of the right hand and left foot which Muslim states should seriously consider implementing on these criminals. A few such punishments should send a severe warning to others who are like-minded to desist from terrorist acts.

If Shari'ah is to be imposed, it cannot be done by forcing the government's hand like what the Pakistani Taliban sought to do in the Swat Valley. It has to be achieved in consultation with established authority and not by rebellion which is one of the greatest crimes in Islam. It will come in God's good time when the Ummah is ready for it. In today's world, Shari'ah law is often misunderstood and is only thought to mean the hadd punishments such as amputation of the hand for theft, stoning to death for adultery or lashing for drinking. This of course is a very narrow-minded view of Shari'ah which embraces all aspects of life including economic life based on the absence of oppressive practices like usury. Besides, there is a need to clear public perceptions of Islamically prescribed punishments which are usually perceived in a negative manner even in Muslim communities due to a lack of understanding of the criteria necessary to carry out such punishments. For instance how many Muslims today know that amputation of the hand for theft is subject to some very strict criteria, including among others that the item stolen has to be above a certain value (in the present day context over 40 USD); it has to be placed in a place of safekeeping such as a safe and it should be obtained by stealth when no one is around. The penalty cannot even be applied in cases of forcible misappropriation of goods or even opportunistic misappropriation when the owner is looking elsewhere. It cannot be applied in the case of members of one family living in the same house, a host visiting a guest or even in the public market. Nor could it be imposed on a child, or an insane person. Furthermore clear intent has to be established, and what's more even if it meets all these criteria, the victim can forgive the offender by gifting him the stolen item before he is taken to court thereby saving him from the punishment. Similarly we would find that although the prescribed punishment for adultery is stoning to death, at least four witnesses should have physically witnessed the accused couple engaged in the very act itself. Thus public perceptions of Shari'ah on the path of both the state and the public should change before one could think of meaningfully imposing Shari'ah law which as stated earlier cannot simply be confined to punishments, but must also embrace other salient aspects such as the welfare state envisaged in Islam.

And it will come God Willing. It was only recently that we heard of the religious authorities in Malaysia sentencing a Malaysian Muslim woman convicted of drinking alcohol to caning, despite the fact that it drew criticism from some human rights group simply for the fact that she is a woman, an absurd argument considering the fact that these rights groups campaign for equality between the sexes in almost everything else other than physical punishment. What's more, the sentenced mother of two Kartika Sari Dewi Shukarno has not only accepted the punishment, but also wants to be caned in accordance with her faith and that too in public. Here we find a classical case of both the state and the individual agreeing on the implementation of the law and this is in the fitness of things.

## Honour Killings

Another extremely evil facet of extremism we see in the practice of so-called 'honour killings' where girls and young women are killed by their male relatives for the slightest misdemeanour. In April 2008 it came to light that some months prior, a Saudi woman was killed by her father for chatting on Facebook to a man. The murder only came to light when a Saudi cleric referred to the case in an attempt to demonstrate the strife that the website causes. A leading Saudi cleric, Sheikh Ali al-Maliki, was outraged that girls had access to such websites where they could post pictures of themselves and otherwise "behave badly," but showed no concern over the girl actually killed.

Another country where such killings is rife is Jordan, though it is said that Judges, lawyers, activists and experts agree that in most cases men exploit lenient laws and social misconceptions about women to murder them for inheritance, settling family feuds or to hide other crimes. In one instance a brother killed his sister simply for wanting to quit the family's prostitution ring and in another, a man beat his 16-year-old daughter to death, claiming she was pregnant. Investigations, however, proved that he had molested the girl. In fact Judge Jehad Oteibi, spokesman for the Judiciary Council, said court records show that many "honor killings" are committed for reasons related to inheritance. More recently we heard of two young Saudi women, identified as Reem, 21, and Nouf, 19, being murdered in cold blood by their brother for attending a mixed party. He shot them in the presence of their father who, according to newspaper reports, quickly forgave the son because he was defending the family's honor.

However, it is not only families that have no knowledge of Islam that indulge in these senseless killings. Afghanistan's Taliban recently publicly executed a young couple who had tried to elope. The pair were shot dead in front of a mosque in the southwestern province of Nimroz, an area where the Taliban has influence. It followed a decree by local religious leaders that they should be put to death. Governor Ghulam Dastageer branded their execution an "insult to Islam." "An unmarried young boy and an unmarried girl who loved each other and wanted to get married had eloped because their families would not approve the marriage," Azad said. The pair, both adults, were discovered by Taliban militants and returned to their village in Khash Rod district where the extremists are active. "Three Taliban mullahs brought them to the local mosque and they passed a fatwa [religious decree] that they must be killed. They were shot and killed in front of the mosque in public" the governor said.

It seems that the Taliban in their rabid bigotry do not understand basic Islamic law. Even a layman knows that an unmarried couple who have illicit sex are merely to be given a hundred lashes each and this is the maximum punishment that can be meted out to them. This too has to be established only after four witnesses catch them in the very act itself, or else even this punishment cannot be applied. Furthermore there is nothing to show that this couple had committed fornication. They had not even eloped and were only planning to do so. The couple concerned had decided to elope because the young woman's parents were attempting to force her to marry another man who was not to her liking, and by no means can this be regarded as a crime. She was only exercising a right conceded by Islam and to murder these young people for that is not only a crime against humanity, but also a crime against Islam.

It is in this backdrop that Islamic governments must take stringent measures to contain this cult of 'honour' which is nothing but a dishonour to the fair name of Islam. There are well documented cases, where Turkish courts have sentenced whole families to life imprisonment for an honor killing. The most recent was on January 13, 2009, where a Turkish Court sentenced five members of the same Kurdish family to life imprisonment for the "honour killing" of Naile Erdas, 16, who had been raped.

It would appear that the Turkish courts who handed down this verdict were far more Islamic than the Saudi authorities who though professedly Islamic would not have taken any action against the perpetrators of such vile acts.

### **Draconian blasphemy Laws**

Yet another aspect of extremism is seen in the harsh blasphemy laws that some Muslim countries inflict. Consider for instance how the Penal Code of Pakistan defines blasphemy. It states: “Use of derogatory remarks etc in respect of the holy Prophet (PBUH) by word, either spoken or written. Or by visible representation, or by importation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiling the sacred name of the holy Prophet (PBUH)”. The penalty for such blasphemy, it declared, was death or life imprisonment. The Federal Shari’ah Court of the country however ruled in 1990 that the penalty should be a mandatory death sentence with no right to reprieve or pardon. Although Saudi Arabia does not have any specific laws for blasphemy, it is left to the discretion of judges to decide on their fate and there have been instances of some rather harsh rulings. For instance consider the case of Turkish Barber Sabri Bogday who was sentenced to death at the Jeddah General Court on March 31, 2008 on charges of blasphemy. The punishment was handed down after two men, one Saudi and the other Egyptian, reported to the authorities that he had sworn at God and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at his Barbershop in Jeddah last year. The judges concerned here did not give Bogday the chance to repent. According to Riyadh-based lawyer Abdul Rahman Al-Lahem, some judges consider blasphemy infidelity and hold that the accused cannot repent and would face the death penalty. Others consider the statement to be disbelief and would allow the accused to retract his words. According to Al-Lahem, the majority of Muslim jurists demand that the accused must be given a chance to repent (Arab News, 21st April 2008). Indeed the judgment was passed in spite of the fact that Saudi Arabia’s leading Ulama have ruled that the accused should be given the opportunity to repent for such an offence and only if it is spurned that he or she should be executed. Indeed one wonders whether not the judge who gave this ruling harboured tribal feelings of prejudice against the Turks who during the Ottoman period ruled the Arabian Peninsula for several centuries and served the cause of Islam more than any modern-day Arab regime. Saudi Arabian men convicted of the charge are known to get away with a lashing.

What is particularly harsh in the case of Pakistan’s blasphemy law is the wording and no opportunity of repentance to save the offender from the prescribed punishment of death despite the fact that we know that even the Prophet (PBUH) at least in one instance (one of Ibn Khatal’s slave girls) forgave those who had reviled him and later sought his pardon. That what constitutes an offence of blasphemy is far more serious than that defined in Pakistani law may be seen from the following hadith where we find a man upon seeing the Prophet (PBUH) urinating while squatting said “*Look at him, he urinates like a woman*”. The Prophet (PBUH) hearing this replied: “*Woe upon you, do you not know what happened to the companion of the Children of Israel ? When struck by urine, they used to cut it away with scissors. He forbade them from doing that and he was chastised in his grave*” (Ibn Majah).

Here we have an instance of a man, in his ignorance, comparing the noble Prophet’s actions to that of a woman’s and he had the temerity to use this kind of language before the Prophet of Allah and the Ruler of the Community. But we do not find the Prophet pronouncing that he be killed for blasphemy. Rather we find the Prophet (PBUH) admonishing him and giving him an explanation as to why he did what he did.

And finally we may ask what good has the wording of Pakistan's blasphemy act done to the country, other than breeding a virulent form of extremism that knows no justice or respect for human life. Could it not be said that the perverse nature Pakistani 'Islamist' militancy has assumed today with rebellion to established authority, mob rule, sectarianism and oppression of minorities has its roots in this kind of extremist thinking that not only sets aside the Spirit of Islam but also its Word to achieve its goals. Having intolerant laws caters only to the needs of sick minds that are bent on death and destruction and stand to see no reason. Such laws only embolden these perverted minds and give them a license to think they can get away with anything including taking lives with impunity. And this we see happening almost every day in Pakistan.

One has only to read the newspapers to realize how violent a society this once peaceful country has become. Many are the allegations of blasphemy brought against a Muslim by a fellow Muslim which is hard to believe given the large number of such accusations, particularly in an Islamic society where love of the Prophet (PBUH) is part of the faith, and we cannot but suspect that many of them have an underlying motive – to settle an old score or misappropriate property for instance. And why is this piece of legislation being so abused and misused? For the simple reason that it mandates death without reprieve through repentance. If it did not, unscrupulous men will not find it a useful tool to achieve their nefarious objectives by having a fellow human put to death on a false pretext. Non-Muslims too are probably being oppressed by such mindless laws. The Islamic State we know is bound to protect its non-Muslim minorities and particularly Christians who have a special status in Islamdom, but what we find is that the blasphemy law is also being abused to harass Pakistan's Christian minority. And indeed, how can one pass death on a non-Muslim for blasphemy without even accepting his right to embrace Islam and so save himself or herself from the punishment. It is generally agreed that in Islam, a non-Muslim, upon embracing Islam, would not only have all his or her past sins forgiven, but will also not be liable to be penalized for any crime he or she would have committed in their former state, even if it were against Islam.

Even today, it is not too late for Pakistan to revisit its legislation and consider how best to rephrase it and incorporate a provision for reprieve through repentance for the offense concerned. Although we know classical Hanafi law to which Pakistan subscribes does not give the offender this opportunity, this does not mean that there is no other way for the Shafi Madhhab does give him that option and so do many Salafi scholars. The principle of *talfiq* or eclectic choice between the various Sunni law schools could be resorted to so that the Shafi and Salafi views on it could be accommodated. This is not a new thing and was even resorted to way back in 1917 when the Hanafiite Ottoman Empire incorporated Hanbalite principles on stipulations in marriage contracts into its family law. Even today, we find that traditionally Maliki countries such as Tunisia and Morocco have adopted Hanafi principles on women's capacity to marry giving the women in these countries the discretion to choose their marriage partners sans the consent of their agnatic guardians, which traditional Maliki jurisprudence does not permit.

Finally what we can conclude from all this is that it is only through a proper and thorough study of the Qur'an and Sunnah and a revisiting of the classical schools of jurisprudence by taking the best of them which are in conformity with the two primary sources of Shari'ah that we could derive a truly Islamic law that will at the same time fulfill the needs of modern society. Islam was meant for all time and so shall it be.

Hazrat Abu Saeed Khudri (Radiallhu Anhu) and Hazrat Anas (Radiallhu Anhu) report that the Holy Prophet (Sallal Laahu Alaihi Wasallam) stated: "My Ummat is destined to differ and be divided. So a group will arise whose talks will sound very good but their character will be misleading. They will read the Quran but it will not descend below their throats (just oral reading). They will leave Deen just as an arrow pierces and goes right through the prey. They will not return to Islam. They are the worst of creation because of their nature and constitution. They will call the people towards the Quran and Deen whilst in reality they will have nothing to do with Islam. Whoever will confront them, he will be the most beloved servant of Allah".

Finally, all we have to ask ourselves is why the misguided sects and individuals harbouring extremist views have been damned and condemned so much in the ahadith, in contrast to Muslims who are moderate. Why is it that the Prophet declared that extremism in religion was the reason for the fall of those before us and not laxity in religion. The answer is simple, laxity in religion can be made up by sincere repentance and reform. Religious extremism on the other hand usually cannot as it does not seem to recognize repentance and even the Almighty's infinite Mercy. Put simply, extremism is deviance from the true teachings of Islam and the sooner it is rooted out – the better.