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**We stand for:**

- *Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue*
- *Respect for the human race and rights*
- *Cooperation for the good of people*
- *Moderation*
- *Modernity*
- *High standards of spirituality*

**In this issue**

<b>Local Events</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Muslim Affairs</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Ibn Ma'ruf Al Shami</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Record number of journalists killed</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Islamophobia, media and Muslim mothers</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>A Feast for Clothes</b>	<b>8</b>

# Abrar

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## **A message for social justice, fit for Christmas**

Justice is the aim of most forms of activism. For centuries people have felt the lack of justice at all levels of human endeavours. Justice implies proper positioning of things in a way that preserves the natural balance needed to ensure durability of human life. Political justice must be parallel with economic and social justice. What does this mean in real life? Aren't the international initiatives to address people's grievances enough to secure a just environment? When the leaders of the countries forming the G20 meet in their annual summit, isn't that a manifestation of the collective efforts to establish economic justice in the world?

One fact that is often overlooked. The modern economic system of the "free world" is pivoted around the private property of the individual. The multinational companies, the insurance conglomerates, the World Trade Organisation, the communication companies and the taxman have one aim in common; to raid the purses of the people who form the lower and middle classes of the society. These raids take various forms; official summons and demands, marketing through the media which aim at brainwashing the consumers, the law-enforcement agencies that make it make it an offence to default on tax payments. What is just and what is not just in these practices? Is there any target except the individual? Of course they also target big businesses, but these are protected by their ability to recruit major accountancy and law firms to ensure the minimum payment of taxation and the least purchases of equipment. The UK Government has had long battles with the big companies like google to retrieve millions worth of unpaid taxes.

When the G20 leaders met in the Brazilian capital; Buenos Aires, their summit was promoted as a forum of the world big economies to coordinate efforts and ensure free trade at reasonable taxation. But how is justice served by those forums when their leaders are part of the ongoing economic concerns which have their eyes of the wealth of the public? When President Trump declares his policy arguing that it is based on retrieving hundreds of billions of dollars from countries like Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Gulf Cooperation Council. Where is justice here? This is shear intimidation and daytime robbery. To establish justice in such a situation appears extremely far-fetched. Without the people's consensus the raid on the public

purse of the poor people will always be devoid of justice. The leaders attending the G20 summit did not possess the fundamental qualities of passion, equality of rights of people, gender pay equality and rights. To be able to achieve a degree of justice, the principles of distribution must have a divine input through revelation or narration.

There is a case to be discussed by modern thinkers, philosophers and ideologues. Can human justice be achieved? Can the UN protect the ordinary people or is its main function to maintain the status quo? As Christmas approaches; churchmen will endeavour to show the mercy and compassion of Jesus Christ. This is a good act to highlight the role of divinity in spreading love and justice among the people of this planet. It is a time of charity and peace. Voices must be raised against injustices wherever they may occur, wars especially in Yemen, abuse of the weak, whether those behind bars under dictatorial regimes or the victims of grooming and social violence. It is clear that the post-war world has not been able to alleviate the suffering of the millions, whether those who cry for help or those who suffer in silence. Political and economic injustices are spread throughout the world. But some acts and policies stand out. The present divisive policies of USA stands out as a serious obstacle in the way to establish justice based on divine revelations and human decency. Churchmen must raise their voices in their messages during this festive season to call for a reversal of the current trend, adopt Christ's morality, his ethical approach against evil acts and intentions and call for immediate cessation of wars and an end to exploitation, deception and enmity of God's religion.



## Good deeds in Islam

The weekly meeting of Abrar on Thursday 6th December was addressed by Dr Khalid Al Sahfi, a consultant specialising in infectious diseases. He talked about "the good deed" referring to actions of man and how they play vital role in societies. Noble deeds are necessary for every society; they curtail the human immoral excesses and help others to overcome their agonies. He repeatedly referred to non-Muslims who do good deeds that benefit the other humans and asked whether these people would. The speaker quoted several verses and prophetic traditions to highlight the importance of good deed in the Islamic religion. Good deed is every act or saying which aims at promoting the good for people and other creatures. Noble acts are appreciated by all people because they are in line with their natural upbringing. To emphasise the notion of good deeds God Almighty sent the prophets to ensure human compliance with God's commandment to enjoin the good and do good deeds. It is an expression of proper worship of God. It is a divine duty that reflects real faith. Good deed also reflects real understanding of the aim of the human existence, the relation with the universe and other creatures. The holy Quran repeatedly emphasises good deed as a reflection of deep faith. This is true for followers of all faiths. Many Quranic verses relate to good deed as an expression of good and real faith. It has many meanings and Arabic terms. It is a form of jihad, i.e. exerting effort to achieve good aims. Divine reward is linked to man's actions. It is the opposite of bad act that leads to corruption. So what is the benefit of good acts in our real life? There is one problem here.



The life of a believer has been distorted by forgetfulness and divergence from the real divine path. Gradually this life has become ritualistic. This has gone too far in some instances. Some people who do not believe in the divine revelation question the real intention of the believers and whether their religion promotes good deeds or is confined to the rituals. This is due to the fact that after the prophets some protagonists worked to empty religion of its real intentions and contents. Thus the deduction of the religious rulings has been done in isolation of morality and real spirituality. Some people concerned themselves with the Quran alone without placing it into religious context. Mohammad had always wanted to humanise religion. Mohammad showed his people that he was a human being; not a supernatural being. He would walk in the street, get married, eat and work. Yet those whose faith had not been fully comprehended became suspicious of themselves. They acted to take the middle ground between the inactive behaviour of those who understood Islam as nothing but rituals and those who attempted to force Islam on the people after "cleansing" them. A new dilemma has thus ensued. Muslims became fragmented along sectarian lines. They also adopted hypocrisy to hide their reality. Inside the mosque they showed a different character to that outside it. Religion must be understood in totality, not fragmented. We have to understand that acts of worship are complementary and must be performed as a whole. Prayers are a means not an aim. We have to understand that religion must be understood as a whole and not in fragmented parts. Religion aims at promoting the good. This good is implicit in the various forms of worship. Intention is also significant. A believer must have good intentions behind his deed; that he aspires to do good to himself and the others.

## Divine laws in the Quran

The weekly meeting of Abrar on Thursday 13th December was addressed by Dr Ali Al Ausie who discussed the Quranic doctrines and whether they present a rule of divine leadership. He said the holy scripture contains what amounts to scientific theories on various aspects of the human life. Those theories are facts that amount to solid laws, whether scientific, legal or social. The holy Quran contains many divine laws that are absolute. They cannot be compromised, shelved or deleted. These relate to people's actions and whether they identify with the divine commands. If the people adapt to those commands they will succeed, their lives will flourish

and their aspirations will be fulfilled. This universe is designed in accordance with the laws of cause and effect. God's commands are the causes; if they are obeyed the effects will be as God promises. God says in Al Jinn chapter: "If they (the Pagans) had (only) remained on the (right) Way, We should certainly have bestowed on them Rain in abundance. This is a law that will always work. No one can invalidate it. There are many verses that talk of injustices and oppression. The holy Quran refers to the society as "the village" and links their behaviour to their eventual destiny. Injustice is the biggest threat to the human society. Those "villages", according to the Quran, will always be annihilated if they practice injustice. In The Cave chapter, God says: Such were the populations we destroyed when they committed iniquities; but we fixed an appointed time for their destruction. There are many other similar verses that link the destiny of the communities to the way they exercise justice or commit oppression. Other areas where divine laws are mentioned as decisive is the fate of the nations who ignored God's messengers and acted against them. The arrogance of man often leads the people to trouble. Dictators, despots and tyrants who position themselves above God will always lead their countries and people to disasters. The holy Quran also refers to the environment and stress the need to preserve it for the good of mankind. Abusing nature is a sin and will lead to collective suffering. The speaker delivered examples of the ill-fate of those who do not use their reason as a guide. These are divine laws that cannot be altered or negated. The speaker presented many such examples to reach the conclusion that the Quran contains significant facts and laws that must be understood as a guide to the human life.



## UN Chief urges standing up for human rights



Human rights are universal and eternal said United Nations secretary-general in his message on Human Rights Day, urging all people to stand up for human rights – for everyone, everywhere.

'For 70 years, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been a global beacon – shining a light for dignity, equality and well-being ... and bringing hope to dark places,' said Antonio Guterres in a message, a copy of which was obtained by the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) through the United Nations Information Center (UNIC) in the Iranian capital on December 10.

'The rights proclaimed in the Declaration apply to everyone -- no matter our race, belief, location or other distinction of any kind.'

Describing human rights as universal and eternal, Guterres added, 'They are also indivisible. One cannot pick and choose among civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.'

Today we also honor the human rights defenders risking their lives to protect people in the face of rising hatred, racism, intolerance and repression, he said. 'Human rights are under siege around the world,' he stressed, adding that universal values are being eroded.

## Irish Senate OKs bill banning Israeli settlement goods

Ireland's Senate or upper house of parliament on Wednesday approved a bill that criminalizes the import and trade of goods and services originating in Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories. The draft bill passed the committee last week.

While the Irish government opposes the bill, it will be enacted if it is approved by the lower house of parliament. If this occurs, Ireland will be the first EU country to impose such a ban on Israeli settlements. "We will enact this vital bill with great support," Senator Frances Black wrote on social media.

In a statement earlier, Black also emphasized that the bill is a minimum requirement for being an EU country that is committed to justice and human rights.

The Israeli embassy in Dublin has condemned the bill, calling it "populist" and "dangerous." The Irish Senate voted 25-20 in July to advance the bill, which would criminalize trade with Israeli set-

tlements, including those built in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

According to the draft law, anyone importing or attempting to import from the settlements would be committing a crime punishable by up to five years in prison or a 250,000 euro fine.

## U.S. to continue support for Saudi-led coalition in Yemen

The United States wants to continue support to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen's war and will remain engaged in efforts to combat Iranian influence and Islamist militancy in the Arab state, a State Department official said on Sunday.

Since the Oct 2. murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate, the U.S. administration has come under pressure at home over the nearly four-year-old conflict.

The Senate last month voted to advance a resolution to end U.S. military support, which includes arms sales and intelligence sharing, for the Western-backed Sunni Muslim coalition that intervened in 2015 against the Iranian-aligned Houthis to restore the internationally recognised government.

'There are pressures in our system ... to either withdraw from the conflict or



discontinue our support of the coalition, which we are strongly opposed to on the administration side," said Timothy Lenderking, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Arabian Gulf Affairs.

"We do believe that the support for the coalition is necessary. It sends a wrong message if we discontinue our support," he told a security forum in the United Arab Emirates.

## Rouhani: sanctions may lead to drugs, refugee, bomb 'deluge'

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani predicted a "deluge" of drugs, refugees and attacks on the West if U.S. sanctions weaken Iran's ability to contain them.

"I warn those who impose sanctions that if Iran's ability to fight drugs and terrorism are affected ... you will not be safe from a deluge of drugs, asylum seekers, bombs and terrorism," Rouhani said in a speech carried live on state television.

Separately, Foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was quoted as saying that the United States is selling more arms into the Middle East than the re-



gion needs, making it a "tinderbox".

U.S. President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of a multilateral nuclear deal with Iran in May and reimposed sanctions on Iran's vital oil in-

dustry last month.

Drug trafficking is a serious challenge for Iran as it borders Afghanistan - the world's largest opium producer - and Pakistan, a major transit country for drugs.

"We spend \$800 million a year to fight drugs which ensures the health of nations stretching from of Eastern Europe to the American West and North Africa to West Asia. Imagine what a disaster there would be if there is a breach in the dam," Rouhani said.

## Yemen food survey finds majority in 'dire' crisis

Yemen's war and the ensuing economic collapse has left 15.9 million people, 53 percent of the population, facing "severe acute food insecurity" and famine was a danger if immediate action was not taken, a survey said on Saturday.

The report was released as the United Nations brought Yemen's warring sides together for the first peace talks in two years. Humanitarian groups say peace is the only way of ending the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

While war was the main cause of the hunger crisis, it was exacerbated by extremely high food prices, a liquidity crisis, disrupted livelihoods, and high levels of unemployment, the report said, adding food aid was not enough to plug the gap.

"Immediate responses are required to save lives and livelihoods of millions not to slide to the next worse case which is famine," it said.

The survey was conducted by Yemeni officials and international experts according to the international IPC system, which uses a five point scale where 3 is "crisis", 4 is "emergency" and 5 is "catastrophe" and possibly famine.

The release of the report, which is based on a survey completed in October, was delayed several times without explanation and is planned to be updated in March.

It showed many pockets of extreme hunger across Yemen, concentrated in areas with active fighting, and especially affecting the 3 million displaced people, their host families, landless wage labourers and other marginalized groups.

## Ibn Ma'ruf: polymath, astronomer and author

Taqi ad-Din Muhammad ibn Ma'ruf ash-Shami al-Asadi was a Muslim polymath: He was the author of more than ninety books on a wide variety of subjects, including astronomy, clocks, engineering, mathematics, mechanics, optics and natural philosophy. In 1574 the Ottoman Sultan Murad III invited Taqī ad-Dīn to build the Istanbul observatory. Using his exceptional knowledge in the mechanical arts, Taqī ad-Dīn constructed instruments like huge armillary and mechanical clocks that he used in his observations of the Great Comet of 1577. He also used European celestial and terrestrial globes that were delivered to Istanbul in gift-exchange. The major work that resulted his work in the observatory is titled *The tree of ultimate knowledge in the Kingdom of the Revolving Spheres: The astronomical tables of the King of Kings [Murād III](Sidrat al-muntah al-afkar fi malkūt al-falak al-dawār- al-zij al-Shāhinshāhi)*. The work was prepared according to the results of the observations carried out in Egypt and Istanbul in order to correct and complete Ulugh Beg's *Zij as-Sultani*. The first 40 pages of the work deal with calculations, followed by discussions of astronomical clocks, heavenly circles, and information about three eclipses which he observed at Cairo and Istanbul. For corroborating data of other observations of eclipses in other locale like Daud ar-Riyyadi (David the Mathematician), David Ben-Shushan of Salonika. According to Salomon Schweiger, the chaplain of Habsburg ambassador Johann Joachim von Sinzendorf, Taqi ad-Din was a charlatan who deceived Sultan Murad III and had him spent enormous resources. Taqi ad-Din's method of finding coordinates of stars was more precise than those of his contemporaries,



In 1551, Taqi al-Din described a steam turbine with the practical application of rotating a spit. Taqi ad-Din's ethnicity has been described as Arab, Ottoman Turkish and Syrian. The Encyclopedia of Islam makes no mention of his ethnicity, simply calling him, "...the most important astronomer of Ottoman Turkey".

In 1551 Taqi al-Din described A rudimentary impact steam turbine In his work *Al-Turuq al-samiyya fi al-alat al-ruhaniyya* (The Sublime Methods of Spiritual Machines). He described a method for rotating a spit by means of a jet of steam playing on rotary vanes around the periphery of a wheel. Similar device for rotating a spit was also later described by John Wilkins in 1648. These devices were called "mills" but are now known as steam jacks.

In 1574 Taqi ad-Din proposed the new observatory to Sultan Murad III who, having an interest in astronomy, provided the financing for a new observatory to be built in Istanbul. He used errors in various astronomical tables as reasoning for the new project. His observatory, it is said, resembled Tycho Brahe's observatory in many respects. A few months after opening, on the first day of Ramadan, a comet appeared in the night sky. This was unfortunate timing as the current Sultan was about to march on Persia and his fathers death had been heralded by a comet. It sat in the night sky for 40 nights growing slowly brighter. With this in mind he asked Taqi to use the observatory to figure out what the meaning of the apparition. Taqi noted that both the head and tail of the comet seemed to be pointing in the direction on Persia indicating that it was more of a bad omen for them and not for the Ottoman Empire. He also noted that the comet appeared in Sagittarius, which represented an Ottoman archer, and would set in Aquarius, which represented a time of peace. He strongly believed that this comet was a good sign for the Sultan and the Ottoman Empire in their march against Persia. While their armies did do well a plague broke out at roughly the same time. This caused political pressure against continued funding of the observatory. Grand Vizier Sokullu pushed for continued funding until his death in 1580. Without protection, the observatory was torn down shortly after.

Taqī al-Dīn, being an astronomer, was very familiar with optics and the behavior of light. From this he wrote a book called *Takiyüddin'in Optik Kitabı* or Taqī al-Dīn's *Book of Optics*. This book is written in three chapters. The first deals with the nature of vision, the second with reflection and then concludes with an understanding of refraction. He makes special note that his book is based on experimental evidence rather than being a conclusion drawn of previous works of literature. He also makes note that light is the same from all sources, contradicting Ibn al-Haytham.

In the early Greek world there were two competing ideas of sight. One that rays emanated from the eyes onto an object and another that an object emanated light and our eyes only observed it. Both sides has their champions however Taqī al-Dīn was able to show experimentally that light emanates from an object and is then collected by our eyes. "According to him, if the ray of light had emerged from the eye, it would take too much time for us to see in the sphere of fixed stars." Since we can see the stars at night without any delay it is clear that light comes from them and not something we produce. From this he also argued that the color of the light is thus contained within the light of the object. He also argued that while light, emanating from a single point, may travel outward in a sphere the individual rays of light travel in straight lines. Finally he showed that the color of an object was produced by the reflection and refraction properties of an object.

Reflection itself was nothing new to the Islamic world and had been figured out for quite some time. However, any optics book that left out a section of reflective surfaces would be strikingly lacking. To this effect a section was included. He noted that rays of light being reflected off a mirror will propagate in a spherical form. As such, reflections of rays are a geometrical problem. It had been found that the incident ray, the reflected ray and the normal all lie in the same plane. It was also discovered that the angle of incidence and the angle of reflection were the same. The rays of light being emitted will also have the same color as the reflective surface.

Like reflection, refraction had been known about for some time. It was, however, a much more complicated problem that required further work. It was known that refracted light propagates in a spherical shell much as reflected light does and that it also takes on the color of the material through which it is traveling. It was also known that if a ray of light is traveling and goes from one medium to another that its angle will bend in a manner related to the density of the two materials. Like reflections the incident ray, the refracted ray and the normal all lie in the same plane however the angle of refraction is always less than the angle of incidence. The only exceptions to this are perpendicular rays which do not in fact refract. Taqī al-Dīn did discover though that "the difference between the refraction angles of different incident rays is less than the difference between the angles of incidence." He also noted that "the ratio of the angle of the larger incident to its refraction angle is larger than the ratio of the angle of the smaller incident to its refraction angle." These are pretty much still our modern rules for optics.

## Number of journalists jailed for doing job near record high

A near-record number of journalists around the world are behind bars for their work, including two Reuters reporters whose imprisonment in Myanmar has drawn international criticism, according to a report released on Thursday. There were 251 journalists jailed for doing their jobs as of Dec. 1, the Committee to Protect Journalists said in an annual study. For the third consecutive year, more than half are in Turkey, China and Egypt, where authorities have accused reporters of anti-governmental activities.

"It looks like a trend now," the report's author, Elana Beiser, said in an interview. "It looks like the new normal."

The number of journalists imprisoned on charges of "false news" rose to 28, up from 21 last year and nine in 2016, according to the CPJ, a U.S.-based non-profit that promotes press freedom.

The report criticized U.S. President Donald Trump for frequently characterizing negative media coverage as "fake news," a phrase that is also used by leaders against their critics in countries like the Philippines and Turkey.

The study was published the same week that Time magazine named several journalists as its annual "Person of the Year." That group included Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, who were imprisoned one year ago on Wednesday, and Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who was killed at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul two months ago.



Wa Lone, 32, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 28, were found guilty in September of violating Myanmar's Official Secrets Act and sentenced to seven years in prison. They had been investigating the massacre of 10 Rohingya Muslim men and boys amid an army crackdown that has driven hundreds of thousands of refugees into Bangladesh. Lawyers for two Reuters reporters have lodged an appeal against their conviction and sentence.

Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi has said the jailing of the reporters had nothing to do with freedom of expression. In comments made the week after their conviction, she said they were sentenced for handling official secrets and "were not jailed because they were journalists."

Turkey remains the world's worst offender against press freedom, the CPJ said, with at least 68 journalists imprisoned for anti-state charges. At least 25 journalists are in prison in Egypt.

Turkey has previously said its crackdown is justified because of an attempted coup

to overthrow the government in 2016. Egypt has said its actions to limit dissent are directed at militants trying to undermine the state, which saw a popular uprising in 2011 topple the country's longtime leader Hosni Mubarak.

Asked about journalists being jailed, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said: "Legal measures are not taken because of these suspects' or criminals' professions. This is unrelated."

The overall number of jailed journalists is down 8 percent from last year's record high of 272, the CPJ said.

The total does not take into account journalists who have disappeared or are being held by non-state actors. The CPJ said there are dozens of reporters missing or kidnapped in the Middle East and North Africa, including several held by Houthis in Yemen.

### Proposed definition of Islamophobia

Muslim organisations across the UK are calling on political party leaders to adopt the definition of Islamophobia, published earlier this week. Councils of mosques representing 100s of mosques from across the UK, national Muslim organisations, Muslim professional networks, the largest Muslim charities and other Muslim organisations – from secular to religious – have co-signed open letters to all political party leaders urging them to adopt the APPG definition of Islamophobia.

The letter states: "For our communities, it was vital that the definition encapsulated the racialised reality of Islamophobia and its many manifestations over and above mere anti-Muslim hatred. In addition, we believed it was important that the definition provided space for criticism of Islam that did not use the language of racism to target expressions of Muslimness. This definition protects these important principles."

Harun Khan, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, which helped facilitate the joint call and support of the definition said: "Muslim organisations from different parts of the country and different backgrounds have come together to make a resounding call on our political leaders to adopt this definition. We hope that they all understand the importance of listening to communities, and look forward to their positive response."

This call comes after over 70 academics publicly endorsed the definition proposed by the APPG at their launch on Tuesday, including some of the most senior respected scholars in the field.

### Corruption costs \$2.6 trillion: UN chief

The cost of corruption is at least \$2.6 trillion, equal to 5 percent of global gross domestic product, said United Nations secretary-general on International Anti-Corruption Day on Sunday.

'Corruption is present in all countries, rich and poor, North and South', said Antonio Guterres in a message, a copy of which was obtained by the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) through the United Nations Information Center (UNIC) in the Iranian capital on December 9.

'Corruption is an assault on the values of the United Nations', and 'robs societies of schools, hospitals and other vital services, drives away foreign investment and strips nations of their natural resource,' Guterres said in his message. He said corruption undermines the rule of law and abets crimes such as the illicit trafficking of people, drugs and arms.

'Tax evasion, money laundering and other illicit flows divert much-needed resources for sustainable development.' Saying that the World Economic Fo-

rum estimates the cost of corruption is at least \$2.6 trillion, which means 5 percent of global gross domestic product, he added, 'According to the World Bank, businesses and individuals pay more than \$1 trillion in bribes each year.'

He said that corruption begets more corruption and fosters a corrosive culture of impunity.

UN chief also said that the UN Convention against Corruption is among the primary tools for advancing the fight.

Sustainable Development Goal 16 and its targets also offer a template for action: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Guterres urged the world to 'work together to build a foundation of trust and accountability.'

'We can educate and empower citizens, promote transparency and strengthen international cooperation to recover stolen assets.'

## Islamophobia, media and Muslim mothers in maternity services

Negative portrayals of Islam and Muslims are everywhere. You don't have to look far to find stigmatising, offensive and biased news reports – all of which significantly impact how Muslims generally see the world they live in.

These experiences influence Muslim people's day-to-day lives – and can play a role in how Muslim people conduct themselves on a daily basis. In my PhD study, I looked at the experiences of Muslim women engaging with UK maternity services. What I found was that Muslim women lacked confidence in discussing their concerns. Most specifically health concerns related to religious practices, such as fasting or wanting to see a female doctor.

The ladies I spoke to felt reluctant to ask healthcare professionals questions related to their religious needs. As one participant explained:

I could not say I am fasting which sounds extreme. Honestly, people just hear the word fasting and they think that you are so extreme.

The anticipation of healthcare professionals not having a positive opinion of them being Muslim women in general and of their religion as a whole was strongly felt among most Muslim women in the study.

This anticipation was not specifically an outcome of a negative encounter during their care, but was associated with the women's concerns of Western media portrayal of Islam and Western attitudes towards Muslims in general.

### Stigmatisation

Research has shown how the representation of Muslims in Western media became significantly more negative following the events of 9/11. Over this period the British press has often used a negative tone in presenting British Muslims, which makes them seen as an "alien other" within British society. This negative tone has only become worse with the dramatically increased coverage of radical groups such as Daesh.

Often the media makes distinctions between the actions of radical Muslims and the beliefs and actions of "mainstream" or "moderate" Muslims. Making it sound like there are "good" and "bad" Muslims.

Many of the Muslim women spoke of wanting to hide aspects of their



religion. Shutterstock

Muslim women, in particular, are often portrayed as victims and oppressed. There is often a greater focus on their outer appearances. This is especially true for Muslim women who wear the face veil (burqa, also known as a niqab), which has long been portrayed as a symbol of oppression. The burqa has become a hot topic of debate in politics, arts and literature, even though it is estimated that 90% of Muslim women in the world do not wear the Burqa – even in most Muslim countries. Debates and policy in Europe about banning or regulating wearing the veil contribute to the assumptions that if Muslim women wearing Islamic garments had a choice, they would not wear headscarves, burqa or any such clothing. Because of this rhetoric, it is often believed that Muslim women are oppressed and need to be saved.

### 'Oppressed, young and married'

It is because of such assumptions, that the Muslim women in the study, believe healthcare professionals would also have similar beliefs – as one of the participants in the study explained:

They think that we are oppressed, young and married, and all these things they have about us that is negative.

For Muslim women this was not the image they want be identified with. They spoke of wanting to negate such representation created by Western me-



dia – but by doing so, feared they would be judged and misunderstood. Most of the women in our study felt that they had to explain themselves every time their religion was mentioned. So rather than just asking for what they need, they felt the need to explain why they want to be seen to by a female healthcare professional or why they would like their curtains to be closed in the ward or why they cannot have medication that doesn't meet their dietary requirements.

### Avoiding the issue

Some white British women who became Muslim even felt the need to explain that being Muslim was their choice – mainly to ensure healthcare professionals didn't make the assumption they had been forced into religion. As for others, they felt that doctors and nurses wouldn't understand or acknowledge their religious needs. So they would avoid discussing them freely – even though they wanted a doctor's or midwife's opinion on certain religious practices during pregnancy. One of the ladies we spoke to explained how she felt the need to hide why she needed to change her appointment:

I phoned up to change my appointment so it could be before the start of Ramadan. When I was asked the reason for me changing the appointment, I could not say that 'I will be fasting for Ramadan' so I just said that I will be travelling out of the country.

I think people do not understand actually how important our religion is to us ... I feel we are forced to hide certain things to make it easier for people not to think our religion is demanding.

What all this shows is that there is a real risk of depriving Muslim women access to the care they need. Muslim women need to feel safe to express their needs in health environments. And this means healthcare professionals need to be aware of how Muslim women may feel, and their fears around speaking out.

Without this awareness, Muslim women will continue to go through the routine notions of engaging with healthcare services without getting optimal care that acknowledges their needs. And in the case of pregnant women, this could easily impact upon the health of both mother and baby.

## Qur'an of the Oppressed

*Liberation Theology and Gender Justice in Islam*

**Shadaab Rahemtulla**

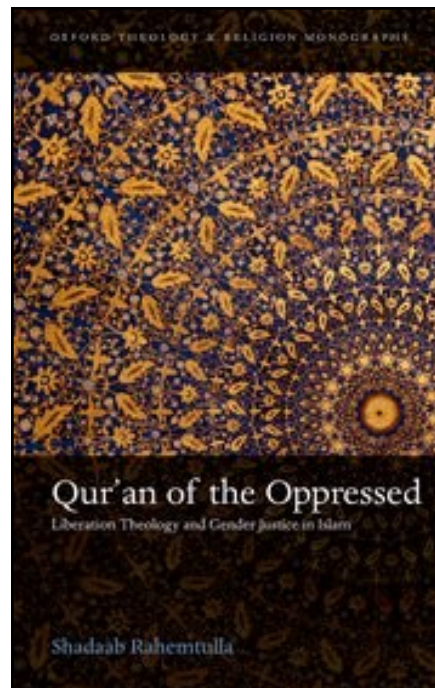
This study analyses the commentaries of four Muslim intellectuals who have turned to scripture as a liberating text to confront an array of problems, from patriarchy, racism, and empire to poverty and interreligious communal violence. Shadaab Rahemtulla considers the exegeses of the South African Farid Esack (b. 1956), the Indian Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013), the African American Amina Wadud (b. 1952), and the Pakistani American Asma Barlas (b. 1950). Rahemtulla examines how these intellectuals have been able to expound this seventh-century Arabian text in a socially liberating way, addressing their own lived realities of oppression, and thus contexts that are worlds removed from that of the text's immediate audience. Through a close reading of their works, he underlines the importance of both the ethico-social content of the Qur'an and their usage of new and innovative reading practices.

This work provides a rich analysis of the thought-ways of specific Muslim intellectuals, thereby substantiating a broadly framed school of thought. Rahemtulla draws out their specific and general importance without displaying an uncritical sympathy. He sheds light on the impact of modern exegetical commentary which is more self-consciously concerned with his-

torical context and present realities. In a mutually reinforcing way, this work thus illuminates both the role of agency and hermeneutical approaches in modern Islamic thought.

Shadaab Rahemtulla, Assistant Professor, School of International Studies, University of Jordan

Shadaab Rahemtulla is Assistant Professor in the School of International Studies at the University of Jordan. A Canadian



Muslim of Indian descent, he received his doctorate in contemporary Islamic thought at the University of Oxford.

"For a world heartened by the rise of moderate Muslim voices calling for gender equity and respect for human rights, this is an important book. ... Qur'an of the Oppressed is illuminating and could be the effective centerpiece of a course on Human Rights in Islam, including works of the four writers considered here." - Janet M. Powers, Religion

"[This study] gives an in depth and yet very accessible analysis of 4 modern authors on the Qur'an: Farid Esack, Asma Barlas, Ashgar Ali Engineer and me. It not only introduces our work but contextualizes it and considers methods of modern Qur'an exegesis as it intersects with LIFE and faith. I would consider this a coherent introduction to the field of modern Qur'anic studies. It is thorough and also weaves in other reformist thinkers and post modernist scholars...Highly recommended." -

Amina Wadud, Visiting Scholar at Starr King School for the Ministry  
"Rahemtulla is to be thanked for providing a compelling analysis, within a specific tradition, of the wider task of interpreting an ancient religious text so that it speaks to the present with a liberating timbre and power without falling into apologetics or idealistic essentialism." - Franz Volker Greifenhagen, Reading Religion

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## Sharia Compliant: User's Guide to Hacking Islamic Law

By Rumees Ahmed

For over a thousand years, Muslim scholars worked to ensure that Islamic law was always fresh and vibrant, that it responded to the needs of an evolving Muslim community and served as a moral and spiritual compass. They did this by "hacking" Islamic law in accordance with changing times and contexts, diving into the interconnected Islamic legal tradition to recalibrate what was outdated, making some laws work better and more efficiently while leaving others undisturbed. These hacking skills made Islamic law both flexible and relevant so that it could meet the needs of a community with changing values while remaining true to its ancient roots. Today, the hacking process has stalled in the face of unprecedented structural challenges, and Islamic law has stagnated.

This book is designed to revitalize the hacking tradition by getting readers

involved in the process. It walks them through the ins and outs of Islamic legal change, vividly describing how Muslim scholars have met new and evolving challenges on topics as diverse as abolition, democracy, finance, gender, human rights, sexuality, and more. And it provides step-by-step instructions for readers to hack laws for themselves, so that through their engagement and creativity, they can help Islamic law regain its intrinsic vitality and resume its role as a forward-looking source for good in the world.

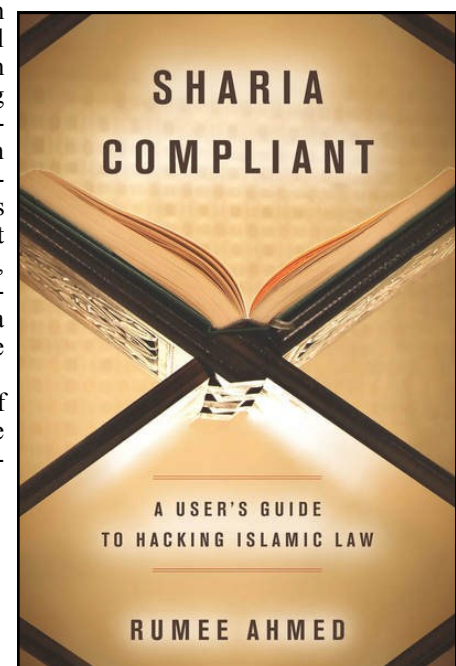
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52. ONE DAY HE WILL SAY, "CALL ON THOSE WHOM YE THOUGHT TO BE MY PARTNERS," AND THEY WILL CALL ON THEM, BUT THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO THEM; AND WE SHALL MAKE FOR THEM A PLACE OF COMMON PERDITION.

53. AND THE SINFUL SHALL SEE THE FIRE AND APPREHEND THAT THEY HAVE TO FALL THEREIN; NO MEANS WILL THEY FIND TO TURN AWAY THEREFROM.

54. WE HAVE EXPLAINED IN DETAIL IN THIS QUR'AN, FOR THE BENEFIT OF MANKIND, EVERY KIND OF SIMILITUDE: BUT MAN IS, IN MOST THINGS, CONTENTIOUS.

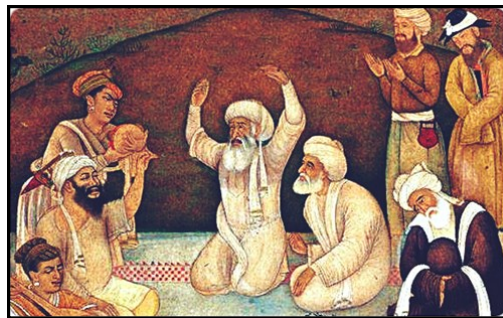
55. AND WHAT IS THERE TO KEEP BACK MEN FROM BELIEVING, NOW THAT GUIDANCE HAS COME TO THEM, NOR FROM PRAYING FOR FORGIVENESS FROM THEIR LORD, BUT THAT (THEY ASK THAT) THE WAYS OF THE ANCIENTS BE REPEATED WITH THEM, OR THE WRATH BE BROUGHT TO THEM FACE TO FACE?

(THE CAVE)

## A Feast for Clothes

Once upon a time in the Iranian city of Shiraz, there lived the famous poet Sheikh Saadi. Like most other poets and philosophers, Sheikh Saadi was not a rich man. He led a very simple life. A rich merchant of Shiraz invited Sheikh Saadi along with a lot of other big businessmen of the town on the occasion of his daughter's marriage which was to be a grand affair. Sheikh Saadi accepted the invitation and decided to attend.

On the day of the wedding, the host and his family were receiving the guests at the gate. They were ushering all the guests towards the dining hall. All the rich people of the town attended the wedding. They had come out in best of their attires. Sheikh Saadi wore simple clothes which were neither grand nor expensive. He waited in a corner for someone to approach him but no one gave him as much as even a second glance. Even the host did not acknowledge him and looked away. Seeing all this, Sheikh Saadi quietly left the party and went to a shop from where he could hire clothes. There he chose a richly brocaded dress which was embroidered in gold on the margins. He selected a fancy turban and a waist-band to go with it. As he put on the



hired dress and looked into the mirror, he found himself a changed person.

With this, he entered the dining hall and this time was welcomed with open arms. The host embraced him as he would do to an old friend and complimented him on the clothes he was wearing. On seeing him, he said, "And here comes our favourite poet. What took you so long, friend? We have been waiting for you for ages! How good of you to have come. The gathering surely would have been incomplete without your gracious presence!" Saadi did not utter a word and allowed the host to lead him to the dining room where other guests had assembled. Tasty dishes had been laid out on grand carpets. Saadi was offered a seat with soft cushions. The food was served in fine crockery and cutlery made out of silver. The host led Sheikh Saadi by hand and himself served out the chicken soup and the fragrant rice to him. After this, something strange happened. Sheikh Saadi dipped the corner of his waist-coat in the soup and sprinkled some rice on it. Addressing the clothes, he said: "This is a feast for you, you should enjoy it."

All the guests were now staring at him in surprise. The host said, "Sir, what are doing? How can your colthes eat? And why should they? To this query, Sheikh Saadi very calmly replied: "My dear friend, I am indeed surprised with the question coming from you."

"Aren't you the same person who did not even throw a look at me when I came dressed in simple clothes. I can guess that it is my clothes and appearance that matter with you, not my individual worth. Now that I have put on grand clothes, I see a world of difference in reception here. All that I can now say is that this feast is meant for my clothes, not for me."

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## My Good Muslim Neighbour

I had recently moved to Melbourne, Australia.

New country, new house, new life, everything. We soon learned that our neighbours were Muslim and had three kids, too. My husband was happy. He said I should go make friends with the mom.

I started inconspicuously observing them from my window, trying to learn the best time to approach. But the more I looked, the more I learned how nice and practicing the family was... I felt like I was not good enough to come and make friends with them anymore.

I had recently started praying, was not ever wearing the hijab. How would I just go and introduce myself to them? Would they even want to be friends with a neighbour like me? Maybe they would be ashamed. So, I kept coming up with excuses before my husband and observing them from my window. Did not muster the courage to do anything for weeks.

One day, someone rang the doorbell. When I opened, I saw the neighbouring mom, standing there glowing with a tray of Turkish bis-

cuits, wrapped with a classy pink ribbon. She said how happy she was that we had moved in, that she just wanted to come by and say salams, welcome us and be friends. I was almost crying.

Alhamdulillah, we have a beautiful relationship. She has taught me how to do wudhu and pray, gifted me several hijabs, gave me marriage and parenting advice, invited me for family Eid dinner, brought me soup when I was sick, lent me good books to read. Her husband is a well-mannered man and her children are very kind and always help with family chores. Alhamdulillah, I am so happy she came to my door at that time. May Allah bless her in this life and the next.

