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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*
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Abrar

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Online activism must build on Ramadan experience

It has been a great accomplishment by Muslims to have been able to observe fasting in Ramadan that has just ended. While we extend our greetings and blessings to Muslims on the advent of Eid Al Fitr, we also applaud the ability of mankind to adapt to the new life style dictated by the unstoppable spread of Covid-19. This year's Ramadan experience has been totally alien to the human culture of recent times. No congregation on any level while people are held back by the lockdown. The severity of this process has been so traumatic that many people do not like to venture out of it. The frightening prospect of catching the disease has pushed UK's trade unions to resist the lifting of the lockdown restrictions, the re-opening of schools, the use of public transport or resuming their normal activities. The "New Norm" appears to replace the "Old Norm" which is gradually slipping back from the human memory. The unseen virus appears to be thousands of times its size as it haunts everyone and hinders the attempts to go back to the pre-lockdown culture of work or socializing.

The month of Ramadan this year has been unique with Muslims having to perform their religious duties behind closed doors, within the confinement of their homes. No mass prayers, religious gatherings, family visits or engagement in any indoor exercises. For Muslims, especially in UK, Ramadan has developed into a get-together time for all especially in the last hours of the day and after sunset. In the Middle East, the hot weather has transformed the mode of life with the people voluntarily locking down during the day while releasing themselves to operate during night. This year has, however changed all that. Muslims had to be content with online activism. Lectures were delivered, prayers were recited online, while families remained segregated at the times when they would normally come together. The Eid functions have been greatly curtailed as the religious leaders and the politicians called for muted festivities. But to some Muslims, the online activities have been a welcome change.

There is no need to travel any distance in order to enjoy the spiritual and intellectual meetings. Speakers from other countries can easily participate in lecturing and debate. There is little effort or cost to achieve these benefits.

Yet the human touch is invaluable. This is a new development that has yet to prove its ability to replace direct human interaction. But it has provided a respite for those who are motivated towards collective action. Even protests were held online. The International Jerusalem Day (Alquds Day) was marked online through various means including the raising of the flag of Palestine. Debates were organized on the fate of the holy city while some people in Palestine and other countries ventured out to the streets to denounce the occupation and demand an end to Israeli atrocious policies. The electronic platforms have provided alternative venues for religious and social activities. These must be utilized to the full as the lockdown continues. In light of the continued failure to contain the disease through medical means like vaccination and medication, lockdown is likely to continue at various levels. Gradual easing of restrictions must not be allowed to help spread the disease further.

Meanwhile lessons of fasting while in lockdown must not be missed. In addition to the health benefits, fasting has encouraged many to give to the poor. The relief organisations have been active during the month mailing appeals to prospective donors. Mosques and Islamic centres were also active to provide online platforms for speakers on spiritual and Quranic studies. It was a unique but productive experience that can be repeated in the coming weeks and months. The religious community must be forthcoming in embracing collective online action to address issues pertaining to the world's pandemic. The religious instructions for followers to observe the lockdown and social distancing rules have been a responsible response to the threat. Religious institutions must continue their positive approach to health, education and social needs especially at such hard times.



Jerusalem; the cradle of faiths

The International Day of Qud was marked at Abrar virtual meeting on Thursday 21st May, chaired by Sheikh Hassan Al Taraiki. Sheikh Hussain Al Ma'tooq, a Kuwaiti cleric started by commenting on fasting especially as Ramadan was drawing to a close. An important condition for fasting to be accepted by God Almighty is the rejection of oppression, injustice and tyranny in the world. He presented several Quranic verses that relate to this. He said there are two ways in life; the first is that of the prophets which promotes justice, combating oppression and defending the oppressed and the dispossessed. The other way is that of tyrants and oppressors who seek to enslave man, deprive him of freedom and subject attack him. To illustrate the two ways Sheikh Al Ma'tooq presented many verses. Then he dealt with Palestine, the land of prophets, the blessed land according to the Quran. Glory to (God) Who did take His Servant For a Journey by night From the Sacred Mosque To the Farthest Mosque, Whose precincts We did Bless,—in order that We Might show him some Of Our Signs : for He Is the One Who heareth And seeth (all things) (Al verse 1 of Al Israa chapter). This land has been usurped as the world watched; its people (Muslims and Christians) displaced and its land annexed. They were expelled by international resolutions. In this holy month we have to reject injustice wherever it happens regardless of people's political or religious affiliation. We have to reject oppressors. We cannot co-habit with them. This is what we learnt from the school of martyrs and the life of Imam Hussain who said: Don't you see that the right path is not followed and that the mischief and misguidance is not rejected? Adding: I consider death a source of happiness while living alongside the oppressors painful".

A believer must reject tyranny (taghut) and anyone who does not do that must examine his/her faith. Then there must be practical steps to confirm this commitment; by supporting those who reject tyranny and occupation. Those who cannot do this must give financial assistance to those resisting tyranny. During the month of Ramadan there were unfortunately some steps to normalize the links with the occupiers of Palestine in many ways, one of which

through TV programmes. The aim is to make links with the occupiers acceptable. We have to challenge this tendency. We are confident that God's support will always enable the believers to win the challenge. We must understand that there is a serious cultural invasion in order to influence the perception of people towards Al Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem. We have to respect other people regardless of their religious or political persuasion. Media often attempts to present Islam as that of ISIS, we have to change this and to show that our religion promotes peace and mercy among the people of this planet. We have to support the Palestinians and encourage others to do so through communication with others.

Wilayah and the concept of Islamic leadership

On 16th May the weekly meeting of Abrar was addressed by Ayatullah Sheikh Mohsin Al Araki who addressed the life of Imam Ali. This was to mark the martyrdom anniversary of the Imam on 21st Ramadan. He deliberated on the concept of Wilayah (religious authority) in Islam. Wilayah, the speaker said is one of the most central of the religious concepts among Muslims, not as a sectarian one but within the social framework of the Islamic religious system. When discussing Imam Ali, several aspects of his life may be debated. The first is the personal. He was the top model for humanity in veracious dimensions: his knowledge, sacrifice, eloquence, his social service and serving Islam. These compliment Imam Ali's character.

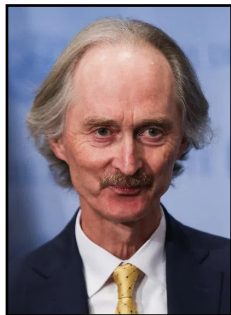
The second is the social dimension of Ali's character. I have found that one of our greatest crisis, past and present, is the problem of leadership. We see that in Palestine, Arabian Peninsula and other places. Writers and thinkers often talked about this, but little has been achieved so far. Due to the lack of unified leadership we often differ on moon

sighting to determine the beginning or the end of the months of the Islamic calendar. If we had one leader we would not have differed almost every year on this beginning and end of Ramadan. Leadership in Islam is well-defined. Mohammad had indoctrinated Muslims to embrace their leadership and taught them the verses that mentioned the names of those leadership. Imam Hussain was among that leadership. The Quran contains many references to the leadership urging followers to refer to God's designated leaders. And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands which he fulfilled; He said: "I will make thee an Imam to the nations." He pleaded: "And also (Imams) from my offspring!" He answered: "But my promise is not within the reach of evil-doers." (Al Baqarah 124). People must revert to their leadership. There are two kinds of reversion. After the killing of Othman, people flocked to Imam Ali's house urging him to stand up for the top job of government. The Quran presented several factors to determine leadership. The speaker referred to the two sermons of Fatima, Mohammad's daughter who referred to her father and predicted the devastating consequences for abandoning his path and ignoring his directions. The community had been unfaithful to the covenant it had with Mohammad. The speaker delved into the meaning of Wilayah through historical, Quranic and logical sources arguing that the Prophet's household were the perfect representative of Mohammad's leadership but were not followed by the community. He then referred to the present day situation to argue what he considered disastrous consequences of abandoning the upholding of wilayah as stipulated by the Holy Quran. No one of Mohammad's companions had been able to replicate Ali in his sincerity, dedication and achievement. Yet he was abandoned as a statesman with the clearest vision in what Islam had been

all about. Where is the real leadership in Muslim countries today? In Palestine, Iraq, Arabian peninsula? He produced several historic and religious references to what Mohammad had expected the community to follow in order to ensure the firm establishment of Islam. To him, Ali had always been the perfect leader that should not have been abandoned by the first and subsequent generations of Muslims.



Syria's warring parties agree to Geneva talks - U.N. envoy



Opposing sides in the Syrian civil war have agreed to reconvene in Geneva for negotiations on the constitution, United Nations Special Envoy Geir Pedersen said on Tuesday, saying that it could provide the arena for

bridging "deep, deep mistrust".

After nine years of conflict in Syria, Pedersen referred to "relative calm" in the last rebel-held enclave of Idlib as an opportunity for building confidence. He urged the United States and Russia, who support opposing sides, to start talks and back the peace process.

"As soon as the pandemic situation allows, they have agreed to come to Geneva and they have agreed on an agenda for the next meeting," Pedersen told reporters, referring to the government and opposition.

He did not give a date for the constitutional committee, which struggled to make headway last year, and said that a virtual meeting would not be possible.

"We need this to start somewhere," he said. "The Constitutional Committee could be that arena where confidence starts to build."

Architect of Pakistan's nuclear programme: I am imprisoned



Abdul Qadeer Khan, who made international headlines in 2004 after publicly confessing his role in global nuclear proliferation, has petitioned Pakistan's top court to say he is being "kept prisoner" by

government agencies and not allowed to plead his case for freedom of movement. Khan, widely described as the architect of the nuclear weapons programme in Pakistan, which tested its first atomic bomb in 1998 to rival that of neighbouring India, was sacked from his official position after his confession, but granted clemency by then President Pervez Musharraf.

He has since lived a heavily guarded and mostly secluded life in an upscale Islamabad neighbourhood. Authorities say he is under guard for security reasons.

"I had been kept as a prisoner having no

free movement or meeting with anybody," Khan said in a handwritten note submitted to the Supreme Court on Thursday.

The 84-year-old is said to have helped supply designs, hardware and materials to make enriched uranium for atomic bombs to Iran, Libya and North Korea.

Global nuclear watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency had said Khan was an important part of the nuclear black market and had help from people in many different countries.

In a televised statement in 2004 after meeting then president Musharraf, who was also the chief of Pakistan's powerful Army, Khan stressed he acted independently and the government had not authorised his activities.

Western diplomats have long doubted whether he could have acted alone. Talking to the Guardian newspaper in 2008, Khan said the confession "was handed into my hand".

Khan filed a petition last year saying that, despite earlier court orders allowing him freedom of movement under agreed terms, he was still kept under restraint and in fear of "physical harm".

On Thursday, he sent a note to the judges hearing his case saying he was to appear before them the day before, but agents of the Strategic Plans Division (SPD) did not take him to the courtroom despite bringing him into the court building.

UN Chief: Int'l cooperation essential for defeating COVID-19

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says that international cooperation on digital technology is essential to help defeat COVID-19.

Guterres made the remarks in a message - a copy of which was sent to the United Nations Information Center (UNIC) in Tehran - released on Sunday on the occasion of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, May 17.

The full text of his message reads:

Information technology can be a beacon of hope, allowing billions of people around the world to connect.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, these connections - with loved ones, with schools and colleges, with workplaces, with healthcare professionals and essential supplies - are more important than ever.

The International Telecommunication Union continues to work with the information and communication technology



community and UN agencies to help manage and end this crisis, and recover better. New technologies, from 5G and big data to cloud computing and artificial intelligence, are powerful tools to tackle the world's most pressing challenges, including the pandemic.

Leaving no one behind means leaving no one offline.

World Telecommunication and Information Society Day reminds us that international cooperation on digital technology is essential to help defeat COVID-19 and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Abbas declares end to agreements with Israel, US

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared Wednesday an end to the agreements and understandings signed with Israel and the United States and turned over responsibility over the occupied territories back to Israel.

"The Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Palestine are absolved, as of today, of all the agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli governments and of all the obligations based on these understandings and agreements, including the security ones," President Abbas announced at an emergency meeting for the Palestinian leadership held in Ramallah to discuss Israeli plans to annex parts of the occupied Palestinian land as declared in the new Israeli government's coalition agreement.

"The Israeli occupation authority, as of today, has to shoulder all responsibilities and obligations in front of the international community as an occupying power over the territory of the occupied state of Palestine, with all its consequences and repercussions based on international law and international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which holds the occupying power responsible for the protection of the civilian population under occupation and their property, criminalizes collective punishment, bans theft of resources, appropriation and annexation of land, bans forced transfer of the population of the occupied territory and bans transfer of the population of the occupying state (the colonialists) to the land it occupies, which all are grave violations and war crimes," he said.



Prominence of Jerusalem in modern Islamic political thought

Quds day, as a unique occasion for Muslims around the globe, is the last Friday of Ramadan month, an initiative by Imam Khomeini, the founder of Islamic Republic of Iran.

Quds city, the first Qibla of Muslims, was occupied by the Israelis in 1948 and taken from its real owners – Palestinians. This conspiracy was confronted by Palestinians from its first stage expressed indignation and the Muslim World rejected this criminal act along with the freedom-loving people around the world. In this regard, Iranian people made the cause of liberation of Palestine the highest priority among their ideals after the Islamic Revolution victory. Iranians demonstrate every year on Quds day.

In Ramadan of 1979, Imam Khomeini introduced the Quds day to the world and said in a speech: "I call on all Muslims and Muslim governments to unite in order to get the hands of this occupier (Israel) and its supporters off Palestine and call on all Muslims around the world to name the last Friday of Ramadan month as the 'Quds day' and declare the international solidarity of Muslims in supporting legal rights of (Palestinian) Muslims."

Here are some important parts of his speeches about the Quds day.

The day of Islamic Government

"Quds day is not only the day of Palestine; it is the day of Islamic government. It is the day in which the banner of Islamic Republic must be raised in all countries. It is the day in which we must give the superpowers to understand that they cannot advance in Islamic countries. I recognize Quds day as the day of Islam and the Holy Prophet (PBUH). It is the day in which we must prepare all are might and bring Muslims out of the isolation they have been put into so that they can stand against foreigners with all their strength."

The day of revival of Islam

Imam Khomeini said in a speech about Quds day that it is the day "we should warn all superpowers that they must get back to their position... it is the day we must revive Islam and Islamic rules in Muslim countries... the day we should warn all superpowers that Islam is no longer under your dominion and it will never happen by your devil agents. Quds day is the day of revival of Islam."

The day of disavowal by the oppressed around the world

Imam Khomeini also said that Quds day is a day in which "the oppressed stand against the arrogant... the day the oppressed around the world should prepare against the arrogant and defeat them. It is the day of the fight of nations who

have been under pressure by the United States and others."

The day of awakening of Muslims

Imam Khomeini told in a speech to Muslims around the world oppressed by the eastern and western powers that they must understand their Islamic power and not be afraid of those powers. He told them to trust in God and get the hands of criminals off their countries and make liberation of Quds and Palestine a priority.

The day of defending dignity of Muslims "Defending reputation and lands of Muslims and all Muslim belongings is a necessity and we must prepare for defending Muslims; especially in these circumstances that the real children of Islamic Palestine and Lebanon, namely Hezbollah and revolutionist Muslims in the occupied lands are shouting out for help by sacrificing themselves, we must stand against Israel and other aggressors," Imam Khomeini has said.

The day of Muslim unity

The founder of Islamic Republic said in another occasion: "Now that the occupier

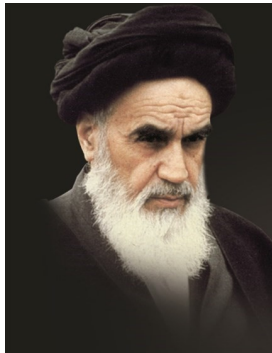
Israeli government has risen to further invade Arab lands... and has ignited the flame of war for several times... it is imperative for governments of Islamic countries, Arab governments in particular, to rely on God and mobilize all their forces to help those who are fighting in frontlines... in order to liberate Palestine and revitalize the dignity and glory of Islam."

He went on to elaborate: "Leave the differences and hypocrisy... do not be afraid of the chaffy power of supports of Zionism and Israel... Governments if oil-rich Islamic countries must use their oil as a weapon against Israel and colonialists.

They must stop selling oil to the governments who help Israel."

A preface to formation of party of the oppressed

Imam Khomeini said that the Quds day is an Islamic day for a public mobilization in the Muslim world; he hoped that this can be a preface to formation a "the Oppressed Party" in the world.



MCB's message commends affiliates

The response of Muslim communities not just to a Ramadan in lockdown, but to the whole pandemic, has been truly inspiring. I am constantly in awe of British Muslims. From our resolve and resilience to our ingenuity and drive to help others.

This Ramadan, with the doors of the masjid closed, we have seen community members work hard to take their services online, from khutbahs and dua recitation to Qur'an classes and activities for children. Alhamdulillah, we have all been able to partake and enjoy the month with our communities and our Imams from home. We have also seen masajid come up with new ways of helping people and providing food. Many have used their space to set up food banks to help those in the local area who are struggling as a result of the pandemic, and others have been able to deliver iftar to the houses of their congregants. Muslim communities across the

UK have truly shown what Ramadan is about: giving back to others. We have seen donations pour in for so many good causes, the generosity of Muslims clearly on display.

The #SupportOurMosques campaign run by the MCB and LaunchGood to facilitate mosques receiving donations online has managed to raise over £300,000 for over 135 mosques, community centres and prayer facilities in the UK, helping to ensure they will still be able to be there for us when it is safe for their doors to open.

I would like to commend all our affiliates for their tireless community efforts,

particularly during such turbulent and testing times.

May you all enjoy and celebrate the day with loved ones, and may it be filled with peace and blessings.

Eid Mubarak.

Harun Khan

Secretary General



British Muslims: Coronavirus has changed Eid-ul-Fitr

The following article was written before Eid. But it accurately predicted that there would be not mass prayers, celebrations of festivities. Families and friends have been kept apart as precautions against the spread of Covid-19. Nonetheless the spirit of the holy month has made people more resilient and accepting of the fact that there will be new realities until the pandemic has been totally contained. The lockdown has taught us many lessons but also enabled us to continue our life and enjoy it within the limits imposed on the human race. There is general acceptance of this reality and the hope is that it will not last for long. Hope must replace pessimism and despair.

As the world enters the fourth month of the deadly coronavirus pandemic, the Muslim community prepares for their most cherished celebration of the year. Eid-ul-Fitr, for the first time for millions of Muslims, will be celebrated under lockdown in their homes.

Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan and is a celebration for fasting and completing religious duties for the entirety of the month. It's a communal month for Muslims, where communities strengthen ties, collectively engage in prayers, and mark the three-day holiday with glorious festive celebrations.

The novel virus has already led to Muslims practicing the holy month of Ramadan under strict guidelines to limit the spread of the virus. Therefore, Eid under lockdown could be both a challenge and a positive experience for Muslims around the world.

We spoke to British Muslims about their feelings and hopes for Eid this year, and for some, Eid feels like it has been "cancelled."

"It feels as if Eid has been cancelled, and I won't be able to see my family and friends, but I have decided that I will still dress up and Facetime everyone," said Zaina Naim, a lawyer from Birmingham.

"There are both positives and negatives; we can't engage in celebrations such as 'chaand raat' and we definitely won't be putting on henna and bangles on Lady pool road, which is very famous area in Birmingham for Eid festivities."

Naim further explained: "I used to celebrate extravagantly for Eid, however I forgot that Eid is essentially all about being grateful for the simple things in life. This pandemic has changed my perspective on living life; I appreciate simplicity more."

Festivities are fundamental to the human experience of celebrating Eid, which consist of special food being prepared and friends and family being invited for joyful gatherings.

However, social distancing measures and cautionary lockdown measures mean that

there will be no celebrations and gatherings for Muslims during Eid this year.

Furthermore, as the pandemic brings an economic collapse, and the world's financial markets crash, saving money has become an objective for the majority of the population. Therefore, many Muslims are spending cautiously on Eid as the future remains uncertain. It has been reported by chancellor Rushi Sunak that "a significant recession" is soon to come and Muslims are preparing for this by not overspending this Eid.

Rosheel Shahid, a medical student from Manchester noted: "The lockdown has not impacted Eid as much as people think and we can still have celebrations, but they will be smaller. People should realise there are positives; for example, I am glad to save money and not overspend this year by going to unnecessarily expensive restaurants."

Shahid further explained: "I used to spend hundreds of pounds on luxurious Pakistani attire from the best designer outlets in Manchester, but this year I won't be doing that."

Although the negative impacts of the pandemic might be real, for most of humanity very few experiences can feel like "living through history." As the coronavirus sweeps the globe, the world order is being reshaped in front of our very eyes which is a time to cherish for many Muslims.

Lazo, an architect from Manchester, said: "Many people are so upset about Eid this year, but for me this is a surreal once in a lifetime experience that will soon surpass. I've been blogging my experience under lockdown and every day is different. I have not seen the inside of a mosque for two months, which is a strange but a surreal feeling. I will definitely never forget this and will remember this for life."

Additionally, for some Muslims, this Eid is the great equaliser as both rich and poor can focus on true spirituality and less on materialism.

This is because for the first time in history, both the rich and the poor in the Muslim world will be celebrating Eid under similar circumstances. Rich families have known to spend Eid in opulence and it is well reported that Eid boosts luxury retail, with people spending thousands of pounds on dresses alone.

"As a Muslim man, Eid means so much to me and many others who have come and gone in this world; for the rich and the poor, this pandemic is a realisation that life is so short, we should use this opportunity to focus on our personal goals of spirituality rather than materialism and superficiality," said Elias, from New York City.

However, for many Muslims, the doom and gloom of the pandemic has stolen the usual excitement of Eid this year.

Anna Ahmed, a lawyer from Manchester, stated: "I would be lying if I said that Eid will be fun this year; there will be no getting dolled up, no salon appointments and definitely no parties. Usually, my friends and I would celebrate on Rusholme in Manchester, which is a famous road for locals due to its vibrancy and desi atmosphere.

"We live in the Western world, we don't always get holidays to celebrate Eid which is difficult in itself, however the gloom of the pandemic has taken the positivity of Eid away from us."

For the most part it is clear that the coronavirus pandemic will bring about a surreal, life-changing experience on Eid-ul-Fitr for all Muslims this year and it is evident that Eid this year will not be celebrated in its usual dazzling spirit.



Coronavirus exposed the real reasons behind France's 'burqa ban'

by Rokhaya Diallo, 15 May 2020

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, France is faced with a paradox: It has just made the wearing of masks compulsory in certain public spaces, but maintained the years-long ban on Muslim full-face veils. This suggests, as the Washington Post recently noted, "if an observant Muslim woman wanted to get on the Paris Metro, she would be required to remove her burqa and replace it with a mask".

The French government made the use of face masks in public mandatory on May 10 in an effort to safely ease the country's strict coronavirus lockdown. More than 50 other countries, from Germany to Uganda, had previously passed similar laws and provisions to stem the spread of the virus and get people back to work.

While in most countries the discussion about compulsory face masks focused on the effectiveness of the measure, in France, where not long ago the government proudly stated that "the Republic lives with its face uncovered", this decision raised questions about the way the state defines French identity and values. Face coverings started to be discussed in the context of French national identity for the first time more than a decade ago, during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency.

In October 2008, the High Authority for the Fight against Discrimination and for Equality (HALDE), France's public watchdog group on discrimination, equated the wearing of a burqa to the "submission of women" in a ruling over an administrative decision that denied a woman wearing the garment access to the French-language classes that were required for her to remain in France. As it sided with the public authority that took the controversial decision, the watchdog said: "The burqa carries the meaning of the submission of women which goes beyond its religious scope and could be considered as undermining republican values presiding over the process of integration and organisation of these lessons."

The ruling laid the foundations for the perception that this religious garment is not only fundamentally anti-feminist but also foreign to French culture. It also ignited a debate on "republican values" which quickly transformed into a debate on whether Islam is compatible with the French Republic.

Just a few months after the publication of HALDE's ruling, as the call for the banning of all Muslim face coverings became louder across the country, President Sarkozy himself joined in the debate.

In a State of the Nation address, the president claimed that face coverings

worn by some Muslim women were not a "religious problem" but a problem of "liberty and women's dignity" and declared "the burqa is not welcome in France".

Sarkozy's words ignited another major public debate, with one side accusing the president of weaponising feminism and secular values to exclude Muslims from the French identity and the other emphasising the importance of protecting the nation's core liberal values.

While the few women in France who wear full-face veils were never included in the "burqa" debate, several prominent public figures - mostly men - passionately argued that no one would willingly choose to wear such a garment and that anyone wearing it was undoubtedly a victim of male oppression. Failing to realise the irony of denying women agency over their own bodies and outfit choices while trying to "save them" from gendered oppression, these people eventually convinced the country that all face coverings should be banned to protect women's rights and French values.

As a result, in September 2010, the French Senate voted in favour of a bill banning the concealment of the face in public spaces. In March 2011, weeks before the ban came into force, the government issued a new circular about the scope of the ban and offered some cultural justifications for it.

"To conceal the face is to infringe the minimum requirements of life in society," the circular stated. "This also places the persons concerned in a situation of exclusion and inferiority incompatible with the principles of freedom, equality and human dignity affirmed by the French Republic."

The circular, therefore, officially acknowledged a link between the way a person chooses to dress themselves in public and that person's place in French society. To be recognised as a French person, the circular affirmed, one has to show her face in public, as a confirmation of her commitment to the "common values" and "shared destiny" of the country.

This is why the French government's recent decision to make the wearing of face masks mandatory in public places raised questions.

The government's move to make face masks compulsory while refusing to reverse the ban on Muslim face veils reaffirmed the conviction many already had that the so-called "burqa" ban has nothing to do with the incompatibility of face

coverings with the French way of life and everything to do with the state's reluctance to include visible Muslims into the French national identity.

As millions of French people now participate in public life with covered faces without any issue, it is indeed clear that the French state banned Muslim face veils not to protect the values of the Republic, but to promote an assimilationist understanding of Frenchness that does not tolerate minority cultural expressions.

The coronavirus pandemic exposed the French state's hypocrisy about several other forms of behaviour, too.

For example, back in 2019, following an attack on the Paris police headquarters by a Muslim employee, French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner delivered a controversial list of potential signs of radicalisation to the French Parliament. Alongside innocent cultural expressions, such as wearing a long beard, he suggested that a Muslim person's refusal to kiss someone to greet them, as many French people usually do, could be a sign of radicalisation. Now, however, the state is actively encouraging citizens to refrain from kissing each other in an attempt to stop the spread of the virus. There is, of course, no suggestion that refusing to kiss someone can infringe the requirements of life in society. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the extreme measures that were taken to fight it, showed that neither the wearing of face veils nor other forms of Muslim cultural and religious expressions, have ever posed a threat to the French way of life. It showed that the motivation behind the "burqa ban" was not to protect republican values but to prevent Muslims from being included in public life. The French state simply used cultural markers that are associated with "being French" in the national psyche to draw the contours of an exclusionary national identity.

Now that COVID-19 demonstrated that one can indeed participate in public life and remain "French" without showing her face or kissing acquaintances, the nation could do well to rethink the way it treats Muslims.



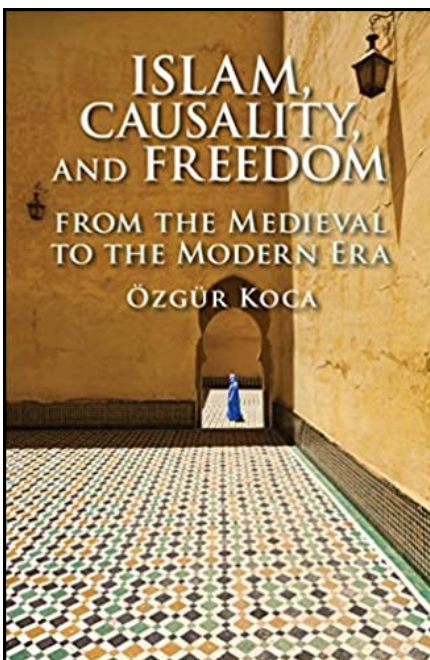
Islam, Causality, and Freedom

From the Medieval to the Modern Era

In this volume, Ozgur Koca offers a comprehensive survey of Islamic accounts of causality and freedom from the medieval to the modern era, as well as contemporary relevance. His book is an invitation for Muslims and non-Muslims to explore a rich, but largely forgotten, aspect of Islamic intellectual history. Here, he examines how key Muslim thinkers, such as Ibn Sina, Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Arabi, Suhrawardi, Jurjani, Mulla Sadra and Nursi, among others, conceptualized freedom in the created order as an extension of their perception of causality. Based on this examination, Koca identifies and explores some of the major currents in the debate on causality and freedom. He also discusses the possible implications of Muslim perspectives on causality for contemporary debates over religion and science.

'This learned and perspicacious book is one of the most important studies on Islamic theology and philosophy to be published in the last decade. Focusing on some of the key medieval and modern Muslim scholars, the author analyzes occasionalist and participatory accounts of causality and freedom in rationalist, orthodox, and Sufi Islamic

thought. Notably, among the most enlightening contributions of this book is its discussion on contemporary discourses on religion and science in relation to Islamic theories of causality. Certainly this book is of great interest to all students of religion and philoso-



phy, but it is mandatory reading for any serious scholar of Islamic thought.'

Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl - Omar and Azmeralda Alfi Distinguished Professor of Law, University of California, Los Angeles

'Ozgur Koca has produced a magisterial work, the kind of volume one expects from great scholars at the pinnacle of their careers. The breadth and depth of scholarship is remarkable, yet difficult concepts are presented clearly enough that the book can be used as an introductory text to the field. Koca treats the pivotal figures in Islamic philosophy and theology with fairness and respect, working to bring the strengths of each to the surface. His greatest achievement, however, is to offer an Islamic theory of causation that is adequate both to the demands of contemporary science and to the actuality of human free will.'

Philip Clayton - Ingham Professor, Claremont School of Theology

Özgür Koca, Bayan Claremont Islamic Graduate School. He is an assistant professor of Islamic Studies and Philosophy at Bayan Claremont Islamic Graduate School. His research focus is on Islamic Philosophy-Theology, Sufism, and Science and Religion Discussion.

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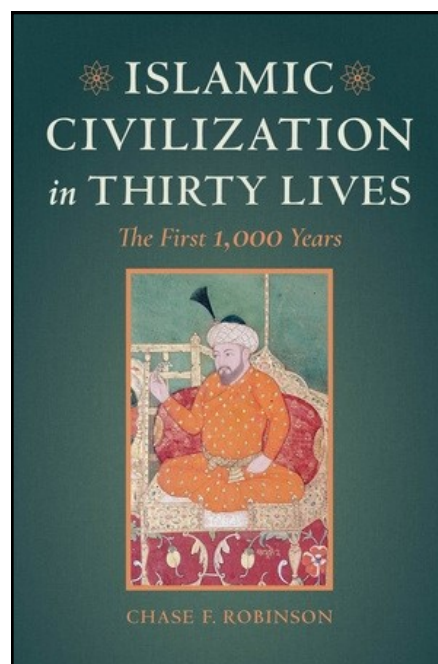
Islamic Civilization in Thirty Lives: The First 1,000 Years

Religious thinkers, political leaders, lawmakers, writers, and philosophers have shaped the 1,400-year-long development of the world's second-largest religion. But who were these people? What do we know of their lives and the ways in which they influenced their societies?

In *Islamic Civilization in Thirty Lives*, the distinguished historian of Islam Chase F. Robinson draws on the long tradition in Muslim scholarship of commemorating in writing the biographies of notable figures, but he weaves these ambitious lives together to create a rich narrative of Islamic civilization, from the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century to the era of the world conqueror Timur and the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II in the fifteenth.

Beginning in Islam's heartland, Mecca, and ranging from North Africa and Iberia in the west to Central and East Asia, Robinson not only traces the rise and fall of Islamic states through the biographies of political and military leaders who worked to secure peace or expand their power, but also discusses those who developed Islamic law, scientific thought, and literature. What emerges is

a fascinating portrait of rich and diverse Islamic societies. Alongside the famous characters who colored this landscape—including Muhammad's cousin 'Ali; the Crusader-era hero Saladin; and the poet Rumi—are less well-known figures,



such as Ibn Fadlan, whose travels in Eurasia brought fascinating first-hand accounts of the Volga Vikings to the Abbasid Caliph; the eleventh-century Karima al-Marwaziyya, a woman scholar of Prophetic traditions; and Abu al-Qasim Ramisht, a twelfth-century merchant millionaire.

An illuminating read for anyone interested in learning more about this often-misunderstood civilization, this book creates a vivid picture of life in all arenas of the pre-modern Muslim world.

Chase F. Robinson was Lecturer and Professor of Islamic History in the Faculty of Oriental Studies and Fellow of Wolfson College at the University of Oxford from 1993 until 2008, when he was appointed Distinguished Professor of History and Provost of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where he now serves as President. His extensive publications on Islamic history include *Islamic Historiography, Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest*, and *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 1*.

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Ramadan, Eid in London: Japanese Revert's tale

6. HE IT IS WHO SHAPES YOU IN THE WOMBS AS HE PLEASES. THERE IS NO GOD BUT HE, THE EXALTED IN MIGHT, THE WISE.

7. HE IT IS WHO HAS SENT DOWN TO THEE THE BOOK: IN IT ARE VERSES BASIC OR FUNDAMENTAL (OF ESTABLISHED MEANING); THEY ARE THE FOUNDATION OF THE BOOK: OTHERS ARE ALLEGORICAL. BUT THOSE IN WHOSE HEARTS IS PERVERSITY FOLLOW THE PART THEREOF THAT IS ALLEGORICAL, SEEKING DISCORD, AND SEARCHING FOR ITS HIDDEN MEANINGS, BUT NO ONE KNOWS ITS HIDDEN MEANINGS EXCEPT ALLAH. AND THOSE WHO ARE FIRMLY GROUNDED IN KNOWLEDGE SAY: "WE BELIEVE IN THE BOOK; THE WHOLE OF IT IS FROM OUR LORD:" AND NONE WILL GRASP THE MESSAGE EXCEPT MEN OF UNDERSTANDING.

(HOUSE OF IMRAN)

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This is our website. Have visited it: It will put you face-to-face with an alternative world, full of spirituality, morality coupled with modern outlooks and perspectives. We want to hear your views on its contents, layout and general quality.

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Everyday
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London has a large Muslim population and wherever you go, you will usually find Muslims and halal restaurants. Even in the supermarkets, they will have a section for Ramadan selling Halal food, dates and etc. There are also numerous mosques where you can have iftar and pray tarawih and this is the time of year when they are most active and busy. There is a very good get-together social and spiritual feeling during Ramadan with many families and friends having iftar together. Currently, Ramadan is closer to the UK summer so fasting hours are long. Regards to the weather, this is the UK; you never know what you're going to get - sunny one day and raining the next.

The biggest challenge during Ramadan is the lack of sleep and long fasting hours. You can only eat and drink for around 6 hours, so it's often quite challenging to break iftar, pray, eat dinner, go to the mosque for tarawih, and then sleep, as it's only a couple of hours until you need to get up for suhur again. Many Muslims choose not to sleep at all, but this is really hard to sustain during the weekdays if you work or study full-time. Balancing spiritual and worldly necessities can be quite strenuous, particularly when I compare my time experiencing Ramadan in Japan. I try to work around the lack of sleep by taking a short nap if such as when I'm on the train, free at home, and so on. Fasting during the middle of the summer in the UK can last for about 19 hours, which is roughly from 2:30 to 21:30. This feels a lot like a marathon, with the final 3-4 hours being particularly challenging.

On the other hand, fasting during winter is extremely short and easy, which is about 6:00 to 15:50. This just feels like skipping lunch and having an earlier dinner instead. It's also great as tarawih at the mosque is a lot earlier and it frees your evening for other Ibadah too.

There are many iftar events in London. Most mosques will have at least dates and other fruits with some snacks for iftar, but others will also provide whole meals. There is much going on in terms of community activities, especially on the weekends, with extra Islamic talks and halaqas throughout Ramadan.

Given a large number of Muslims here, there are a number of events for Muslims and also open non-Muslims, with the mayor of London Sadiq Khan holding a Ramadan and Eid Festival celebration in Central London, many charities providing iftar to homeless people as well as Muslims, and public iftar events were non-Muslims can have iftar with Muslims and experience what it's like for us and learn more about Islam. It's also a really good opportunity for Muslim friends to meet-up, spend some time at the mosque, catch-

up, and have iftar together.

Where I currently live in London, there aren't a huge number of Muslims. But yes, they understand fasting and it's natural for them to have Muslims in London. It's also compulsory for children in primary and secondary schools to learn about different religions, including Islam, and aspects such as Ramadan. They are exposed to the many mosques, increased number of Muslim activity at night, advertisements in supermarkets and TV, in addition to having neighbours, friends and coworkers who are Muslim. There are plenty of opportunities to learn about it.

For me, Ramadan is the special month to be closer to Allah and Muslim brothers and sisters. I drink a lot of water and consume less food during Ramadan and I try to keep my body warm using hot bottle water since my body gets cold whilst I'm fasting.

I try to read Quran, increase my prayers, duas and dhikir and I also try to go to a mosque to eat iftar and pray together with sisters here. These things strengthen my Imaan.

The UK is a Muslim minority country, so we don't have traditional dishes as British Muslims per se. But each family has own cultural background and own sahur and iftar menu.

I'm a Muslim revert, so I always cook normal dinner for iftar and eat only fruit and oats for sahur. I recommend visitors to go to London mosques or iftar events here to get to know Muslims here! InshaAllah.

How do you celebrate Eid in London?

A typical day will start early in the morning, getting ready and dressed for Eid, followed by a trip to the mosque for prayers with the family. As there are so many people wanting to

pray at the mosque, most have to hold three, four or sometimes five Eid prayers consecutively in order so that everyone is able to pray their Eid prayers. Once prayers are finished, there are usually lots of Eid greetings, and then time spent leisurely in the mosque. There will often be food and markets stalls at the mosque for people to eat and buy things if needed.

Ramadan is not only my event anymore. I don't have any problems in terms of fasting with my family now. Alhamdulillah. My mother also joined an iftar dinner at a mosque in Tokyo when I was there and because of this event, she allowed me to wear hijab. I often went to my grandparents' house with my mother and sister and we had iftar together, although I was the only one who fasted. So, I can say that Ramadan changed my family and improved our relationships over the years. Now, my family and I are talking about celebrating Eid parties together as a family when I move back to Japan. InshaAllah!

