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- *Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue*
- *Respect for the human race and rights*
- *Cooperation for the good of people*
- *Moderation*
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Abrar

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Welcoming Ramadan in a second lockdown

This time last year, many would not have anticipated the advent of the holy month of Ramadan in another lockdown. There were hopes that vaccines would be found and would gradually eliminate infections. This has happened almost. But it is now clear that vaccination has not yet prevented second or third waves of the pandemic that necessitate more lockdowns. While businessmen lament the opportunities of sales and normal marketing practices, people of faith have felt uneasy as they lost the opportunities of face-to-face human dealings and the ability to attend mosques, churches and other places of worship. Yet God exists everywhere; not only within the confines of the places of worship but in everyday life. It will remain a necessary ingredient of the human life to worship God collectively. For worship is not solely a silent contemplation and worshipping the Almighty God, but it also possess human dimensions that have become part of the human existence. Undoubtedly the pandemic has seriously curtailed the human ability to challenge the forces of nature, despite the scientific developments in the world. It has presented real challenges to the human race as it moved freely from one region to another, crossing physical and symbolic boundaries and rendering man-made travel protocols null and void. Which country has succeeded in closing its borders to this virus?

The advent of the holy month of Ramadan in yet another lockdown presents more challenges to the observant people as they start their fasting season. To them, this form of worship possesses great social as well as spiritual potentials. While the spirit of the mass gatherings in mosque and churches would have given impetus to those seeking worship, the lack of them can also contribute to good worship, away from the public glare. Worshippers have been assisted by health experts in various countries to practice their faith in public, but within the health boundaries that have become the order of everyday life. Observing health restrictions, according to Islamic teaching, is compulsory as it will lead to better social insulation. While there

is deep urge among Muslims to re-convene their normal way of Ramadan living, reason has prevailed in the world and in the Arab and Muslim countries. The pandemic is seen as a vicious killer and all precautions need to be made in order to keep it at bay. There are now plenty of vaccination but the lack of equitable distribution of preventative measures has made it impossible to lift the lockdowns in many countries. There are second and third waves sweeping countries like India, Brazil, Germany and France. This is clear evidence that the human future will be intertwined with measures to contain transmittable and infectious diseases.

The spirituality during the month of fasting may not be compromised. The whole month is worship, according to the Prophet Mohammad's sermon welcoming Ramadan. He confirms that the physical life of a believer is tantamount to worship in Ramadan. The devils are chained, the breathing of the people who fast is glorification of God; their sleep is worship and their supplications and prayers receive divine responses. While it is socially directed, worshipping in solace is a virtue. The believer talks to God in silence, approach Him with a desire to open up to divinity and expose the personal weaknesses and temptations. While families always aspire for their gatherings during the month, the experience of the past 16 months has convinced them to avoid direct contact especially with the elders. Fasting is gradually making its way into the people's lives as a way out of the materialistic world and into the world of divinity. It is an ascendance towards the absolute who is the source of the ultimate power. While collective worship may not be possible during the month the individual approach to worship as direct communication with God will always improve the quality of life of the worshipper. It is our hope that adherence to safety guidelines while fasting is part of the individual's worship. The advice is to live the spirit of Ramadan and fasting in lockdown; it is a unique opportunity to establish personal love and peace with God.



Easter Online seminar

On Tuesday 30th March a joint online seminar was organised Open Discussions and The Gulf Cultural Club titled: The Role of religious leadership in a troubled materialist world. It was chaired by Shabbir Razvi and addressed by four speakers, Canon Peter Challen (Canon Emeritus of Diocese of Southwark), Olufemi Cole-Njie (Supernumerary Methodist Minister), Father Ishaq Tuza (Priest at Syriac Orthodox Church, London) and Dr Hassen Al Sader (consultant haematologist, faith activist).

Peter Challen said: I have had 63 years of ministry in the Christian church. I have found great difficulty because my father also said "Jesus is the Christ." He made it clear that a human being bore the title of one who manifested the things of the kingdom of God. I have been troubled by so many Christians who speak of Jesus and Christ as though both are one. One is the name. I opened a regular meditation I have each morning for the Centre for Action and Contemplation and I read these words: "We have to switch our thinking from Jesus Christ coming to fulfil us to us having to fulfil Christ." That is why I try and get people, especially people who get all embarrassed and humble and talk of quantum and say I am not a scientist. We have to accept cosmic creation and cosmic creation is a richer contemporary word for God. I believe that we have to try and rid ourselves of the anthropocentric emphasis on God out there. God the father. God as a noun. I see God as a verb. The very words we use in Christianity of incarnation are often applied only to Jesus. But the incarnation is the spirit made flesh. The heart of quantum physics and the quantum theology that is flowing from it is that we are all one. We are interdependent. Christian leadership should not be hierarchical. It should not be authoritative. It should be more like chaplaincy to enable everyone to find God incarnate within them. There is potential creativity in every single child and for that reason

Olufemi Cole-Njie: In what way has the world become troubled and materialistic and is there a role that can be played by religious leaders to make the world a better place? And why religious leadership? We do not have far to travel to discover that the world we live in is a troubled one. But first we need to clarify the term world. A colleague reminded me recently that God created one world but human beings have divided the world into three: the first world, the second world and the third world.

Materialism plays a key role in our troubled world. It was Mahatma Gandhi who said that there is enough in the world for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed. In the words of Martin Luther King we must rapidly begin to shift from a thing orientated society to a people orientated society, one where machines, computers, profit motives and property rights are more important than people and giant triplets of materialism, racism and militarism are capable of being conquered.

As Christians we believe that Jesus gives the peace that the world cannot give because he made peace by his death and resurrection. This is the peace which can be described as not the absence of war but the presence of God and of justice. As religious leaders we do have a vital role to play in a materialistic world.

Father Ishaq Tuza: The death and resurrection of Christ was mentioned many times by many Prophets like David. Jesus said that he has three comings. The first that he came to save the world by his death on the cross and he accomplished the redemption. The second coming is to judge the world and to reward the believers with the kingdom of heaven and the unbelievers with eternal fire. We pray that the resurrection of Jesus will give a blessing to all the people and that we can be brothers.

The second topic is the historic visit of Pope Francis to Iraq. He declared to the world that Iraq is an important country which can affect a settlement in the Middle East and in all the world. He met the main political leaders and talked to them about democracy and about the

oppressed people and needy ones. He called all the accountable sides to act for the Iraqi interest.

He met Sayed Sistani the supreme Shia imam the scholar of wisdom and authority. Both of them said the solution of problems should be through reasonable dialogues with the persistence that all relations should be built on the basis of respect and equality and according to human standards.

The pope declared that God is peace and anyone who opts for war does not know God. Both the pope and Sistani are very wise men and very respected men by all the people inside and outside Iraq. They are looking for a solution to the problems which should be solved peacefully by dialogue and equality and all good things to every person.

Dr Hassen Al Sader: Before the pandemic there were estimates that for example in the UK that between 20 and 30 percent of people suffer from depression. This is despite having access to the first world lifestyle. You offer society the top materialistic access yet a minimum of them - one in five people - is not happy. This is before the pandemic. We are still in the pandemic and we are hearing about the inevitable economic melt down so God knows what percentage that will be in the next few years. May God help us all, in sha Allah. In our time in a world troubled by materialism was well defined by Olufemi. Their role is essential to bring back God centricity. Our lives should evolve round him the Almighty God and not a self centric view of the world that it is the individual and it is up to the individual. My life evolves round me and I define what is right and what is wrong. It is me. There is no higher authority. Truth is relative and every man and woman is for him or herself. No. It should be God centricity. I should evolve round God.

*The 41st anniversary of the martyrdom of Ayatullah Mohammad Baqir Al Sadr and his sister, Bint Al Huda, was marked by Abrar on 1st and 8th April.

On 1st April, Mrs Sanaa Al Ansari talked about the life and thoughts of Amina Bint Al Huda, her activism and cultural approach to political change.



On 8th April Sheikh Dr Abdul Zahra Al Bandar talked about the rules of government as presented by Al Sadr. He wrote several booklets linked to governance.



Iran blames Israel for Natanz nuclear plant attack



Iran on Monday accused arch-foe Israel of sabotaging its key Natanz nuclear site and vowed revenge for an attack that appeared to be latest episode in a long-running covert war.

Iran's semi-official Nournews website said the person who caused an electricity outage in one of the production halls at the underground uranium enrichment plant had been identified. "Necessary measures are being taken to arrest this person," the website reported, without giving details about the person.

The incident occurred amid diplomatic efforts by Iran and the United States to revive Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with major powers, an accord Israel fiercely opposed, after former U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned it three years ago.

Last week, Iran and the global powers held what they described as "constructive" talks to salvage the deal, which has unravelled as Iran has breached its limits on sensitive uranium enrichment since Trump reimposed harsh sanctions on Tehran.

Iranian authorities described the incident a day earlier as an act of "nuclear terrorism" and said Tehran reserved the right to take action against the perpetrators.

On Monday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif explicitly blamed Israel. "The Zionists want to take revenge because of our progress in the way to lift sanctions... We will not fall into their trap... We will not allow this act of sabotage to affect the nuclear talks," Zarif was quoted by state TV as saying.

"But we will take our revenge against the Zionists."

US Protests erupt after police kills another Black man

A police officer fatally shot a driver in Minneapolis on Sunday in the US state of Minnesota, leading to clashes between protesters and officers, local me-



dia reported.

Police said that when they tried to arrest a driver they pulled over after determining that he had an outstanding warrant against him, he returned to his vehicle and drove away, reported by CBS Minnesota. One of the officers then fired at the vehicle, fatally hitting the driver.

Following the incident, dozens of protesters began to gather at the scene of the shooting, surrounding the Brooklyn Center police headquarters. Police forces used flashbangs and tear gas to disperse the crowd.

The killed driver was identified as Daunte Wright, 20, by a woman, Katie Wright, who told CBS that she was the victim's mother.

The incident took place as white former police officer Derek Chauvin faces a charge of third-degree murder for the killing of George Floyd, a Black man during the fatal arrest in May 2020.

Rights groups warn of underage executions in Saudi Arabia

International rights group Reprieve has warned that 80 per cent of those sentenced to death in childhood are still threatened by execution.

This is while Saudi officials had previously announced that they will halt execution of those underage at the time of detention, reported Taqrib News Agency (TNA).

The royal decree issued in March 2020 has not been published in media or the state paper bringing much concern for the rights groups and western lawyers the decree will be ignored.

Ten Saudi teenagers are in the kingdom's jail and feared to be executed.

Reprieve is a nonprofit organization of international lawyers and investigators providing free legal and investigative support to the most vulnerable people across the globe.

Muslim Unity necessary to withstand Israeli occupying regime

Secretary General of World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought said on Sunday that the Muslim World needs solidarity to withstand the Israeli occupying regime violating rights of the Islamic Ummah and desecrating the Islamic sanctities.

All Muslims and freedom seekers around the world should focus on this issue that is unity, Hojjatoleslam Hamid Shahriari said in a meeting with Head of Iraqi Scholars Association Sheikh Khaled al-Mulla. The Muslim World is



facing serious dangers and all Muslims should cooperate to combat them, Shahriari noted.

He further described proximity among religions as a strategy that makes the Muslim World stronger and the downfall of the global arrogance led by the US.

He added that dialogue and interaction between Ulema and scholars is a good way to reach unity among Islamic Ummah.

For his part, the Iraqi Sunni cleric said that today more than any other time, unity among the Islamic Ummah is needed and this is what the Supreme Leader has repeated over and over.

Today, project on proximity among Islamic religions should be activated, al-Mulla stressed.

Unity is the most powerful weapon in the hands of Muslims, he noted.

World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought makes great efforts to reinforce unity among Muslims.

Court sentences acting Muslim Brotherhood leader to life

An Egyptian court sentenced Mahmoud Ezzat, the former acting leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, to life in prison on Thursday, months after he was detained in a Cairo apartment.

Security forces arrested Ezzat last August in a raid in Cairo's Fifth Settlement district, the latest blow to a movement that has been the target of a crackdown since it was forced from power in 2013.

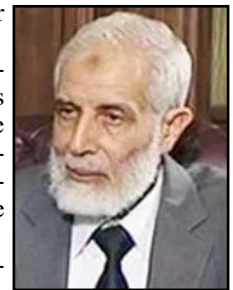
Ezzat was sentenced on charges of inciting violence and supplying fire-arms during clashes outside the Brotherhood's headquarters between its supporters and opponents in 2013, a judicial source said. Other senior Brotherhood members have been sentenced to life in prison in the same case.

Ezzat's lawyer could not immediately be reached. At the time of Ezzat's arrest, the Brotherhood said he had been pursued on "false political charges".

Ezzat was an influential former deputy to Brotherhood leader Mohamed Badie, and considered a hardliner within the group. He became acting leader after Badie's arrest in August 2013.

Ezzat had previously been sentenced to death and to life in prison in absentia, but faces retrials following his detention.

Other senior members of the group have been jailed or left the country.



The health benefits of fasting

By Kerry Torrens – Nutritionist
BBC – Good Food

How does fasting affect the body, and what are the different types of fasting? Nutritionist Kerry Torrens explains the benefits and drawbacks of this dietary practice. With studies suggesting fasting may boost health, promote longevity and keep those extra pounds at bay, nutritionist Kerry Torrens takes a look at the history of fasting, the science behind some of the claims and how fasting might work with our modern lifestyles.

The origins of fasting

Despite being popularised by today's diet world, the practice of fasting actually dates back centuries and is thought to be one of the oldest therapies in medicine. In the 5th century BC, Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, recommended abstaining from food to aid the healing process. In Ayurvedic medicine, fasting once a week is thought to promote digestive clearance.

Fasting plays a central role in cultural and religious practices, with all major religions utilising a fast in one form or another. Christian Lent and Muslim Ramadan are two well-known examples. Whether it involves the abstinence of food and drink or a lighter, lower calorie form of eating, many argue that going without food for periods of time is something we have evolved to do.

The health benefits of fasting

With numerous health claims linked to fasting, its draw is understandable. However, it's worth noting that for non-weight related benefits, the evidence is mixed (but promising). This is because some areas of research have only been explored with animals, so it's unclear how the benefits translate for humans.

That said, by lightening your normal eating pattern, you give the body time to focus on other important functions, including disease prevention. Similarly, fasting appears to improve the body's ability to manage inflammation and, as such, may help chronic conditions such as heart disease, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Several studies have also supported the use of fasting as a means of improving blood sugar control and reducing the risk of diabetes – although gender may play a part here and more studies are needed.

Improving immunity through fasting may help the body's control of cancer. One study demonstrated that a nightly 'fast' of

more than 13 hours could be an effective means of reducing the risk of recurrence in those diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer. This should always be undertaken with your doctor's supervision.

Studies in animals suggest fasting may protect against, or improve outcomes in, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, as well as improve brain function by supporting memory and brain processing. Similarly, animal studies suggest fasting may protect brain health and increase the generation of nerve cells.

Many dieters turn to fasting as a manageable approach to weight loss. Studies show that controlling the times we eat, or undertaking short-term fasts, can aid weight reduction, fat loss and improve blood lipids. That's not all – other studies have shown fasting to increase the ability to switch metabolism to fat burning, preserve muscle mass and improve body composition in overweight people.

Of particular note, fasting may promote levels of the human growth hormone that plays an important role in growth and repair, metabolism, weight loss, muscle strength and exercise performance. Furthermore, fasting, and in particular adopting a diet low in protein, has, at least in animal models, been associated with extended life expectancy.

Types of fasting

A fast can take many forms, although typically you can expect the practice to be performed over a 12-72 hour period. One popular form, known as intermittent fasting, involves cycling between periods of fast and periods of eating. Ranging from a few hours to a few days, this may involve alternate day fasting, when you eat a low-calorie diet (say 500 calories in a day) and then eat normally the next, whole day fasting, where food is restricted for a 24 hour period, or time-restricted feeding, where you choose a set number of hours each day within which to eat. Opting for an 'eating window' is thought to be a gentler way to introduce fasting – this may be as simple as delaying breakfast.

Popularised versions of fasts include the 5:2 diet, which involves eating no more than 500 calories in a day, twice a week. This is a simple, flexible plan, although for some it may be too restrictive and hard to stick to. Since its original initiation, author Dr Michael Mosley has updated the plan with the Fast 800, which advocates 800 calories for two days and a lower carb diet on the remaining five.

Another scientifically backed plan is the Longevity diet formulated by Dr Valter Longo. The plan involves five days of fasting two to three times a year. On these days the diet comprises of 400 calories of vegetables and another 400 calories of nuts, seeds and their oils.

Conclusion

Linked to an array of health benefits and taking many forms, fasting is a dietary practice which appears to fit most lifestyles. However, if you decide to adopt a fast, make sure you stay well-hydrated and when you eat, the food is nutrient-dense and well-balanced. If fasting for extended periods, minimise physical activity and ensure adequate rest. It's also wise to avoid fasting during stressful periods – it requires resolve and willpower.

Fasting is not for everyone. It's advisable to speak to your GP or healthcare professional before starting a new dietary regime, especially if you're under 18 years old, elderly, have a pre-existing medical condition (including diabetes and high blood pressure) or are on medication. Fasting isn't recommended for people who are underweight, have an eating disorder or are pregnant or breast-feeding.

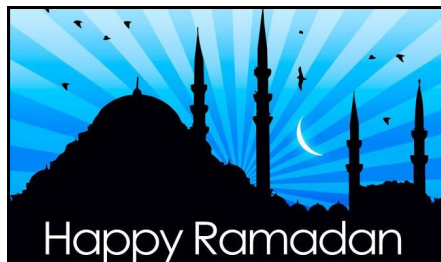
Please note: if you're considering any form of diet, please consult your GP first to ensure you can do so without risk to your health.

Prophet's sermon on Ramadan

"Indeed ahead of you is the blessed month of Allah. A month of blessing, mercy and forgiveness. A month which with Allah is the best of months. Its days, the best of days, its nights, the best of nights, and its hours, the best of hours. It is the month which invites you to be the guests of Allah and invites you to be one of those near to Him. Each breath you take glorifies him; your sleep is worship, your deeds are accepted and your supplications are answered.

So, ask Allah, your Lord; to give you a sound body and an enlightened heart so you may be able to fast and recite his book, for only he is unhappy who is devoid of Allah's forgiveness during this great month. Remember the hunger and thirst of the day of Qiyamah (Judgement) with your hunger and thirst; give alms to the needy and poor, honor your old, show kindness to the young ones, maintain relations with your blood relations; guard your tongues, close your eyes to that which is not permissible for your sight, close your ears to that which is forbidden to hear, show compassion to the orphans of people so compassion may be shown to your orphans.

Repent to Allah for your sins and raise your hands in dua during these times, for they are the best of times and Allah looks towards his creatures with kindness, replying to them during the hours and granting their needs if he is asked...



The Muslims who Inspired Spinoza, Locke and Defoe

By Mustafa Akyol, April 5, 2021

In this age of anxiety, anger and contestations between the West and the Islamic world, many epoch-shaping stories of intellectual exchanges between our cultures are often forgotten. A powerful example comes from literature. Millions of Christian, Jewish and Muslim readers across the world have read that famed tale of the man stranded alone on an island: “Robinson Crusoe” by Daniel Defoe, the 18th-century British pamphleteer, political activist and novelist.

Few know that in 1708, 11 years before Defoe wrote his celebrated novel, Simon Ockley, an Orientalist scholar at Cambridge University, translated and published a 12th-century Arabic novel, “Hayy ibn Yaqzan,” or “Alive, the Son of Awake,” by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Tufayl, an Andalusian-Arab polymath. Writing about the influence of Ibn Tufayl’s novel on Defoe’s “Robinson Crusoe,” Martin Wainwright, a former Guardian editor, remarked, “Tufayl’s footprints mark the great classic.”

Ibn Tufayl’s novel tells the tale of Hayy, a boy growing up alone on a deserted island, with animals. As he grows up, Hayy uses his senses and reason to understand the workings of the natural world. He explores the laws of nature, devises a rational theology and entertains theories about the origin of the universe. He develops a sense of ethics: Out of mercy for animals, he turns vegetarian, and out of care for plants, he preserves their seeds.

Hayy then leaves his island and visits a religious society. He finds that the teachings of reason and religion are compatible and complementary. Yet he notices that some religious people may be crude, even hypocritical. He returns to his island, where he had found God and developed his concepts of truth, morality and ethics by relying on observation and reasoning.

Ibn Tufayl’s message was clear — and for its times, quite bold: Religion was a path to truth, but it was not the only path. Man was blessed with divine revelation, and with reason and conscience from within. People could be wise and virtuous without religion or a different religion.

The translations of “Hayy ibn Yaqzan” in early modern Europe — by Edward Pococke Jr. into Latin in 1671, by George Keith into English in 1674, by Simon Ockley into English in 1708 — sold widely. Among the admirers of Ibn Tufayl’s work were the Enlightenment philosophers Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and John Locke, who were trying to advance a

sense of human dignity in a Christendom long tormented by religious wars and sectarian persecutions.

Fans of the novel also included a new Protestant sect: Quakers. Mr. Keith, a leading Quaker minister, who translated the novel into English, helped publicize it in European intellectuals circles. He admired the novel, for it echoed the Quaker doctrine that every human being had an “inward light” — regardless of faith, gender or race. That humanist theology would have profound political consequences, making Quakers, in a few centuries, leaders in world-changing campaigns: abolition of slavery, emancipation of women, and other worthy causes.

The insights in Ibn Tufayl’s work that inspired the Quakers also shined in the works of Abul-Walid Muhammad Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes. Ibn Tufayl, who served as a minister in the court of an Almohad caliph of Islamic Spain, commissioned Ibn Rushd, to write commentaries on ancient Greek philosophy, which became the main source for the European rediscovery of the Greeks, earning him great reverence in Western intellectual history.

What is less known is that Ibn Rushd also sought to harmonize his philosophical insights with Islamic law — the Shariah. At the core of Ibn Rushd’s effort was the vision of Ibn Tufayl’s philosophical novel: Religion and reason were both independent sources of wisdom. Religion had its written laws, while reason had its unwritten laws, the universal principles of justice, mercy or thankfulness. When there was a conflict between these two, Ibn Rushd argued, written laws of religion should be reinterpreted as they were inevitably bound with context.

Ibn Rushd applied this vision to the debate on jihad, criticizing the militant Muslims of his time who called for jihad “until they uproot and destroy entirely whoever disagrees with them.” He saw that position as reflecting

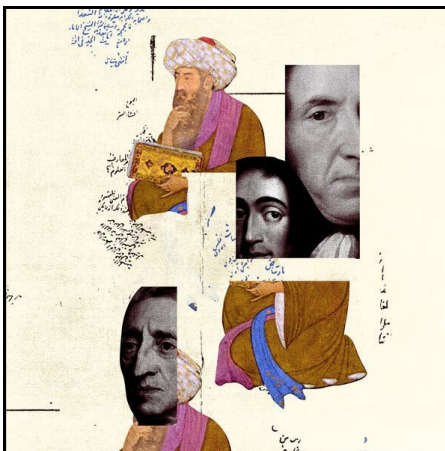
“ignorance on their part of the intention of the legislator,” or God, who could not have reasonably willed “the great harm” of war. He used the same perspective to critique the enfeebling of women in medieval Muslim society, which was a result of the denial of their intellectual capacity.

He did his best to advance the most women-friendly views in Islamic jurisprudence: Women had the right to refuse polygamy, enjoy equal right to divorce, avoid the face veil, or to become judges. Ibn Rushd’s other key contribution to modern Europe was his call for open debate, where views are freely expressed and rationally measured. “You should always, when presenting a philosophical argument, cite the views of your opponents,” he wrote. “Failure to do so is an implicit acknowledgment of the weakness of your own case.” The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, a towering intellectual we lost last year, had traced how Ibn Rushd’s insight was picked up by the 17th-century Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, John Milton and John Stuart Mill.

Yet conservatives in Islamic Spain abhorred Ibn Rushd’s indulgence in philosophy and accused him of being a polytheist after he cited a Greek philosopher who was a worshiper of Venus. He was publicly humiliated, exiled and forced into house imprisonment. His books on philosophy were burned. They survived in Hebrew or Latin translations in Europe, but most of the Arabic originals were lost.

This loss has had grim consequences for Muslims. Powerful orthodoxies in the Islamic world — although parochialism and bigotry have proliferated in other communities as well — are still denying values distilled from the “unwritten laws” of humanity: human rights, religious liberty, or gender equality. They rather preach blind obedience to old verdicts, without asking “why and how,” and without deploying reason and conscience. The result is a troubling religiosity that relies on coercion instead of freedom, and generates moralism instead of morality. The way forward for the Islamic world lies in reconciling faith and reason. A good first step would be to reconsider what Ibn Tufayl’s “Hayy ibn Yaqzan” and the works of Ibn Rushd were trying to tell us.

Mustafa Akyol, a contributing opinion writer, is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. This essay is excerpted from his forthcoming book, “Reopening Muslim Minds: A Return to Reason, Freedom, and Tolerance.”



'Law against Islam': French vote in favour of hijab ban condemned

As part of the 'anti-separatism' bill, the French Senate has voted for outlawing a bid by the French Senate to ban girls under 18 from wearing the hijab in public has drawn condemnation, with the hashtag #HandsOffMyHijab circulating widely on social media.

The hijab is a headscarf worn by many Muslim women and has been the subject of a decades-long feud in France.

The French Senate's move comes as part of Paris's push to introduce a so-called "anti-separatism" bill which it says aims to bolster the country's secular system, but critics have denounced, arguing it singles out the minority Muslim population.

While debating the proposed legislation on March 30, senators approved an amendment to the bill calling for the "prohibition in the public space of any conspicuous religious sign by minors and of any dress or clothing which would signify inferiority of women over men".

The ban is not yet law, with France's National Assembly required to sign off on the change before it can take effect.

But a backlash to the amendment was swift, with some suggesting the proposed rule amounted to a "law against Islam".

"Age to consent to sex in France: 15 Age to consent to hijab: 18 Let that sink in. It isn't a law against the hijab. It's a law against Islam. #Handsoffmyhijab #FranceHijabBan," one Twitter user wrote.

Another posted: "I thought we already had this covered. Forcing a woman to wear a hijab is wrong. Just like forcing her to take it off is wrong. It's HER choice."

The issue also attracted the attention of several high-profile figures.

On Instagram, Olympic athlete Ibtihaj Muhammad shared a post suggesting the Senate's amendment indicated "Islamophobia is deepening in France".

"This is what happens when you normalize anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim hate speech, bias, discrimination, and hate crimes – Islamophobia written into law," the post said.

Amani al-Khatahtbeh, founder of Muslim Women's Day and the website Muslim Girl, also weighed in on the controversy.

"No government should regulate how a woman can dress, whether to keep it on or take it off," she tweeted, referencing the hijab.

Somali-born model Rawdah Mohamed suggested the French Senate's move had put it on "the wrong side of equality".

"The Hijab ban is hateful rhetoric coming from the highest level of government and will go down as an enormous

failure of religious values and equality," she posted on Instagram.

The National Assembly, France's lower chamber which is dominated by President Emmanuel Macron's centrist La République En Marche (LREM) party, voted overwhelmingly in favour of the bill on February 16 before it was passed up to the conservative-led Senate.

The legislation has been debated in a highly charged atmosphere in France after three attacks late last year, including the beheading on October 16 of teacher Samuel Paty, who had shown his students caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad during a lesson on free speech.



Ramadan 2021: Lessons from lockdown

Ramadan is an opportunity for healing, for self-restoration, for seeking closeness to Allah, His love and His mercy. And you are worthy of it all.

To help you manage the month, we've compiled some lessons we've learnt after experiencing last Ramadan in lockdown.

1. Be compassionate. Firstly, to yourself. Many of us enter Ramadan with apprehension. We are human and susceptible to error and shortcomings, we were made to be tested by our nafs, and over the past year, we may have failed and failed again. This doesn't mean Ramadan isn't for us; Ramadan greets us as we are. Ramadan welcomes us and invites us to realign our focus and principles, it also ushers us to reconnect with our Lord.

2. Plan.

As the old saying goes, 'if you fail to plan, you plan to fail'. We plan for our jobs, or exams, our weddings, our kids – Ramadan should be planned with the same energy and effort in order to help maximise our time and worship. We're Muslims before we are anything else.

The month is a sacred and special time; to get the most out of it, create a Ramadan checklist. This will motivate you to tick off your prayers, reading Quran, completing good deeds etc. If you map out what your day will look like, you can then figure out where to fit in moments of reflection and in turn, this will stop us from being lazy or engaging in things we shouldn't be.

3. Start small.

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the long list of ambitious goals you might be setting yourself, but remember, 'Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see

The law does not specifically mention the word Islam, but French Muslims have for months protested against it, saying several of its measures single them out.

Amnesty International last month warned the proposed law posed a "serious attack on

it' (99:1). As with any act of worship, intention is key. Starting small means you give yourself the room to improve as the month progresses, rather than starting with unattainable goals that are hard to maintain. Examples of setting smaller goals could be: praying tahajjud every night, reviving and implementing a sunnah of the Prophet or learning the tafsir of the surahs you most frequently recite in salah.

4. Make the most of the period of isolation.

No doubt the global pandemic has meant a forced change in the way we observe Ramadan. Whilst many of us may miss families and friends getting together to open fast, the silver lining is that the conditions of lockdown (though now easing) have actually enabled a slower paced life for many, offering more time and a better, ample environment to reflect and worship in. That extra hour you'd spend commuting to work can now be dedicated to reading more Quran, or doing more dhikr. Perhaps you can get your steps in on your daily walk and listen to a podcast (Salam Girl, Sacred Footsteps and The Mindful Muslim to name a few). It's ample time to re-centre, prioritise, and align yourself to things that matter most to you

Just like last year, there are many online communities offering the chance to experience Ramadan together through shared initiatives, such as Jeem Journal's 30 day challenge and Green Deen Tribe's ethical iftar weekend, connecting people across the globe in the absence of real life festivities with a shared purpose.

The Contemporary Middle East in an Age of Upheaval

Edited by James L. Gelvin

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab uprisings of 2010–11 left indelible imprints on the Middle East. Yet, these events have not reshaped the region as pundits once predicted. With this volume, top experts on the region offer wide-ranging considerations of the characteristics, continuities, and discontinuities of the contemporary Middle East, addressing topics from international politics to political Islam, hip hop to human security.

This book engages six themes to understand the contemporary Middle East—the spread of sectarianism, abandonment of principles of state sovereignty, the lack of a regional hegemonic power, increased Saudi-Iranian competition, decreased regional attention to the Israel-Palestine conflict, and fallout from the Arab uprisings—as well as offers individual country studies. With analysis from historians, political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists, and up-to-date discussions of the Syrian Civil War, impacts of the Trump presidency, and the 2020 uprisings in Lebanon, Algeria, and Sudan, this book will be an essential guide for anyone seeking to understand the current state of the region.

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What Hasn't? Joel Beinin chapter abstract | This chapter points to the continuities between the "old" Middle East and the new. In terms of petroleum-based crony capitalism, authoritarian patrimonialism or neo-patrimonialism, low human development indexes, and a repressive public culture, political opposition in the form of Islamist movements, little has changed. What has changed is that

the subalterns of the Arab region have burst into the historical and political arena in hitherto-unprecedented ways.

About the author

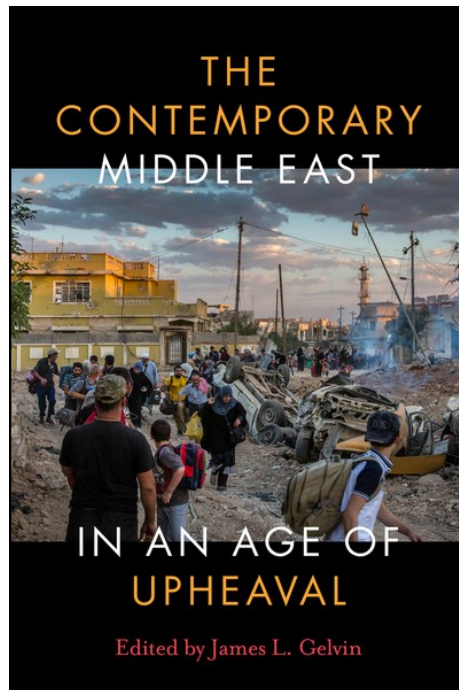
James L. Gelvin is Professor of History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is the author of *The New Middle East: What Everyone Needs to Know* (2018) and *The Modern Middle East: A History*, now in its fifth edition (2020), among other books.

"The essays in *The Contemporary Middle East in an Age of Upheaval*, edited by distinguished historian James Gelvin, are an indispensable guide to making sense of the Middle East's current disorder and future direction. A must-read for academics, policy makers, and informed general audiences."

—*Frederic Wehrey, Senior Fellow, Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

"A first-rate collection of analyses from leading scholars across a range of disciplines, *The Contemporary Middle East in an Age of Upheaval* is essential reading for anyone interested in how the Middle East has and has not changed since the uprisings of 2011."

—*Jillian Schwedler, Hunter College, CUNY*



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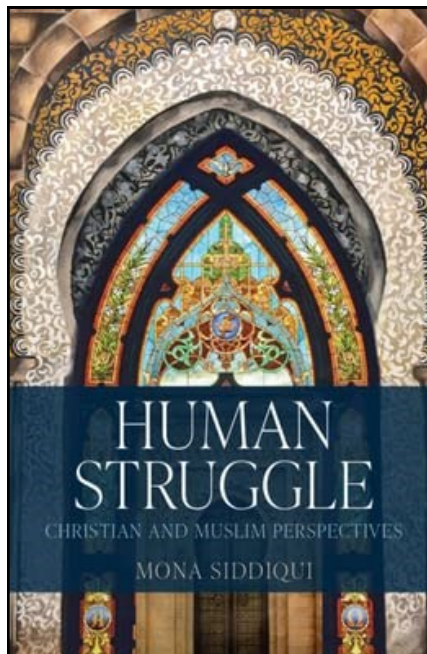
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Human Struggle: Christian and Muslim Perspectives

By Mona Siddiqui

Many of the great thinkers and poets in Christianity and Islam led lives marked by personal and religious struggle. Indeed, suffering and struggle are part of the human condition and constant themes in philosophy, sociology and psychology. In this thought-provoking book, acclaimed scholar Mona Siddiqui ponders how humankind finds meaning in life during an age of uncertainty. Here, she explores the theme of human struggle through the writings of iconic figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Muhammad Ghazali, Rainer Maria Rilke and Sayyid Qutb - people who searched for meaning in the face of adversity. Considering a wide range of thinkers and literary figures, her book explores how suffering and struggle force the faithful to stretch their imagination in order to bring about powerful and prophetic movements for change. The moral and aesthetic impulse of their writings will also stimulate inter-cultural and interdisciplinary conversations on the

search for meaning in an age of uncertainty.



The first book to explore human struggle from such a wide range of theological, philosophical and sociological angles

Draws on the iconic work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Muhammad Ghazali, Rainer Maria Rilke and Sayyid Qutb

Provides a unique foundation for inter-cultural and interdisciplinary conversations on the search for meaning in an age of uncertainty

Mona Siddiqui is Professor of Islamic and Interreligious Studies at the University of Edinburgh. She received an OBE for her comparative work and public profile. As a Muslim scholar in Christian-Muslim relations, she is unique and her book *Christians, Muslims and Jesus* (2013) received international acclaim. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a fellow of the American Academy for Arts and Sciences.

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My Ramadan Experience During Lockdown

Noor Baqat, Reporter | May 11, 2020
Francis Lewis News

The abrupt sound of my alarm clock wakes me up everyday at 4 am, just in time for suhoor, signaling the beginning of my day. I get up restlessly to pray and start eating quickly before I can close my fast. It was April 23, the beginning of Ramadan, and I was beyond anxious to find out what this month would hold for me and my family.

During Ramadan, Muslim families observe fast for 15 hours everyday for a month, from sunrise to sunset. Through these desperate times, Covid-19 has forced me to adapt and observe this holy month at home. However, through my eyes I believe that observing my fast at home has been very beneficial to me.

First and foremost I would like to mention that everything has felt easier due to all the time the lockdown has given me. I feel like I can finally breathe. My mom is a nurse.

Everyday she risks her life working from the front lines to help her patients, and she has to do all of this while fasting. While being at home, I have an abundant amount of time to clean the house, finish my schoolwork, and prepare dinner for me and my mom to break our fast together.

Being in lockdown has given me the ability to use my time wisely and not fasting at school has made everything seem abundantly easier. It feels as if this weight has been lifted off my shoulders that would constantly be there when I used to fast in school. I don't have to worry about the hot weather physically draining me, I don't have to worry about final exams or SATs, or even running or working out during gym. These key factors made me feel absolutely restless while fasting. It finally feels like I can fast with an open and free heart without having to think about these things.

For the past three years of being in school, fasting was an everyday struggle. The sheer panic of breaking my fast would constantly overcome me as soon as I walked into the school building. I constantly felt as if teachers never understood how much pressure they apply on those who were fasting by giving us an excessive amount of work and tests almost every week. Coming to school without eating breakfast was tiring enough, but having to worry about tests and exams felt as if I had a weight on my shoulder that seemed to get heavier every day. Being in a crowded lunchroom surrounded by people and food was also very exhausting and tempting at times. Often I would find myself at the library or the auditorium to get away from the lunchroom, and now being in my room has felt like a safe sanctuary for me.

The only downfall of experiencing Ramadan at home is not being able to break bread with my extended family members or even with

people from my mosque. Not standing shoulder to shoulder on a prayer mat with my fellow Muslims at the mosque makes me feel lonely. Ramadan is a key way to bring one closer to the people around them, to feel closer to Islam, but this aspect of celebrating Ramadan at home is such an odd feeling. I have to create my own mosque within the four walls of my home.

So many recurring questions kept coming into my mind,

"Would this be the first time I celebrate Eid without my family?"

"Would I not be able to read Eid prayer at my mosque, a tradition that has been around ever since I was born?"

"Would this be the first year that I would not be able to visit my cousin's grave, which is what me and my family do every Eid?"

I think these questions will pass through my mind every day, and only time can answer



183. O YE WHO BELIEVE! FASTING IS PRESCRIBED TO YOU AS IT WAS PRESCRIBED TO THOSE BEFORE YOU, THAT YE MAY (LEARN) SELF-RESTRAINT, -

184. (FASTING) FOR A FIXED NUMBER OF DAYS; BUT IF ANY OF YOU IS ILL, OR ON A JOURNEY, THE PRESCRIBED NUMBER (SHOULD BE MADE UP) FROM DAYS LATER. FOR THOSE WHO CAN DO IT (WITH HARDSHIP), IS A RANSOM, THE FEEDING OF ONE THAT IS INDIGENT. BUT HE THAT WILL GIVE MORE, OF HIS OWN FREE WILL, - IT IS BETTER FOR HIM. AND IT IS BETTER FOR YOU THAT YE FAST, IF YE ONLY KNEW.

(THE COW)

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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.

Join us in our Noon and Afternoon prayers
Everyday
at 13.00

them. I do hope that everyone finds comfort within their home. I want people to feel satisfied with Ramadan, regardless of the underlying circumstances we must face. I'm trying to look more at the positive aspects of this virus rather than the negative. I think what we all need to do is try to find the positive side of situations in order to get through something as sad as this virus.

"There are many who fast and gain nothing from their fasting other than suffering from thirst and hunger"

Imam Ali (AS)

Fasting blinds the body in order to open the eyes of your soul.

Moulana Jalaluddin Rumi

The fasting of the elect is the fasting of the heart from all unworthy concerns or worldly thoughts; a total abstinence from all else besides God.

Imam Al-Ghazali