THE MUSLIM DILEMMA

AN ABDUL AZIZ TRUST PUBLICATION

www.aaiil.org
Contents

Foreword 2
Dedication 4
The Eternal Message of Islam 5
The Status of Women in Islam 15
Conclusion 23
Qur'anic Solutions for our Social Problems 29
Conclusion 36
I extend the Islamic greeting of peace and pray that the love and choicest blessings of the Creator will always be showered in abundance upon you. This publication promotes Islam as 'a way of life' that embraces every facet of human activity in a progressive society. Islam is supported by five pillars the first and foremost being Imaan- Faith in one God, Allah Subhanna Wa Taala. He is Sovereign and the heavens and the earth are his Dominions. His Divine Guidance in the Holy Qur'an gives man the basic knowledge to know, love and obey Him. It lights up the pathway for man to travel in safety towards his destiny. It enables man to seek and find abundant happiness and lasting spiritual fulfillment as he journeys through life serving mankind for the pleasure of the Creator.

Because we live in a world that has become hostile to the Islamic Faith every believer has a responsibility to engage in some damage control to erase the cause. Muslims should at all times be prepared to highlight and present Qur'anic injunctions that will encourage and promote good relationship between the believer and the non-believer. Islam can triumph as the panacea for the ills of our contemporary society if we publicly condemn the bigotry and fanaticism of the many radical groups and cults who volunteer to give edicts and speak in the name of Islam. Muslims today must take Islam out of the arid desert of the seventh century and bring it into the fertile valleys of the twenty-first century. They must enter the new age of communication and secure a berth in the frontline of progress to be able to participate on an equal basis with those of other faiths who are engaged with the future development of our society.

In the pursuit of righteous living Muslims have confined their Faith to daily prayers and the annual fast in the Holy Month of Ramadan. They have overlooked the fact that Islam is 'a way of life' that goes beyond these limitations. The Holy Qur'an Ch: 2 V: 177 states: *It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards east or west; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels,
and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for God for your kin folks, for orphans, for needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer; and practice regular charity, to fulfill the contracts which you have entered into; and to be firm and patient in times of personal pain, adversity and throughout all periods of distress. Such are the people of truth and these are the God-fearing.

Muslims have placed themselves in a time warp and must take positive action to escape and be free from this dilemma. This publication is a compilation of some essays on current topics with a few suggestions for all concerned Muslims to consider and use in their personal or group efforts to erase the misrepresentations and propaganda against Islam. This publication comes to you with the compliments of the Abdul Aziz Trust. May Allah (swt) bless the humble effort.

Mahmud S. Dean Aziz  LL.B (Hon)
Attorney at Law - Legal Adviser

November 25, 2004
Dedicated to the sacred memory
of our beloved parents

IMAM ABDUL AZIZ (1903 - 1952)
and
HAJJIN HANIFA AZIZ (1912 - 1989)

MAY ALMIGHTY ALLAH GRANT THEM
AN ETERNAL ABODE IN PARADISE.

"Qaaloo Inna Lillaahi Wa Inn Ilaihi Raajjoon"

Say: 'Verily from Allah we have come and to
Allah is our eventual return.'

THE AZIZ FAMILY
THE ETERNAL MESSAGE OF ISLAM

Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim
(Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful)

All praises are due to Allah (swt) the Lord of the worlds, and greetings and salutations to our Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp). I bear testimony that there is no being worthy of worship except Allah (swt) Who has no associate and I bear testimony that Muhammad (uwbp) is His Apostle and Messenger.

O believers! Reflect upon the historical references in the Holy Qur'an and consider the fate of the Pharaohs, and the many evil tyrants who exceeded the limits of God. Do you believe that individuals and nations in this era are immune from the same severe punishment when they transgress and exceed the limits of God or fail in their duty to Him? The Holy Qur'an exhorts the believer to engage in good deeds and is quite clear about rewards and punishment. The wrath of Almighty Allah will surely visit every nation and individual for their evil deeds unless they sincerely repent and seek forgiveness from their Lord. Whomsoever Allah guides there is none to lead astray and whomsoever Allah finds in error there is none to guide him.

The human rights violations that are perpetrated today in the majority of Muslim states are indeed ultra-vires International Law and are condemned by all the relevant injunctions of the Holy Qur'an and the Islamic Legal Code. The United Nations Reports and Surveys on Human Rights show numerous violations done in the name of Islam in Muslim States. In many cases these violations have their genesis in pagan societies and are alien to Islam. The abject poverty and hunger; the prevalence of disease and human suffering; the high level of ignorance and disregard for human dignity; the political oppression by rulers and governments with unjust and barbaric legal systems that permit inhumane torture of prisoners and the innocent; and the extravagant waste of the national resources by the privileged, are
in direct contradiction with Qur'anic injunctions and the authentic Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (uwbp).

Our Lord has promised in the Holy Qur'an that those who anchor themselves firmly in faith in Him and engage in good deeds for His pleasure shall be rewarded with an abundance of good. He has enjoined upon us the promotion of truth and justice and the doing of good to our kinfolks, the poor, the needy, the wayfarer, the widows and orphans. He has specifically forbidden the doing of evil acts and engaging in lewdness, indecency and causing strife or rebellion in the community. He has guaranteed the devotee who seeks and follows His guidance the enjoyment of His protection. He has warned those who disobey and ultimately find themselves in error that there will be no one to guide them. The believer can never entertain the hope of deceiving Allah (swt) for the Holy Qur'an reminds us that the Lord knows best those who yielded to His guidance.

We cannot hope to be rewarded by our overt show of piety if internally we nurture a false assessment of our true relationship with the Creator. He promised those who surrender themselves to Him and accept the true Faith, who are devout, sincere, patient, humble, charitable and chaste; those who fast and are ever mindful of their duties to Him - on these both, men and women - He will bestow mercy, forgiveness and a rich reward. Islam is a world faith and is universally acclaimed by its adherents to mean complete resignation to the Will of God. Some theologians and philosophers say Islam implies submission to the Divine Will. Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) has explained it through the observation he made of the basic duties and obligations imposed upon mankind by the Creator and summed it up to be:

1. Bear witness that there is but only one God (Iman).
2. Recite the daily prayers in submission to His command (Salah).
3. Uplift the standard of life of members of the society by almsgiving and other charitable acts. The establishment of the Bait-ul Maal or Treasury for the administration of
these funds (Zakah).

4. Observe the fast during the holy month of Ramadan for the pleasure of Almighty Allah and for the personal purification and spiritual development of the believer (Saum).

5. Perform the pilgrimage to Makkah at least once to show solidarity with the Muslim Umma and also as a preparatory exercise for one's own demise, the inexorable end of this earthly journey and the transition to the Hereafter (Hajj).

These five pillars of Islam are the common ties that bind the Umma of Prophet Muhammad (uwbp). Every person who has taken the Shahada or accepted Islam as a way of life is required to learn all the rules of conformity in the faith. In obedience to the Lord he must faithfully practice these fundamental principles of the faith for the pleasure of Allah (swt) and ultimately inherit the rewards promised by the Almighty. The believer is not called upon to change his nationality or to alter his physical appearance. He retains his identity, dress, cultural customs and language except in areas where they patently offend the basic principles on which the pillars of Islam are founded. The change must be made in the character of the individual and evidenced by his deeds and actions. The Holy Qur'an makes the point in the following words: O mankind, We have created you from a single pair of male and female, and established you as nations and tribes, so that you may know one another. The noblest of you before your Maker is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware (49:13). It also says: Verily you have in the Prophet of Allah an excellent exemplar.

In accepting the Holy Prophet (uwbp) as a role model, the believer is not instructed to become a look-alike, a clone or attempt to walk in the sandals of the Messenger. On the contrary, Allah (swt) wants the believer to imbibe the good character of the Holy Prophet (uwbp) by following his noble examples and teachings in his Eternal Message. We are invited to walk in the Sirat ul Mustaqueem, the footprints he left behind on the sands of
time. It is common practice in some Islamic communities today to make a convert to Islam think he is actually changing his national identity to become someone from a different tribe or nation. This practice is more prevalent among Indian, Pakistani and Arab communities. Converts are often made to believe that their western dress is not Islamic and therefore not proper or appropriate for the ceremony. The intention in 49:13 of the Holy Qur'an is to keep the identity of the convert intact and to recognize his basic intention, sincerity and willingness to accept and practice the Islamic way of life. In 2:143, it is stated: *All mankind is naught but a single nation.* The principle of the brotherhood of man is laid down here on the broadest basis encompassing the entire human race as one human family.

The world today is a spectacle of human beings who are simply lost. People are confused and unsure of the direction to follow. Everywhere, faith and belief in the established world religions have become largely problematic both in individual and collective life. People in every society are stammering incoherently in borrowed symbols, searching for some new and separate identity. The growth of certain religious cults and devil-worshippers in western societies has seriously affected the mores of the society. We cannot be oblivious of the fact that today in our society institutions such as marriage and the family are seriously threatened. In the case of Islam political, social and economic transformations are occurring more rapidly than spiritual and intellectual development. This dilemma is rooted in the fact that science and technology, with their ever-growing ideas and prowess and modern transient life by its glitter and enchantment, are regarded as threats to the Muslim psyche. Muslims, for too long, have neglected the basic teachings of Islam. They are so focussed on the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (uwpbp) that they often fail to look deep into the mind of the Holy Qur'an to verify their authenticity. They also promote the traditional and cultural elements of countries and peoples who are yet to emerge into the twenty-first century.

Muslims are also faced with the dilemma of being caught
unprepared to confront the new social paradigm in the West. In an attempt to escape and avoid this challenge, believers are encouraged to return to the practice of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries and to reject the reality of the environment in which we now live. Instead of expanding the Islamic horizon to promote a better quality of life for members of society, Islam is still kept confined to the narrow corridors of worship. Muslim intellectuals are limiting the Islamic way of life by introducing some pagan rituals and additional prayers to supplement the basic Salaat already sanctioned and prescribed by Almighty Allah and established as a Pillar of Islam by Prophet Muhammad (uwhbp).

Islam is also given negative publicity when Muslims devote undue attention to insignificant issues (wearing the hijab and the right to practice polygamy in western countries) and fail to address the problems of the millions, especially children and women, who live in sub-human conditions in Muslim lands. People who are neglected and deprived of the basic needs (food, clothing, shelter and medical attention) for survival. The Muslim leadership, too, is vocal in citing Qur'anic injunctions to support its right to fight for freedom, independence and to hold power to govern and control the affairs of the people. However, there is deep silence about the various responsibilities to defend the fundamental teachings of Islam and promote and propagate the injunctions that guarantee the dignity and the rights and freedoms of every human being.

Muslim Leaders will receive greater respect from their own people as well as those from the international community when serious efforts are directed towards highlighting the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an which give man and woman the right to life; the right to the freedoms we all cherish in seeking knowledge, earning a livelihood with dignity; the right to freedom of speech and travel; the right to own property; the right to freedom of conscience; and the right to the use of the democratic process for the election of our leaders as enshrined in the Holy Qur'an.

It is, therefore, ironic to find so many Muslim scholars and
community leaders, who should be speaking out against this retrograde step, engaged in propagating and recommending the return to the early practice of Islam as the panacea for the evils that abound in the world today. Speaking to his followers, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) is reported to have said: 'The greatest enemies of God are those who have entered into Islam and do acts of infidelity and who without cause shed the blood of men'. He also said: 'Do you know what destroys the foundation of Islam and ruin it? The errors of the learned destroy it, and the disutations of the hypocrite, and the orders of kings who have lost the road'. In one of his prophesies, the Messenger of Allah said: 'The time is near in which nothing will remain of Islam but its name, and of the Qur'an but its mere appearance, and the mosques of Muslims will be destitute of knowledge and worship, and the learned men will be the worst people under the heavens, and contention and strife will issue from them and it will return upon themselves'.

What does the Holy Qur'an recommend for the removal of the social ills, prejudices, injustices, discrimination and domination that have brought about the apparent decline and complete breakdown in the moral quality of life in society generally and the Muslim nations in particular? Living in the past is not what the Holy Qur'an recommends or intends for mankind. The Holy Prophet (uwbp) is reported to have said: 'If one's today is not better than his yesterday and his tomorrow is not better than his today, he is a loser'. To be a winner, therefore, one has to strive for excellence. Allah (swt) says in the Holy Qur'an: You are the best of peoples evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in God (3:110). In another injunction, the believers are told that Allah will not change the condition of any person or community unless there is some positive effort on the part of the individual or community towards effecting the desired change. A true Muslim is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence so that his life will be sophisticated, dignified and kept up-to-date with the developments that are constantly taking place in a changing society. He strives to be a
rational human being; to contribute to the prosperity and protection of the society in which he lives and to earn the respect of his fellow men.

Muslims must come to realize that they have voluntarily put themselves today in a time warp. When we yearn to live in the past and engage in wrestling with the present we become a liability to ourselves, the Muslim community and are also incapable to help with the overall development of the nation. Muslims must wake up to the realities of the new forces that are set free by the extraordinary development of human thought in all its directions. They must be aware and come to grips with the fact that they live in a period when science and technology have expanded our knowledge base. Man is now in space seeking information that will be useful to improve the quality of human life on planet earth. Science has made it possible for man to sit in his home on planet Earth and view the topography on planet Mars. Muslims must know that they live in an age when genetic engineering and the use of robotics are fast changing the shape of things. They must now focus their attention on accessing the new technologies and move Islam away from the arid deserts to fertile valleys of progress and enlightenment.

History will testify that Muslims were the forerunners and torchbearers of knowledge and civilization when Europe was still struggling through the Dark Ages. These forces that are set free in society today, technically speaking, are neither alien to Islam nor in conflict with the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (uwbp). Muslims today have the good fortune to view both the bright and the dark sides of Islamic historical growth and development to evaluate the true status of Islam in the world community. They must move to correct the situation and align themselves with the forces of progress. They must endeavour to become benefactors by contributing to the resources which are needed by man and not remain in the poor status only as beneficiaries of all the new technologies.

The change must begin with the revision of the Shari'ah
Law (Muslim jurisprudence and legal system) that has remained in a state of flux far too long. This situation has stagnated the growth and development of Muslim States sitting on half of the total resources in today's world. We know from Islamic history that Shari'ah Law experienced a phenomenal growth and development during the first six centuries of the Hijrah (migration of Prophet Muhammad (uwpb) from Makkah to Madinah). The stagnation we have today has existed from that time when the door of Ijtihad (development in the law) was virtually closed. The full and proper use of Islamic legal principles such as Ijma (consensus of opinion) will certainly ensure the ongoing process of fresh thinking and influence some creative and desirable adjustments to that body of laws. Qiyas (judgments or juristic analogy), Al-Istihsan (deviation on a certain issue from the rule of a precedent to another rule for a more relevant reason that requires such deviation), Al-Istislah (unprecedented judgment motivated by public interest to which neither the Holy Qur'an nor the Traditions of the Holy Prophet (uwpb) explicitly refer) or Al-Urf (custom of society) are all necessary tools for Muslims to use in interpreting and expanding Islamic legal principles for the development of Shari'ah as well as the legal systems in western societies where there are large concentrations of Muslims.

The Holy Qur'an is a living source of jurisprudence and as such provides for changes that will keep it relevant and alive. Shari'ah laws that relate to certain areas of the Muslim life, though obsolete, are still quoted by some contemporary scholars who deliver edicts or fatwas. The use of these archaic and obsolete laws causes greater hardships and quite often creates some embarrassment for the believer as well as Islam. Prophet Muhammad (uwpb) bequeathed a legacy to suit the needs of mankind for all times. In this background, the believer is better able to understand why his faith, Islam, is being maligned, misunderstood, misrepresented and misinterpreted in the media as well as among the traditional enemies of the faith. Muslims, too, will come to realize the injury they continue to inflict upon
the faith. The image that Islam once boasted for the first six centuries of its being has suffered a serious decline due largely to neglect and also the reluctance of the learned to recommend that Shari'ah which is neither Divine nor immutable be revised and updated on an ongoing basis.

Muslims must therefore rethink and plan again their strategy for life in an ever-changing world. They must hasten to contribute and keep abreast with the developments in the society and not remain complacent, leaving the task to be undertaken by future generations of followers. Muslims must not remain silent and be condemned to live under rules that were established by Islamic scholars and jurists who lived in the eight and ninth century. Qur'anic legal principles must be critically examined with all the available knowledge at the time of examination before changes are made in the relevant sections of Shari'ah Law. The Holy Qur'an is addressed to men of reason and understanding who are commanded to ponder, to reflect, to reason, to analyse, to contemplate on the message of the Qur'an, and to arrive at the best solutions to meet the challenges of the day. Why is this injunction in the Holy Book if we are already condemned for life to follow the schools of thought of the Imams and their interpretation of Al-Qur'an? The pristine message of Holy Qur'an and the authentic Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) are the sources to which every generation of Muslims must turn for guidance. This is why the Holy Book is addressed to men of reason and understanding - oo lal al baah - and advocates the pursuit of knowledge.

Islam as a way of life is the most recent of the revealed religions and has the 'mark' and 'royal seal' of perfection from Allah Subhanna wa taala. Almighty Allah says in the Holy Qur'an: This day have I perfected for you your religion and have completed My favours upon you and have chosen for you as your way of life Al Islam. In modern terms, Islam is 'state of the art' among the established religions. The Eternal Message of Islam must not remain in the hands of those leaders who lack the courage, qualifications and good intentions to promote its real
value and true purpose for mankind. The leadership in Muslim lands has failed to address the social and economic problems among their people and have allowed capitalism and communism to permeate their social structures and ruin the Islamic way of life. The economic questions of banking, mortgages, interest payments, insurance, investment banking, money exchange and transfers continue to pose problems for Muslims in Western as well as in Islamic jurisdictions. This subject area has posed another serious dilemma for every Muslim with business and financial interests that are regulated by government and require the services of the banking, mortgage and insurance companies in western societies. In order to compete in the economic and social life and avoid the pitfalls inherent in doing business in these jurisdictions Muslims must use the facilities of these financial institutions or unilaterally decide to face economic jeopardy with the result of possible financial losses and bankruptcy.

Many communities in the West are dependent on scholars from the East to promote their personal growth and development in the understanding of the Islamic way of life. Unfortunately, this practice has created yet another dilemma. These communities are, in fact, becoming victims of this imported leadership from depressed communities where Islamic principles and values are being compromised and corrupted by ancient culture and traditions. Almighty Allah says: And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful. And be not like those who became divided and disagreed after clear arguments had come to them. And for them is a grievous chastisement (3:103-104). Muslims in the West are undoubtedly aware of the corruption and decay that have gripped Islamic communities in the East and the plight of the Muslims in these regions. To depend or rely solely on intellectuals from such foreign cultures to propagate and promote the faith in western societies is not recommended. The Eternal Message of Islam is clear and fortunately still available for those who are willing to follow the wisdom of Al Qur'an and the noble teachings and traditions of the Messenger of God.
THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE HOLY QUR'AN
Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim
(Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful)

In a recent report published by the United Nations the status of Muslim women in Africa, the Middle East and several other Muslim States was given a very low rating on the Human Rights scale. In defending the infringements and violations the offending states relied on Shariah Law sanctioned by Islam. The faithless and ruthless tyrants who used their political power to infringe and suppress the rights and freedom of their female citizens are somehow not personally responsible. This indictment on Islam must not go unchallenged since Islam gave women their God given rights and freedom some fourteen hundred years ago when women in the developed states we know today were treated as mere chattels with no rights or status of persons. The current debate on the role and status of women in Islam focuses on women's rights taken from the western perspective. This essay, however, will address the subject giving the basic Islamic viewpoint and state what the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) say about the role, rights and freedom of women in Islam.

The family is the bedrock of the Islamic Society and as such laws pertaining to the rights of the person are given a higher priority vis-à-vis laws dealing with proprietary rights. Islamic laws protecting the family and women in particular differ in many respects from those in the Civil and Criminal Codes of Western Jurisdictions. For example an adulterer or fornicator in Islam is subject to trial under the Islamic Criminal Code. In Western Jurisdictions, however, matters of consensual sex outside of marriage are handled in the civil courts except in cases of Rape or Statutory Rape that are criminal offences. This is indeed a very controversial subject and the Islamic approach needs to be understood and tested from the true Islamic perspective and the authentic sources of Islamic jurisprudence.
On issues affecting women in Islam one must seek guidance from the relevant decrees and injunctions in the Holy Qur'an as well as the authentic traditions and practices of Prophet Muhammad (uwbp). It is not uncommon to find that in some Islamic jurisdictions today the interpretation of relevant Qur'anic injunctions on women's rights are tainted and compromised with customs and cultural traditions. Some differences also occur when the interpretation is given from a literal translation of the injunction and the allegorical and metaphorical language of the Holy Qur'an are lost to the simple minded. Consequently the status of women in these conflicting jurisdictions is different and generally incompatible with the true letter and spirit of the legal principles entrenched in the Holy Qur'an. In such cases the law will only have local currency in the jurisdiction in which it was proclaimed. It can only be applied to citizens of that country because it can be implemented and judgement against its citizen can be enforced. However, it does not bind the entire 'Muslim Umma' or even the Muslims in another Islamic Jurisdiction because it is lacking in authenticity and also universal appeal.

It is also important to point out that Islam is unique and has no established ecclesiastical high court such as a papal authority. There are no divinely ordained clerics or religious authority to pronounce judgement in matters of conscience in Islam. The Muslim Umma has not come together to appoint a world body that can claim authority as the universal protector of the Faith. The fact that there are so many self-appointed clerics with royal titles of eminence and as many conflicting views on every issue that affect Muslims everywhere can be blamed on this unrestricted freedom enjoyed by every believer. For example the edict by Ayatollah Khomeni of Iran that was delivered in the recent matter against Salman Rushdie is a good case in point.

The true situation in Islam is that Almighty Allah is Sovereign and has honoured every believer with the title of 'Khalifatullah' making him an agent and Vice-gerent of God. Allah (swt) is the Protector of His Religion and has also guaranteed Divine Protection of His Message in the Holy Qur'an. The test of this
guarantee is manifested in the fact that the Holy Qur'an has weathered fourteen centuries against all the attempts to change the message by way of revision, alteration, modification, interpolation and corruption. It has remained in the same pristine original Arabic text to this day with translations of the message in many international languages and dialects. Every generation of believers will have this legacy from the Prophet Muhammad (uwbp). They will be able to use the wisdom of this Holy Writ to plan and chart their course to salvation and the reward that the Creator promised the faithful. Almighty Allah is the One and only Master of the Day of Judgement and the Sole Judge of the conscience of the faithful for He knows best those who yielded to His guidance. The fact that so many differences exist in the social and cultural practices among the believers is proof that Islam allows freedom and flexibility to the believers in all matters of conscience to exercise their free will to distinguish truth from error.

Islam is a complete way of Life and does not separate the secular from the non-secular. Muslim communities in Islamic jurisdictions have guidance from divine sources and also the freedom to use their goodwill and wisdom to establish rules and regulations for good governance and for the welfare and benefit of their own people. In some Islamic communities there are rules that are in direct conflict with the letter and spirit of Qur'anic injunctions. They also offend the teachings and practices of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp). These rules, nevertheless, still get published and are promulgated in the name of Islam by these self-appointed clerics and political leaders. There is no judicial authority, however, to proceed against the perpetrators and sanction appropriate remedial action. The outcome is that Islam and not the actual offenders stand accused for the violation. At the present time there are numerous infringements of provisions in the United Nations Charter on Human Rights committed by countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia and some other Islamic nations that are erroneously blamed on Islam.

To do justice with the subject of the role and status of the Muslim Woman one must start by going back into history and take a
close look at the spiritual, intellectual, economic and social status of women before and after the advent of Islam. The investigation must commence from the early part of the seventh century with a close look at injunctions from the Holy Qur'an with specific reference to the recorded Traditions of the Messenger of God as well as the records handed down by theologians and historians from other faiths. This essay will rely upon these sources to argue the case for Islam. It will project Islam to be a simple way of life and not a religion. It will also attempt to do some damage control to vindicate Islam from some unjustified charges that it discriminates against the female person.

In pre-Islamic Arabia and other countries across the then known world women were accorded the status equal to that of slaves. They were treated as mere chattels with no personal or proprietary rights. Polygamy and polyandry were widely practiced and accepted as the norm by religion as well as individuals in the pagan population. Women were denied the right to own or inherit property. In matters of domestic affairs they had no rights over their own children or even themselves. In fact they were often abandoned by their husbands at will or even sold in the slave market. In situations of abuse by their husbands they had no recourse to seek or initiate any proceedings for a divorce or legal separation. They enjoyed no personal status in society and were never accorded the respect as wife, mother or daughter as we understand it today. In the economic sense a daughter was considered a liability and was often killed at birth for fear that she might one day bring shame and disgrace to the clan, tribe or family. Women in much later times received little or no education. They had no say in religious matters because they were bereft of a soul being limited in intellect as well as in spirituality. History records that in Europe and some other countries women were burnt at the stake as witches for their display of spiritual powers and their intellectual prowess.

History has recorded that much of these conditions existed well into the nineteenth century among European Nations. We are also aware of the fact that witchcraft is still very
much alive among the gypsy communities of Europe and practiced by some groups in modern western countries. Today it can even be found among aboriginal peoples in many regions of the world. In the Americas and parts of Europe devil worship has become an accepted form of the culture and religion among some groups of people. It is not fiction that we see when we view movies in which these practices are portrayed. The film making industry has discovered that stories based on the occult and the macabre have large followings and are indeed huge box-office attractions.

We are also aware of the difficulties, humiliation and suffering women continue to experience even today in their struggle to remove the iniquity of gender discrimination that still bedevils the developed and socially advanced communities. In these communities women are still engaged in the liberation struggle to free themselves from male domination. They are engaged in the battle for pay equity and their sacred inalienable rights and freedom as persons. In every developed and civilized society today women are exploited in several ways. Their rights are constantly infringed and even compromised by the media. In politics, commerce and sexuality, women are the main props and major attractions. They have become the main focus in business advertising and public displays to market every commercial item to go on sale including pornography, sex and all the other carnal pleasures.

Islam as a universal religion had its advent in the first half of the seventh century. The first convert to join the Holy Prophet was Lady Khatija, his beloved wife and mother of his children. Lady Khatija, who is revered by Muslims as the 'Mother of the Faithful', was independently wealthy and supported her husband in his divine mission with both her personal endeavours and her total financial resources. In this early seventh century era women were playing a very important role in the new Islamic Community. Because of their devotion to the cause of Islam and the role they played in nurturing and supporting the early converts the new Islamic Community became known as the 'Umma of
Muhammad' taken from the Arabic word 'umm' which means 'mother'.

SPIRITUAL STATUS:

The single most important change made in the earliest period of Islam was the recognition of women as persons. The Holy Prophet elevated their spiritual status and anointed them with a soul thus removing the taint of the inequality between the sexes. In the Holy Qur'an, Almighty Allah states in Ch: 4 V: 7: Whosoever does good work, whether male or female, and is a believer, such shall enter paradise. This promise was underlined and given greater emphasis in Ch: 33 V: 35 which states: Surely, the men who submit and the women who submit; and the believing men and the believing women; and the obedient men and the obedient women; and the truthful men and the truthful women; and the humble men and the humble women; and the almsgiving men and the almsgiving women; and the fasting men and the fasting women; and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard their chastity; and the men who praise God and the women who praise God; Allah has prepared for all of them forgiveness and a mighty reward.

The Holy Qur'an in Ch: 3 V: 194 also states: I will not suffer the work of a worker among you to be lost, whether male or female, the one of you being from the other. In yet another injunction Ch: 40 V: 40 the Almighty has promised: whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer, these shall enter the Garden and be given therein sustenance without measure. The Creator reminds us in numerous injunctions that Paradise and its blessings are equally for both the righteous men and the righteous women. In this context, Almighty Allah has specifically referred to Mary the mother of Prophet Jesus and the mother of Prophet Moses having elevated and anointed them spiritually. In Ch: 3 V: 41 the Angel said: O Mary surely Allah has chosen thee and anointed thee. In Ch: 28 V: 7 the Almighty proclaims: We revealed to the Mother of Moses, saying: Give him suck; then when thou fear for him, cast him into the river and fear
not nor grieve.

INTELLECTUAL STATUS:

The intellectual status of the Muslim woman and all women was given full recognition by Islam following the revelation of Ch: 2 V: 270 in which the Creator states: He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted abundant good; and none would take heed except those with understanding. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwpb) moved immediately to get this message to the believers and it is reported that he laid down the law that made education compulsory for both sexes. He proclaimed that all knowledge was the lost property of all the believing men as well as all the believing women. He urged that they go forth in search of knowledge even if their quest took them to the far off land of China. He said that the acquisition of knowledge was of paramount importance because it is essential for spiritual growth and development of every believer. Seeking knowledge he warned is a life-long exercise that never ceases; it is an ongoing mission from the cradle to the grave.

The Holy Qur'an is addressed to men of reason and understanding and can be understood best by those whose intellectual development will provide them with the skills to interpret and the ability to ponder and reflect upon the allegorical and metaphorical language in which the message was delivered to the Messenger of God. While Islam is basically a simple way of life the fact still remains that its message is for the intellectual mind and not the simple-minded. Allah (swt) does not want the devotee to be an ignorant blind follower. To know and love Him truly will require a personal level of awareness that is strengthened by the knowledge and intellectual development of the believer. The Holy Qur'an is a legacy to man from the Holy Prophet (uwpb). To receive the full benefit of his inheritance man must invest his time and personal effort to become intellectually equipped. Knowledge and faith in Allah (swt) are the tools to access the wisdom and the guidance from the Holy Qur'an that
guarantee the good life here in this world and in the life Hereafter. In his farewell address the Holy Prophet (uwhbp) cautioned his followers to ensure that the message he delivered to them is handed down exactly as he gave it. He explained the reason for this request by stating that future generations may even understand it better.

**ECONOMIC STATUS:**

On the question of economic freedom the Holy Qur'an states in Ch: 4 V: 33: *Men shall have the share of what they have earned and women shall have the share of what they have earned. And ask Allah of His bounty. Surely, Allah has perfect knowledge of all things.* Islam has made it abundantly clear that women are entitled to possess wealth and property of their own whether earned or inherited. It also made it incumbent upon men to give a dowry to their wives when contracting marriage. This nuptial gift gives the wife the status of an independent owner of property. It strengthens her legal capacity to enter the marriage contract at arms length as a femme sole. In fact this is a reversal of the old practice that required parents of brides to make nuptial gifts to bridegrooms and their family. This practice still obtains today in some societies and the demand for pre-nuptial settlements made on the parents of brides have ruined their financial resources and many have been driven into abject poverty.

**SOCIAL STATUS:**

With the advent of Islam the social status of women experienced some dramatic changes. The killing of an infant daughter at the time of her birth to avoid family shame, humiliation and poverty was abandoned and outlawed. In the new Islamic society fathers were taught to raise their daughters in the same way as they raised their sons. The Holy Prophet (uwhbp) is reported to have said: 'He who brings up two girls through their childhood will appear on the Day of Judgement attached to me like the two fingers of the hand' (Muslim). In marriage a woman is given rights similar to her husband. The husband and wife ties and
relationship are beautifully defined in the Holy Qur'an in Ch: 2 V: 188: *Your wives are a garment for you and you are a garment for them.* This metaphor clearly depicts that in Islam the spouses are equal in their responsibility to provide support, comfort and protection for each other. They are to complement and not be in conflict or competition with each other. As wives and mothers Muslim women achieved their highest social status within the family. Mothers are revered in the Islamic family and are accorded the highest place of honour in their homes and treated with respect and dignity by the Muslim Umma.

CONCLUSION:

The Holy Qur'an is a book of theology as well as jurisprudence. It provides guidance for the believer to draw nearer to Allah (swt) and learn all about His nature and beautiful attributes. It establishes the rules that govern the role and purpose of every person in the human society. It guides man in the maintenance of his relationship with his Creator and all that He has created. To promote a peaceful society for man to live in comfort and without fear would need the help and support of every human being. This ideal may not be achieved in our lifetime but nevertheless we still have the responsibility as *Khalifatullah* to strive for its attainment. The believer has an assignment from His Creator to make this world a better place before he leaves it. Allah (swt) has honoured man with the title of vicegerent and the principles and procedures governing the pursuit and execution of all his duties and obligations to the Creator are set out in the Holy Qur'an.

The Holy Qur'an prohibits acts that will ruin the plan for a well-ordered society. Islam, therefore, prohibit acts of physical lovemaking and sexual relations done outside of marriage. Adultery, fornication, homosexuality and engaging in secret relations with the opposite sex are criminal acts and are strictly prohibited. Violations in these areas attract severe penalties and harsh punishment in Islamic Law. The Holy Qur'an has the laws and measures in place to avoid the occurrence of these activities
whether they occur in a private or public location. It warns that every believer must assume the responsibility to guard his or her modesty.

In Islam the adult male has the special responsibility to help in the safeguarding and protection of women and children in the society. The adult male must ensure that proper provisions are in place for a safe and secure environment for them to live and function in society. The security for women in particular must allow her the freedom to carry out her duties and obligations to her Creator as well as live and function in the community in which she resides.

Women in Islam, therefore, have the right to protection that does not require them to be cloistered. They must be given the freedom to live, study, work and develop their human faculties in an environment that is free from fear of molestation and sexual abuse. An environment that will allow them the freedom to achieve their personal salvation and the spiritual maturity spoken of in the Holy Qur'an.

Because of the seriousness attached to the personal rights and freedom of the individual some Islamic societies have taken harsh and extreme measures to guard and protect their women from moral and sexual abuse. They have in place dress code, protocols and rules for home confinement and segregation of the sexes in public. They believe that these provisions will help to prevent erosion of the moral values in the society. They depend on these measures to safeguard the entire community from the social problems resulting from adultery, fornication, rape, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Even with all these measures in place these communities are still battling the problems and are faced with social and moral decay. Some of these inhumane provisions also infringe the basic human rights of the Muslim woman by portraying her only as a sex object denying her the dignity she must be given in Islam.

Those who introduced these measures have failed to consider the fact that Muslim women are their grandmothers,
mothers, aunts, sisters and daughters who together with the rest of the female population are an indispensable asset for the general welfare and development of the new and succeeding generations of believers. Their participation in the life of the Community can make a significant difference in the struggle to bring about certain desirable changes to the image of Islam especially in the West. These changes will occur when women are allowed to contribute to the economic, social, cultural, intellectual, moral and spiritual development of their families. When they are given the freedom to do so as sanctioned in the Holy Qur'an and the Hadiths of the Holy Prophet (uwbp). It is ironic for Muslim men to be engaged in protecting their women from dangers that are in fact created by men. This is an indictment against the integrity or the lack of control by men. Perhaps the focus on protection of the women against sexual abuse should also be directed towards the problem of the lack of discipline among men.

It is a fact that many of the measures in place do not protect women but only deprive them of the right of equal opportunity to strive in the way of Allah (swt). They are too restrictive and make it extremely difficult for women to function and carry out their spiritual as well as other obligations with the same rights and freedom permitted to men. Judge Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian Jurist and female activist for human rights was given a prison sentence in Iran for advocating changes in the Iranian Laws that are in direct conflict with the letter and spirit of Qur'anic injunctions and discriminate against the Muslim woman. Her struggle for justice in the cause of women's rights received international recognition and in 2003 she became the first Muslim woman to be awarded the coveted Nobel Peace Prize.

For more than six centuries following the death of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp), Islam as a civilization was a vibrant and dominant force in society. It brought new rays of light to brighten and enhance the lives of human beings in an enlightened environment. In his farewell address at his last pilgrimage to Mecca the Holy Prophet (uwbp) said he was leaving two things behind as his legacy to the faithful, the Holy Qur'an and
his Noble Traditions. He also stated that those who sought and followed the guidance from them will be granted success in this world and ultimately achieve the spiritual fulfilment to gain entry into Paradise. When Muslims neglected to use the wisdom of the Holy Qur'an and the examples set by the Prophet of God (uwbp) the progress and level of development achieved by the earlier generations of believers began to decline. With the reintroduction of some harsh barbaric and archaic measures that discriminated against women fifty percent of the human resources in some Muslim society (the women population) have not been given the opportunity to be productive and help their countries to move into the twenty first century. It is no surprise, therefore, that many of these societies today are in a state of backwardness, with substantial numbers in their population living in abject poverty ravished by disease and deprivation of the essentials of life.

Today we seem puzzled and perplexed about the human tragedy and the state of Muslims in so many Islamic countries who inherited the message fourteen centuries ago. The unbelievers who are unaware of the true teachings of Islam refer to them as 'fundamentalists' in a Faith that promotes terrorist activities and keeps its adherents in a perpetual state of ignorance and poverty. The fact that so many are still steep in ignorance, poverty and backwardness must be blamed upon the corrupt intellectuals and the political leadership that is not democratically chosen from among the faithful. The political will is not that of Islam and does not serve its message of peace and prosperity for the citizens of the country. The leaders in most of the Muslim countries still represent the alien and foreign interests that helped them into office. The interests they support are in direct conflict with the Islamic ideal and the legal injunctions in the Holy Qur'an that call upon Muslim leaders to promote a just and progressive society.

Allah (swt) is the sole Guardian of the 'Eternal Message' in the Holy Qur'an and has also given His guarantee that it will endure for all future generations for the benefit of those who elect
to cherish and pursue truth and to exhort others to truth and patience. It is available today to champion the causes of people everywhere who are groping in the dark in false symbols trying to find peace in this troubled world. What we are witnessing in the Muslim World today is the painful chastisement that Allah (swt) has sanctioned for those who disobey Him and go astray. It is the duty of every believer, male and female, to strive in the cause and deepen his/her knowledge of the 'Eternal Message'. There is urgent need, too, for others in the society to learn the truth about the Islamic Faith and know that the message of Islam is for all mankind.

Every believer must endeavour to return to the truth and become aware of the fact that the Holy Qur'an highlighted the Divine Right of every human being to life and the freedoms he cherishes. It gave every human being the right to seek knowledge and to earn and own property. It also brought guidance and lighted up the path (the Sirat ul Mustaqueem) for everyone to travel safely on life's journey towards his destiny. It even simplified the reason and purpose of life here and opened the door for man to experience the joy of living in harmony with his fellowmen while dedicating his life in the service of the Creator. It is the Holy Qur'an that taught man about the self-accusing conscience and the way to repent and seek forgiveness directly from his Creator 'Taubaah'. Man was shown the way to freedom of conscience and taught how to purge himself and be free from the baser instincts and desires that are characterized by the negative forces of greed, anger, cruelty, malice, hatred, jealousy and the numerous injustices that plague the human race. The Holy Qur'an, as a divine source of jurisprudence, was first to establish some basic human rights principles in the seventh century. Today some of these principles can be found entrenched in the United Nations Human Rights Charter.

The Muslim Umma today is urged to return to Qur'anic wisdom. Use the criteria that recommend the democratic process for the election of leaders and make provisions for the safeguard and welfare of women. The Holy Prophet (uwpb) encouraged his
wives to seek knowledge and taught them the 'Eternal Message'. It is reported he told his followers that half the Religion of Islam could be learned from his wife Lady Ayesha. He taught man that Paradise lies at the feet of mothers and said when you educate a woman you educate a nation. It is Prophet Muhammad who made the statement that 'the hands that rock the cradle rule the World'.

Muslims must do some soul searching and reflect upon the wisdom of the Holy Qur'an and the Authentic Traditions of the Messenger of God to determine whether they are on the right path. They must open their hearts to receive the true message and reject the falsehood that has brought Islam and Muslims in the present state of disrepute. They must be willing to avoid all the false doctrines coined by extremists and fanatics for their own selfish reason and purpose. The faithful must be prepared to use the message to go forward and avoid their use to cause division and create strife and confusion. The injunctions that promote equality and establish truth and justice for both sexes should always be highlighted in delivering the message. Every believer must be equipped with the tools to access the good things promised to the faithful in this world and encouraged to engage and participate in the activities that will also earn good in the Hereafter.

In today's hostile environment Muslims must not withdraw from the battle and seek shelter in some safe haven. There is work to be done so that the evil misrepresentations and misconceptions about the Faith can be erased. Muslims must prepare themselves for damage control duty to remove these and other obstacles with wisdom and goodly exhortations and by the personal example they provide for their family, the community and in the country to which they belong. May Allah (swt) strengthen the resolve of every believer, male and female, with the knowledge that comes from Him and bless the faithful with wisdom to use that knowledge only for His pleasure and glory.
QUR'ANIC SOLUTIONS FOR OUR SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Bismillah ir Rahaman ir Rahim
(Allah, The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful)

The Holy Qur'an is both a guide and a criterion (Al Furkan) for moral and spiritual rearmament of mankind. It is a book of theology as well as jurisprudence with basic legal principles to regulate human relationship with the Creator and the created. Every believer who obeys the Command of his Creator and holds fast to the Holy Qur'an should become better prepared to face the real challenges of life in the twenty first century. He will learn how his prayers, his fasting, his acts of charity and the payment of zakaat (wealth tax) can guarantee a peaceful and very rewarding life here on earth and increase and strengthen his faith in Almighty God.

Every devotee can develop a clearer vision and better understanding of the assignment and role of a Vicegerent of Allah (Khalifatullah) when he devotes time to ponder over and to reflect upon the reason and purpose behind the many exhortations, and commands of the Creator in various injunctions of the Holy Qur'an. The sacrifices, which Islam enjoins upon man, are intended to revitalize and create a spiritual awakening in him. They prepare the devotee to engage in activities that provide the experience of a new and beautiful inner satisfaction of peace with himself, the universe and most of all with his Creator, Allah Subhanna wa Taala.

Every believer, however, must be aware of the social, economic, political and the true spiritual environment in which he functions. He must understand the reality of life in a world that has become a spectacle of confused human beings searching for the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. Human beings especially in Muslim lands today are forever engaged in the
struggle against poverty and political oppression. Struggling with the fear and terror that have seized their minds and souls creating serious doubts about religion and their belief in the existence of God. People in every continent today are still striving for freedom from fear and all the social and economic problems that are choking their human faculties and bruising their senses.

The true image of Islam is being defaced and defiled by the enemies of the Faith as well as some from among the faithful. The invasions against Afghanistan and Iraq and the ongoing violent struggles in Chechnya, Palestine, Sudan, Kashmir and other Islamic countries have the entire world community in a state of unrest and ideological division. The United Nations is rendered powerless and without influence and authority to keep the peace. In light of the unilateral action by some states it has been rendered impotent to pursue its Charter objectives to establish peace and tranquility in the global village. The true victims in all this chaos are not those from the human population who have died in vain but in the fact that truth and justice are being shamefully sacrificed for the special interest of the powerful in our society.

History attests to the fact that all the wars waged against tyrants and rogue nations have not succeeded in fostering the stated objective of mutual understanding, peace, love, respect, and tolerance for the social, cultural, religious and ethnic differences of people. Human beings are still struggling to survive the onslaught of domination, prejudices, discrimination, racial profiling and many other grave injustices inflicted upon them by political systems that are autocratic, oppressive, inhumane and gravely unjust. There is a significant amount of human and financial resources that are needlessly squandered and lost, forever, in these senseless battles. The social illnesses that affect the physical, moral and mental health of the population in developed as well as developing countries are threatening the very existence of the human race.

The social scientists and politicians who are engaged in
addressing these global problems simply alter and water down some basic rules that have protected the mores and social norms in civilized societies for many generations. The politicians are afraid to lose power and unfortunately permit the lowering in standard of basic human response and try to justify such action as being politically correct. This type of irresponsible action from public officials is becoming the accepted norm in many areas of family and public life in contemporary society. The traditional institutions of marriage and the family traditionally regarded as the bedrock of human society are being threatened in some communities. The controversy is currently debated by various denominations in the Christian Religion as well as in other Faiths and has engaged the attention of the judiciary and legislature in many countries of the world.

Today, communities everywhere are also fighting a losing battle against the cause of the social plague. The battle is waged against the prevalence of alcoholism, drug abuse and addiction, neglect of family obligation, promiscuity, diseases caused by non-natural sexual activities and the deadly threat of AIDS. Government agencies are engaged in the battle against terrorism, violent crimes, poverty, prostitution, human exploitation in industry and the work place. Legislation against racism, ethnic profiling, discrimination, genocide or ethnic cleansing, the scourge of famine and the proliferation of some life threatening diseases caused by toxic waste and other dangerous chemical pollutants are poisoning the land, water and air quality of the environment.

These are the real weapons of mass destruction that are in the grasp of individual human beings who know very well that they threaten the very existence of the human race. There are others such as greed and lust for power by some individuals and nations that are the root cause of the disparity and social injustices that continue to widen the economic and social gaps between the rich and poor nations in our human society. The established world religions have struggled with these basic human problems since the beginning of time hoping to bring peace and goodwill on
earth. Regrettably, these problems are still with us today in a more acute form than before. They are posing an even greater threat to the intellectual, moral and spiritual health of the human society.

The churches, synagogues, masajids, temples, mandirs, gudwaras, buddhist shrines, social and cultural organizations, friendly societies, the born again religious congregations and the numerous international organizations are still struggling with the divisions and sub-divisions of the human race. Divisions based on the criteria of race, religion, class, colour, economic wealth and military power. Divisions that are influenced by ethnicity and characterized by the negative forces of ignorance, hatred, arrogance, greed, anger, vengeance, hypocrisy and injustice. The diabolic approach by certain states and some organizations continue to hurt the efforts of those who are genuinely engaged in the struggle to bring people closer and to promote a state of peaceful co-existence among the nations of the world.

With all its frustration is religion still the panacea or answer for today's social and economic ills or has religion failed mankind? Those who are firmly anchored in faith and uphold the teachings of all the Prophets of God argue that religion still has a vital role to play in the struggle for peace and prosperity for the human race. Islam, which is the most recent of the world religions, states that peace can be found through faith in one God and service to mankind. It offers the message of Peace and the teachings in the Holy Qur'an as the criteria that will guide mankind unto the path that leads to peace and prosperity. In Ch: 5 V: 3 Allah Subhanna wa Taala says: This day have I perfected for you your religion and have completed My favours upon you and have chosen for you as your way of life Al Islam.

Islam, therefore, is not confined to the narrow definition of the word religion as stated in the Webster Dictionary. The Arabic word Deen in the Holy Qur'an, is in fact more sophisticated, dynamic and all embracing. It identifies with today's 'modern living' providing for the fulfillment of all the material, moral, intellectual, social and spiritual aspirations of man. When these are firmly in place then his economic problems
could be properly addressed and alleviated. On the question of the human race, the Holy Qur'an in Ch: 10 V: 19 states that: All mankind is naught but a single nation. This is the unity that Islam seeks to achieve in establishing and promoting the UMMA or the society of true followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp).

In the pursuit of this noble objective the believer is reminded by the Creator in Ch: 2: V: 143: And thus We have made you an exalted Nation that you may be bearers of witness to mankind and that the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (uwbp), may be the bearer of witness unto you. The believer is also reminded and cautioned by the Creator in Ch: 49: V: 13: O mankind, We have created you from a single pair of male and female, and established you as tribes and nations to know and not despise one another. The best and noblest of you before your Maker is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is ever Knowing, Aware. The Lord knows best and is well aware of those who yielded to His guidance. We cannot, therefore, hope to deceive Allah by our show of piety if internally we nurture a false assessment of our true relationship with Him.

The Holy Qur'an further states, those who surrender themselves to Allah and accept the True Faith, who are devout, sincere, patient, humble, charitable and chaste; those who fast and are ever mindful of their duties to Allah; on these both men and women, Allah will bestow forgiveness and a rich reward. A true believer in the Islamic Faith is one who has voluntarily and willingly resigned himself completely to the Will of God. Some theologians and philosophers say Islam implies submission to the Divine Will. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) explained it to mean FAITH and PRACTICE the actual observation of the obligations placed upon mankind in the five pillars of Islam.

Islam promotes the paying of homage and worship to Allah only and no other deity or object. Islam was the Faith of all the prophets of God. Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) is the final Messenger of God and came after the Prophet Jesus (uwbp) with responsibility to remove all the misgivings and interpolations that had clouded the true message. He was given the responsibility to
proclaim the Islamic Faith formally as the way of life chosen by God for the benefit of mankind. Ch: 3: V: 83 84 state: Say: We believe in Allah and that which was revealed to us, and that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and to the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them and to Allah we submit. When the believer sought guidance from the Holy Qur'an and Muslims emulated the excellent example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) Islam flourished for more than six centuries after his death.

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, a renowned scholar, wrote in his book 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' that Islam aimed at becoming non-territorial in nature. It furnished a model for the final combination of humanity by drawing adherents from a variety of mutually repellent races and then transforming this atomic aggregate into one - the UMMA of Muhammad (uwbp). The new Islamic Civilization provided many of the formulae and theories in the fields of science and technology that benefited the past and present civilization. However, European invasions and the conquest and occupation of Muslim lands marked the introduction of alien concepts and institutions that were imposed upon Muslims. Evidently, the new economic concepts of the occupiers were introduced and Muslims were unprepared and also reluctant to apply them to benefit their own material and spiritual interests. The growth and development of Islamic political and economic institutions were restricted to allow the occupiers to develop their own.

The Islamic nationhood and nationalism were suppressed by the invaders and consequently Islam fell into a state of stagnation and decadence for centuries. In the last fifty years, however, many of these territories were given their independence. The control was tacitly placed in the hands of Muslims leaders who in fact were willing to represent the interests of their foreign patrons. They held the natural resources and means for social and economic development on behalf of the former colonial administrators. This new arrangement also
greatly affected the proper practice, promotion and propagation of
the Islamic Faith. In fact the propagation of Islam was placed in the
hands and control of self-styled revivalists who enjoyed the support
and goodwill of the corrupt rulers. The Islamic way of life was now
compromised and the locals were given the freedom to focus on
spiritual development only and kept out of the political and economic
arena. The greed and excesses of the new administration were not
challenged and the neglect and corruption brought about the decline
in the economic growth and development that face these countries
today.

In this historical setting one is better able to understand why
Islam, is being maligned, misunderstood, misinterpreted and
misrepresented by Europe and the West. The increase in efforts to
distort and denigrate Islam since the events of September 11, 2001 is
largely due to the absence of knowledge of the true teachings and
tenets of Islam. Unfortunately, this is found not only among the
traditional enemies of Islam but also among many of the believers
who are yet to understand the message. The blame for the false image
projection of Islam is not to be directed solely upon the historical and
traditional enemies of the Faith. The corrupt rulers who are the
guardians of Islamic resources are still protected by non-Islamic
interests and governments. They still play a major role in the
conspiracy against Muslims. They encourage and finance the
promotion of self-styled Islamic revivalists rooted in fanaticism and
bigotry, both of which are alien and totally rejected and condemned
by the true Islamic Faith.

The faithful in Islam must certainly ponder and reflect upon
the true purpose of his life here on earth and also be reminded of his
own inexorable end. Life here is simply transient and the believer
must reaffirm his faith in God. He must fully understand why his
success in this life depends on the sincerity of his faith in God; in the
complete and total submission to His Will and in obedience to His
Commandments. The Believer is now fully conscious of the fact that
whatever he does in this life is simply for the pleasure of God. Islam is
a ‘way of life’ with a broader spectrum than is the case with other
faiths. It does not divide life into what is sacred and what is secular. It
does not divide the natural resources of the universe between 'Caesar and God' since every thing belong to the Creator.

A Muslim must be fully aware that Allah (swt) has dominion over whatever is in the heaven and the earth and all that is between them. That every thing he possesses or claims ownership over he in fact holds in trust for posterity. Islam provides a complete code for the conduct of human life from the cradle to the grave. It is a force in itself, having the potentiality for guidance in all spheres of life for the individual as well as the entire human race. It provides guidance in all human social, economic, political, moral, intellectual and spiritual aspects of life. Notwithstanding the negative image that the media and some Western Nations paint about Islam, it is still the fastest growing Faith in the world today.

To triumph as the panacea for the ills of the human society today, however, Islam must be rescued from the fanatic fringe that is distorting the message. There is urgent need to discourage the faithful who are seeking solutions in terrorism for the political problems that face Muslims globally. Islam must be placed in the hands of those with no vested interest. Those who are only interested in promoting and propagating the pristine message of truth and justice as commanded by Allah Subhanna wa Taala. Those who are themselves living their lives according to the teachings of our Holy Prophet (uwbp) and the wisdom of the Holy Qur'an that must be made accessible to all mankind.

CONCLUSION:

Islam is a way of life providing man with the tools and guidance to seek the bounties and favours of the Creator. It gives the believer the divine right to enjoy abundant life living generously with his bretheren in peace and harmony. That living in accordance with the wisdom of the Holy Qur'an and the noble Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) the believer will be able to reap the good of this world and be assured of the good in the Hereafter. He will be well mannered, sociable, faithful, sincere and content with himself, his neighbours and his community. He will also reflect the true spirit and nature of his
being and become an asset to his Faith and the rest of the society.

Muslims will be given the respect and attain the comfort level in their Faith when they have a better understanding of the Eternal Message of Islam. When they decide to use the wisdom of the Holy Qur'an and the noble Traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (uwbp) to engage in the struggle for survival. The message of the Holy Qur'an is clear and the scholars in the multi-racial and multi-religious states and countries in the West should have no difficulty in presenting the simple and unadulterated version to believers as well as non-believers. Muslims must use their homegrown leaders and role models for the propagation of Islam in the West. Only then will Islam thrive and be given the respect it deserves in the West and not be confused with the political events in the East and Middle East. This approach will also help to unite and equip Muslims to take on some of the challenges facing the society in which they reside. Islam has a role to play in helping to resolve the problems that are plaguing the institutions that promote family values and all the other societal structures in the western communities where Muslims have taken up residence. To achieve this the Islamic groups and individuals in western communities must come together and take positive action to address problems that exist within their own groups.

The following suggestions are given for consideration by Islamic groups or individuals who may have a plan of action for propagating the Faith in the West in the hope of improving the image of Islam in the society:

1. Conduct an educational campaign to inform the public about the concept of Jihad. Distinguish between Jihad for Arab nationalism and Jihad in defence by Muslims who are persecuted by a government or people who deny them the right and freedom to worship and practice their Faith.

2. Identify the traditional and cultural practices that have crept into the Faith and incorporated as fundamentals of the Religion by converts in Asia, Africa and Europe and publish the findings for circulation.
3. Encourage Muslims to work with non-Muslims in their community especially in environmental, charitable and educational projects.

4. Participate in the political life of the state to be able to influence legislation with Islamic values.

5. Uphold and protect the integrity and national security of the country in which they live and enjoy their civic rights.

6. Engage in national events to demonstrate that Islam has the solution for racial barriers and the prejudices and discrimination against persons by reason of colour, class, rank and sex.

7. Provide more opportunities for non-Muslims to attend gatherings at which Islam is being promoted.

8. Promote the Islamic value system being conscious that the *Eternal Message in Al Qur'an* is addressed to mankind.

9. Promote activities for the children of the Community which can highlight the discipline that is characteristic in all Islamic endeavours.

10. Dig deep into the mines of the Holy Qur'an as well as the Authentic Traditions of the Holy Prophet (uwbp) to unearth relevant and pertinent information and knowledge that can be used as a database for Islamic research and scholarship. Information that will encourage the Believers to proceed with the amalgamation of thoughts between the essence and spirit of Islam. Information that will serve as a platform for Muslims to enter today's world of science and technology, industry, commerce, economics, banking, politics, culture and other areas of human interest, armed with the Islamic perspective that can give the believer an edge in the competition.

Khuda Hafiz