

TARIKH (History)

Lesson 1

Muslim Dynasties

Most of us are familiar that after the passing away of Rasulullāh (s), Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthmān became caliphs one after the other. After Uthmān was murdered, the people asked Imām Ali (‘a) to lead them and he did so for 3½ years before he was martyred. The Sunni Muslims refer to the first four caliphs as ‘The Rightly-Guided Caliphs’ (*khulafā ar-rāshidun*) because the caliphs after them were not regarded to be ‘rightly-guided’.

In Book 11, we studied the history of the first three Caliphs and their legacy as well as the history of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a) as the Caliph. In this lesson and the next two, we wish to study about the dynasties that ruled after Imām Ali (‘a) until the collapse of the global Muslim Empire.

The first two dynasties that ruled after Imām Ali (‘a) - the Umayyads (Banu Umayya) followed by the Abbāsids (Banu Abbās) - are perhaps the most important to know about because during their rule, all the Muslim lands belonged to one Empire. It was only towards the end of the Abbāsīd Dynasty that different empires formed within the Muslim lands, one overlapping the reign of another and each ruling over different Muslim regions. We shall study about these post-Abbāsīd Muslim dynasties in Lesson 3.

The Umayyad (Banu Umayya) Dynasty

Even though strictly speaking the first Umayyad ruler was the 3rd Caliph Uthmān b. Affān (and it was he that gave his family members positions of power that led to the creation of the Umayyad dynasty), historians general mark the start of the Umayyad dynasty after the martyrdom of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a) in 40 AH.

The first three Umayyads caliphs after Imām Ali (‘a) were descendants of Abu Sufyān and the rest were from a different line of descent of the Banu Umayya and called themselves “descendants of Marwān” (Aal Marwān). The names of all the Umayyad rulers are as follows:

Sufyānids (Aal Sufyān): 661-684 CE

1. Mu’āwiya b. Abi Sufyān (661-680 CE)
2. Yazid b. Mu’āwiya (680-683 CE)
3. Mu’āwiya b. Yazid (Mu’āwiya II) (683-684 CE)

Marwānids (Aal Marwān): 684-750 CE

4. Marwān b. Hakam (684-685 CE)

5. Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (685-705 CE)
6. Al-Walid b. Abd al-Malik (705-715 CE)
7. Sulaymān b. Abd al-Malik (715-717 CE)
8. 'Umar b. Abd al-Aziz (717-720 CE)
9. Yazid II b. Abd al-Malik (720-724 CE)
10. Hishām b. Abd al-Malik (724-743 CE)
11. Al-Walid II b. Yazid II (743-744 CE)
12. Yazid III (744 CE)
13. Marwān II (744-750 CE)

What follows is a brief biography of the most famous (or infamous) of the Umayyad rulers.

Mu'āwiya b. Abu Sufyān

He was the son of Abu Sufyān, the arch-enemy of Rasulullāh (s), and his mother was Hind, the woman who chewed the liver of Hamza the uncle of Rasulullāh (s) after he was martyred at Uhud.

Mu'āwiya was appointed governor of Syria by the 2nd Caliph Umar and when Imām Ali ('a) became the Caliph, he immediately asked Mu'āwiya to step down as governor but he refused. Instead he fought Imām Ali ('a) at the Battle of Siffin that was inconclusive. When Imām Ali ('a) was martyred in 40 AH (661 CE), Mu'āwiya bribed the commanders of Imām Hasan ('a)'s army and finally agreed to a peace treaty with Imām Hasan ('a) that he quickly broke.

In 50 AH (670 AH), Mu'āwiya had Imām Hasan ('a) poisoned through his wife Ja'dah and in Rajab 60 AH (680 CE), Mu'āwiya died after appointing his son Yazid as his successor.

Mu'āwiya killed many companions of Rasulullāh (s) and Imām Ali ('a). One of them was Ammār b. Yāsir who was killed in Siffin by Mu'āwiya's men. Another great companion was Hujr b. Adi in Kufa who was a tribal leader and a very loyal Shi'ah of Imām Ali ('a). Mu'āwiya had Hujr b. Adi and a large group of his men executed through his governor Ziyād b. Abih. Ziyād was a brutal man whose mother was a prostitute and he never knew who his father was. Mu'āwiya promised to let Ziyād call himself the son of Abu Sufyān since Abu Sufyān used to visit Ziyād's mother often. Ziyād killed many Shi'ahs for pleasure including Rushayd al-Hajari who was a close companion of Imām Ali ('a). Ziyād amputated Rushayd's hands and feet and hung him to death because he refused to curse Imām Ali ('a) or disassociate from him.

Mu'āwiya's closest adviser was a Christian named Sarjun (Sr. John). Another prominent adviser to Mu'āwiya, especially in the Battle of Siffin, was Amr b. al-Aas, a crafty man who agreed to help Mu'āwiya become the caliph provided he was given to rule as governor of Egypt. Amr b. al-Aas's mother was also a prostitute named

Nābigha so he was known by his enemies as 'Ibn al-Nābigha' (Son of Nābigha). Amr was also responsible for killing and poisoning Imām Ali ('a)'s closest companions like Muhammad b. Abi Bakr and Malik al-Ashtar.

Yazid b. Mu'āwiya

He was the son of Mu'āwiya and his mother is said to have been a Christian from the Byzantine Empire whom Mu'āwiya married and divorced three times. When he was finally not permitted to keep her as a wife, he still did and had Yazid as his illegitimate and only son.

Yazid loved drinking wine, playing with dogs and monkeys and gambling. He had absolutely no respect for religion and believed that the Qur'ān was forged by Rasullāh (s) just so that the Banu Hāshim could take power! When his father died, Yazid ruled for 3 years only. The first year he killed Imām Husayn ('a) and his 72 companions in Karbala and imprisoned the rest of the family members of Rasullāh (s). The second year he ransacked Madina and his soldiers murdered over a thousand men, including companions of Rasullāh (s) and over a thousand women were raped. The third year, he attacked Makkah, and attacked the Ka'bah with catapults and burnt it down.

Yazid's governor in Kufa was Ubaydullah b. Ziyād who was as cruel as his father Ziyād and equally enjoyed torturing the Shi'ah. Ubaydullah was also of illegitimate birth. His mother was a well-known prostitute called Marjānah and therefore Ubaydullah was also known as 'Ibn Marjānah'. Ubaydullah oversaw the army of Umar b. Sa'd in Karbala and sent Shimr Dhil Jawshan to kill Imām Husayn ('a).

Ubaydullah also murdered Maytham at-Tammār, one of the favorite Shi'ah of Imām Ali ('a). He cut Maytham's hands and legs and crucified him on a tree and when Maytham continued praising Imām Ali ('a) from the tree, he had his tongue pulled and cut out and Maytham remained there until he bled to death and died slowly and painfully.

Marwān b. al-Hakam

After Yazid died, his son Mu'āwiya II was not interested in ruling and condemned his father Yazid. Mu'āwiya II (also known as 'Mu'āwiya the Good') died shortly afterwards and is believed to have been poisoned by his family members. His teacher was buried alive because the Umayyads believed he had influenced him.

The Umayyad rule was then taken over by Marwān b. al-Hakam who was also an Umayyad. He was a cousin and also the son-in-law of the 3rd caliph Uthmān b. Affān. Marwān continued ruling like a King and oppressing the Shi'ah.

Abd al-Malik b. Marwān

He was the son of Marwān. He is well known for his atrocities such as poisoning the fourth Imām, Ali Zayn al-Abidin (‘a), attacking the Ka’bah and appointing the evil Hajjāj b. Yusuf ath-Thaqafi as one of his governors.

Hajjāj b. Yusuf is recorded as one of the cruelest men in history. He used to kill for fun and in particular enjoyed watching old people and children being tortured and killed. His favourite pastime was to kill the Shi’ah of Imām Ali (‘a). People would be afraid of even being ‘accused’ of being a Shi’ah. Wherever a Shi’ah was found, his limbs were immediately amputated and then he was killed or he would be thrown into prison and tortured. Amongst the famous Shi’ah that Hajjāj killed were: Qanbar (the servant of Imām Ali (‘a)), Kumayl b. Ziyād, and Sa’id b. Jubayr, all known for their piety and closeness to Imām Ali (‘a).

Another favourite pastime of Hajjāj was to make fun of Imām Ali (‘a) and to curse him. He had special gatherings for this. When Hajjāj finally died, he had tortured and killed at least 120,000 Muslims (besides those he attacked and killed in battles and looting). There were 50,000 men and 30,000 women in his prison out of whom at 16,000 were naked. And the prison was designed to ensure the inmates suffered from the extreme heat of summer and extreme cold and rains of winter. If a prisoner tried sitting in any shade, stones would be thrown at him to move him and the food was mixed with dirt and ashes. There was a constant wailing and crying from Hajjāj’s prisons.

The Caliph Abd al-Malik b. Marwān chose Hajjāj as his governor specifically for Irāq and Hijāz (today’s Saudi Arabia) to ensure he would have no opposition from these regions while he ruled Syria, Yemen, Iran and other Muslim regions.

When Hajjāj died in 714 CE, the Muslims rejoiced and offered thanks to Allāh for the relief. The people of Iraq rejoiced openly in the streets and the Caliph Umar b. Abd al-Aziz (717-720 CE) later thanked Allāh for removing a ‘tyrant’. Hajjāj’s name at birth was Kulayb (which means “little dog”) but he later changed it to Hajjāj which means “The Bones Crusher”.³⁶

In total, Abd al-Malik b. Marwān ruled for 21 years and died in 86 AH (705 CE).

The Sons of Abd al-Malik

After Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, his sons Walid, Sulaymān, Yazid II and Hishām ruled one after another, with a brief break when Umar b. Abd al-Aziz ruled between the time of Sulaymān and Yazid II.

³⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Hajjāj_bin_Yousef

Walid b. Abd al-Malik was as cruel as his father. He continued to support Hajjāj, who died during his reign. Sulaymān b. Abd al-Malik took over in 96 AH. He was known to be a glutton and a womanizer. He could eat an amazing amount of food constantly. Even when he slept he kept dishes of food besides him so that as soon as he woke up he would eat. Sulaymān ruled for only 2 years and a few months before he died in 99 AH.

Umar b. Abd al-Aziz

Umar b. Abd al-Aziz was a cousin to the sons of Abd al-Malik. He succeeded Sulaymān and ruled for 2½ years. Unlike all other Umayyad caliphs, he was loved by people for his honesty and justice. He is often regarded by the Sunnis as the ‘fifth rightly-guided Caliph’. One of his virtues is that he stopped the cursing of Imām Ali (‘a) after every Friday (Jumu’ah) prayer and from every pulpit – a practice that was established by Mu’āwiya b. Abu Sufyān for the previous 60 years.

Another great deed of Umar b. Abd al-Aziz is that he returned the garden of Fadak to the descendants of Sayyida Fātima az-Zahra (‘a) because he believed it was taken from her unjustly. It is believed that the reason Umar b. Abd al-Aziz was so different from the other Umayyad Caliphs is because his teacher loved Imām Ali (‘a) and had guided him correctly when he was a child. This was just like the case of Mu’āwiya II (the son of Yazid) who was poisoned by his family. This tells us the important role that teachers’ play and how they can influence a person even over the influence of parents, whether it is at school, madrasah or university.

Other Sons of Abd al-Malik

When ‘Umar b. Abd al-Aziz died, Yazid II b. Abd al-Malik took over as Caliph. He was fond of wine, women and all sinful matters. He was constantly surrounded by singing girls who poured wine for him and sang and danced before him. Like his ancestor namesake Yazid b. Mu’āwiya, he was a sinful and cruel man. He reversed a lot of what Umar b. Abd al-Aziz had established and usurped back the garden of Fadak from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Yazid II ruled for 4 years and died at the age of 37.

Thereafter his brother Hishām b. Abd al-Malik ruled. He was also a cruel man, who specifically ordered his governors to torture the Shi’ah and keep them behind bars. He poisoned Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir (‘a). One of the sons of Imām Ali Zayn al-Abidin (‘a) called Zayd b. Ali, who was very learned and brave, tried to fight Hishām. He gained a lot of support but was eventually killed. Hishām then mutilated his body and hung it near a dumpsite in Kufa. Later his head was cut off and like his grandfather Imām Husayn (‘a), Zayd b. Ali’s head was paraded from city to city. Some say it is buried in Cairo (Egypt). In Cairo there is a mosque called Masjid al-Husayn (‘a) where some people believe the head of Imām Husayn (‘a) is buried. It is possible that the head there is actually of Zayd the son of Imām Zayn al-Abidin (‘a).

Walid b. Yazid b. Abd al-Malik

After ruling for 19 years, Hishām died and was succeeded by his nephew Walid b. Yazid bin Abdul Malik. Walid’s mother was the niece of the tyrant Hajjāj and Walid himself continued the Umayyad policy of tormenting the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and their Shi’ah.

Walid was particularly fond of wine. He constructed a pool of wine and would swim in it with prostitutes. He is even said to have abused his own daughter. The ruins of his palaces with paintings of naked women are still found today.³⁷

One day Walid opened the Qur’ān and the verses he saw before him were:

﴿...وَوَخَّابَ كُلُّ جَبَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ. مِنْ وَرَائِهِ جَهَنَّمُ وَيُسْقَى مِنْ مَاءٍ صَدِيدٍ﴾

...and every arrogant tyrant was defeated. Before him is Hell and he will drink a putrid drink (in it).

- Surah Ibrāhim, 14:15-16

This made him furious. ‘Do you call me an arrogant tyrant and threaten me?’ he said to the Qur’ān. Then he took a bow and began shooting arrows at the Qur’ān until he tore it to pieces. Then he said, ‘When you go before your Lord on the Day of Judgement, then tell Him, “O Lord! Walid tore me to pieces!”’

The Fall of the Umayyad Dynasty

As the Umayyads continued to show their hatred for the family of Rasulullāh (s) and to lead sinful lives, the Muslims became more impatient and there were constant risings and oppositions against them. At the forefront of these oppositions were the Banu Abbās – the descendants of Abbās, the uncle of Rasulullāh (s).

At first the Banu Abbās led the Muslims to believe that they were fighting for the right of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). They made the motto of their uprising, ‘*ar-ridā li Āli Muhammad*’ (“for the sake of the family of Muhammad”) and so they got a lot of support from the masses. But once they overthrew the Banu Umayya, they now claimed that they were closer to Rasulullāh (s) in relationship and they held on to power themselves. In due course they were even crueler to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) than the Umayyads.

In 132 AH (750 CE), the Abbāsids defeated the army of Marwān II and took over Damascus. Marwān II – the last Umayyad Caliph - was killed in Egypt. The Abbāsids destroyed all the tombs of the Umayyads in Syria except for the tomb of the pious Umar II. The remaining Umayyad family members were hunted down and killed. One grandson of Hishām b. Abd al-Malik – Abd ar-Rahmān – escaped to Spain and

³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umayyad_Caliphate

established the Umayyad caliphate there. The rest of the Muslim world was taken over the Abbāsids.

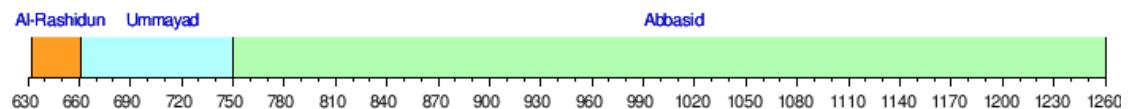
In total the Umayyads ruled the Muslims for 90 years or according to some historians, exactly 1000 Islāmic months.

Lesson 2

Muslim Dynasties (cont'd)

The Abbāsīd (Banu Abbās) Dynasty

While the Umayyad dynasty lasted ninety years only (661-750 CE), the Abbāsīd dynasty lasted for over five centuries at least (750 to 1258 CE).



As mentioned in the previous lesson, the Banu Abbās were descendants of Abbās, the uncle of Rasulullāh (s). They were quick to capitalize on the general feeling that the Caliphate should be restored to the members of the family of Rasulullāh (s), the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). They even fought the Umayyads based on the slogan "*ar-ridā li Āli Muhammad*" ("for the pleasure and rights of family of Muhammad"). Soon they gained widespread support. But having removed the Umayyads, the Banu Abbās took over the reins of power for themselves.

The Caliphs of the Banu Abbās are too many to list here. You can find their entire family tree on the internet.³⁸ But we will discuss the lives of some of the most famous (or infamous) of them.

Abul Abbās as-Saffāh (750-754 CE)

Abul Abbās was the first Caliph of the Abbāsīd Dynasty. He ruled out of Kufa from 132 AH (750 CE) until he died in 136 AH (754 CE). Most of his rein was spent in hunting for the Umayyads and killing them. He was known as as-Saffāh (The Shedder of Blood) because of the number of people he killed.

In one account he is said to have invited 80 members of the Banu Umayya on the pretext of rewarding them and sharing a meal. When they arrived, he ordered them to be killed. Then carpets were laid on their half-dead bodies and while the Umayyads were crying and dying slowly and painful under the carpet, as-Saffāh had his meal; and when he finished eating, he remarked, ‘Never have I had such a delicious and wholesome meal!’

The Abbāsīds did hire poets to compose poetry against the descendants of Imām Ali (‘a) and in their favour so that no one would favour the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) over them,

³⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbāsīd_Caliphate

but they did not kill the Shi'ah as much during the reign of as-Saffāh as they were busy hunting for the Umayyads.

During the years when the Abbāsids were busy fight the Umayyads, Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) used the opportunity to set up schools in Madina to teach Islāmic sciences. A lot of the contributions that Muslim scientists and philosophers made later on were the result of their teachings.

Mansoor Dawāniqi (754-775 CE)

Mansoor was the second Abbāsīd Caliph and the brother of as-Saffāh. He moved the capital of the Abbāsids to Baghdād and he was the first Abbāsīd Caliph to start focusing on the torture of the descendants of Imām Ali ('a) and their Shi'ah.

In particular, Mansoor tortured many descendants of Imām Hasan ('a). He would have them chained and thrown into prisons where they were left to die of starvation.

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) was the Imām of the time during the reign of Mansoor and even though he was focused on teaching Islāmic sciences, Mansoor felt threatened by him. He is said to have once remarked, 'although I have killed more than a thousand descendants of Fātima ('a) (the daughter of Rasulullāh (s)), I have not yet killed their leader and chief.' He finally succeeded in poisoning Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) in 148 A.H.

Mansoor was also known to invent new ways of torturing and killing the Shi'ah. For example, he would have their eyes whipped so that they would go blind or he would have them placed between walls of a new building construction so that they were buried alive.

Mansoor died in 158 AH (775 CE) after having ruled for 22 years. After his death, rooms were found with numerous dead bodies of the descendants of Hadrat Abu Tālib ('a) and their parentage had been written on pieces of paper and hung from their ears.

Mahdi (775-785 CE) & Hādi (785-786 CE)

Mahdi was the son of Mansoor and Hādi (whose original name was Musa) was the son of Mahdi. They ruled after Mansoor successively, both as cruel as their father and grandfather, respectively. Mahdi died in 169 AH after ruling for 11 years and Hādi ruled for 15 months only.

During their time, the Shi'ah and descendants of Imām Ali ('a) became almost non-existent. There was so much fear that the Sādāt (descendants of Imām Ali ('a) and Sayyida Fātima ('a)) as well as the Shi'ah changed their names to hide their identities

and others fled to far off foreign lands where they lived in poverty and secrecy. Many of the Sādāt were too scared to even tell their wives and children their real identities. As a result, many generations of Sādāt became Sunni, following the teachings of their local schools and mosques. Even today there are many Sunnis who are Sādāt and in particular Hasanis (i.e. descendants of Imām Hasan (‘a)) who call themselves “Sharifs”. They now know they were descendants of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) but they have been following the Sunni madhhab for generations.

Hārūn ar-Rashid (786-809 CE)

Hārūn ar-Rashid is probably the most famous Abbāsīd Caliph. He succeeded his brother Hādī and ruled from 170 AH to 193 AH (23 years). He is said to have promoted a lot of learning in the Muslim Empire by encouraging art and culture and building mosques, schools, hospitals, bridges, roads and canals throughout the Muslim Empire. Some historians praise his era as the ‘Golden Islāmic Era’. However he was no different from his forefathers regarding the descendants of Imām Ali (‘a) and Sayyida Fātima (‘a) and he continued the policy of imprisoning, torturing and killing the Sādāt and their Shi’ah.

The reason why the Banu Abbās were constantly threatened by the presence of the Banu Hāshim is because the Banu Hāshim and the Shi’ah had supported them against the Umayyads and the agreement was to restore the right of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) but once the Abbāsīds took power, they adopted Sunni Islām and isolated the Shi’ah completely.³⁹ The Abbāsīds also claimed they were the rightful Caliphs based on their relationship with Rasūlullāh (s) but they knew full well that the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) were closer to Rasūlullāh (s) and more learned and deserving to be the rulers of the Muslims. One of the ploys the Banu Abbās used was to argue that they were descendants of Abbās, the uncle of Rasūlullāh (s) who was a man while the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) were related to Rasūlullāh (s) through Sayyida Fātima (‘a) who was a woman and therefore the relationship link through the man was stronger.

This of course was not true because the relationship through a child (even if it be a daughter) is far stronger than the relationship through an uncle or cousin. Furthermore, Rasūlullāh (s) had repeatedly said, ‘everyone traces their lineage through their sons but I trace my lineage through my daughter.’ He had also repeatedly declared who his Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) were and declared Imām Ali (‘a) and his descendants as his successors. The early Muslims used to refer to Imām Hasan (‘a) and Imām Husayn (‘a) as the ‘sons’ of Rasūlullāh (s).

Hārūn ar-Rashid once asked a descendant of Imām Hasan (‘a) to prove he was closer to Rasūlullāh (s) than the Abbāsīd Caliphs. The descendant of Imām Hasan (‘a) asked him, ‘if Rasūlullāh (s) asked for your daughter’s hand in marriage, would you accept the proposal?’ ‘Of course, it would be an honour,’ replied Hārūn. ‘Well,’ said the Sayyid, ‘he wouldn’t ask me for my daughter’s hand in marriage because she would

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbāsīd_Caliphate

be his *mahram* (as his great-grand daughter)! This answers your question: while I am a descendant of Rasulullāh (s), you are not.' Hārūn was very angry at having been thus defeated and left the gathering in a rage.

On another occasion, Hārūn came to Madina and stood before the grave of Rasulullāh (s) and exclaimed, 'Peace be on you, O Cousin, O Messenger of Allāh!' He did this to show off his relation to Rasulullāh (s) because his ancestor Abbās b. Abd al-Muttalib and Rasulullāh (s) father Abd Allāh b. Abd al-Muttalib were brothers. Just then Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a) came in and said, 'Peace be on you, O Grandfather, O Messenger of Allāh!' This humiliated the Caliph Hārūn and enraged him to no end.'

Hārūn was responsible for imprisoning Imām Musa al-Kādhim ('a). He had him transferred from one prison to another and from Madina to Basra and then Baghdād until he finally poisoned him through the cruel Sindi b. Shahak in Baghdād.

Hārūn's rule ended after 23 years and he died in Tus (Northeastern Iran). Before he died, he appointed his eldest son Amin as his successor.

Amin (809-813 CE)

Amin ruled for 4 years during which he was too busy leading a life of pleasure to cause much trouble to the descendants of Imām Ali ('a). His younger brother Ma'mun plotted to overthrow Amin. A war broke out between the two brothers and Amin was killed.

Ma'mun (813-833 CE)

During the rule of Ma'mun, there was rivalry between the Arabs and the Persians. Unlike his step-brother Amin, Ma'mun's mother was Persian but his father's side was Arab and he was keen to reconcile the two. He also realized that the policy of his ancestors to persecute the Shi'ah was not helping the cause of the Banu Abbās. He therefore decided to use the Imāms of the Shi'ah to his advantage. His plan was to convince the Shi'ah that he loved Imām Ali ar-Ridā ('a) and therefore win the support of the Shi'ah and the Persians, many of whom loved the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

When Imām Ali ar-Rida ('a) refused to play along with Ma'mun's plan, Ma'mun had the Imām brought from Madina to his capital in Tus by force. There Ma'mun threatened the Imām and forced him to accept the position of being his heir i.e. his successor.

Imām Ali ar-Rida ('a) knew this was only a plot because Imām ar-Ridā ('a) was much older than Ma'mun and an heir is usually younger. So the Imām defeated Ma'mun by saying he would accept the position provided he would not be asked to appoint or dismiss anyone in the government and he would not be consulted or asked to get

involved in any government affair. In other words, it was only a title but with no meaning. Ma'mun accepted it thinking it would still help his cause.

For a while, the Shi'ah enjoyed some safety from persecution because of Imām ar-Ridā ('a)'s position though the Imām himself was isolated from his family and kept in the far off land of Tus. The people around the area of Tus began realizing the difference between Ma'mun and Imām ar-Ridā ('a) and soon the Imām was far more popular and loved than the Caliph himself. Ma'mun was therefore displeased and jealous. He had Imām Ali ar-Ridā ('a) poisoned.

When Imām ar-Ridā ('a) was martyred, Ma'mun pretended to cry for him and to keep the loyalty of the Shi'ah, he married his daughter Umm Fadl to Imām Muhammad al-Jawād ('a), the son of Imām ar-Ridā ('a).

Ma'mun was also hoping that if Imām al-Jawād ('a) had any sons from his daughter then the 10th Imām would be his grandson. But Imām al-Jawād ('a) did not have any children from Ma'mun's daughter. Ma'mun died in 210 A.H

Mu'tasim Billāh (833-842 CE)

Ma'mun was succeeded by Mu'tasim who ruled for 8 years. He imprisoned Imām Muhammad al-Jawād ('a) but then released him and allowed him to return from Baghdād to Madina. A few years later he had him recalled to Baghdād where he got the Imām ('a)'s wife Umm Fadl (the daughter of Ma'mun) to poison him.

Wathiq (842-847 CE)

After the death of Mu'tasim, Wathiq came to power and he ruled for 5 years. He is said to have been kinder to the descendants of Imām Ali ('a). Wathiq died in 232 AH.

Mutawakkil (847-861 CE)

After the death of Wathiq the oath of allegiance was given to his brother Mutawakkil who ruled for 14 years. Mutawakkil was perhaps the cruellest Abbāsīd Caliph and the 'Yazid' of the Abbāsīds. He was also notorious for his sinful lifestyle, immodesty and addiction to wine. He threw parties of pleasure, drink and vain talk.

It was during the rule of Mutawakkil that the Abbāsīd Empire began to deteriorate, as corruption and evil behaviour became widespread. Mutawakkil did not love knowledge but loved the idea of magnificence and of being a king. He built the Great Mosque of Samarra, which was once the biggest mosque in the world. The ruins of its minaret – a vast spiralling cone - still stands today in Samarra.

Mutawakkil also had an extreme hatred for the Shi'ah and the Sādāt. He killed innumerable of them. He banned people from going for the ziyārah of Imām Husayn ('a) in Karbala and even tried to remove all traces of Imām Husayn ('a)'s grave by directing the flow of the river Furāt towards the graves of the martyrs of Karbala but it all failed.

During the rule of Mutawakkil the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) lived under house arrest and with such extreme poverty that the women had only one patched dress that was not badly ripped and they used to share it to offer their salāh. Often Mutawakkil would send his men to the house of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) to take away their possessions and any extra clothes they found.

Mutawakkil once asked a very learned man called Ibn Sikkit – who was the teacher of Mutawakkil's son Mu'taz – 'who do you consider to be better, my two sons Mu'taz and Mu'ayyad or Hasan and Husayn (the grandsons of Rasulullāh (s))?'

Ibn Sikkit bravely replied, 'I consider Qanbar, the servant of Imām Ali to be better than you and your sons.' Enraged, Mutawakkil ordered Ibn Sikkit's tongue to be pulled out from the back of his head and Ibn Sikkit died from this.

Mutawakkil was finally killed by his own son Muntasir while he was drunk in a party in his palace. This was during the time of Imām Hasan al-Askari ('a).

Decline of the Abbāsīd Dynasty

The power of the Abbāsīd Dynasty began to decline after Mutawakkil. The Abbāsīds had hired many Turkish slaves to be soldiers and army commanders and after the reign of Mutawakkil, these Turkish commanders ran the show. The Abbāsīd Caliphs were appointed and deposed or killed by the influence of these Turks and the Caliphs remained as puppets living in fear of their commanders at all times.

As a consequence of this development, the Shi'ah were able to breathe in peace. During these later periods many great Shi'ah scholars were able to contribute to our present day knowledge of Islām.

In all there were 37 kings of Banu Abbās, and their reign lasted until 656 AH (1258 CE), when Hulagu Khān, the Mongol King ransacked Baghdād. Three years later, the Abbāsīds did resurface in Cairo (Egypt) but their rule was mostly in the hands of the Mamluks (their Turkish slaves) and they were figureheads only, claiming religious authority, until they were completely replaced by the Ottoman Empire in 1517 that established its capital in Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey).

Lesson 3

Muslim Dynasties (cont'd)

We concluded in the previous two lessons that after Rasullāh (s), four Caliphs ruled and thereafter the Banu Umayya ruled followed by the Banu Abbās. It is important to have some understanding of what happened *after* the Banu Abbās and how the history of Muslim rule and leadership developed until the present time.

A Summary of Muslim Dynasties after the Banu Abbās

As the Abbāsīd Dynasty grew, it soon became too large an empire to run and the cost of managing it became too great. Furthermore, as we concluded in the previous lesson, the Abbāsīd rulers became mere puppets after the reign of Mutawakkil and the rivalry between the Arabs, the Persians and the Turks increased.

In the meantime, a group claiming descent from Imām Ali (‘a) and Sayyida Fātima (‘a) (who came to be known as the Fatimids), established their own rule in North Africa covering what is today Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. They actually founded the city of Cairo and made it their base. The Fatimids were very tolerant of other groups and appointed people on merit rather than sect. Despite being Ismaili Shi’ahs themselves, many of their officials were Sunni Muslims as well as Christians and Jews. The rest of the Muslim world (outside North Africa) was still under Abbāsīd rule.

Beginning the 8th Century CE, the Christian Roman Empire (that extended from England to the borders of Spain), under orders from the Pope, decided to invade the Muslim lands and take back Jerusalem that they considered to be a holy land. These attacks are known as the Crusades and lasted for several centuries.

Around the late 12th century, another Muslim dynasty rose in North Africa and the Eastern Arabian Peninsula called the Ayyubid Dynasty. Its most famous ruler was Salāh ad-Din al-Ayyubi (known as ‘Saladin’ in the West). He is most famous amongst Muslims for his success in fighting back the Christian Crusaders and taking Jerusalem back into Muslim control in 1187 CE. The significance of the Crusaders in Muslim history is that though they never managed to keep Jerusalem and the Muslim lands they had invaded; they did however weaken the Muslim Empire and prevent it from spreading further into Europe beyond Spain.

Salāh ad-Din also attacked the Fatimids and took Egypt from them, making it Sunni again. Because the Fatimids were Shi’ahs, Salāh ad-Din and the Ayyubids were oppressive to the Shi’ah. According to some historians, it was Salāh ad-Din who removed the words “*hayya ‘ala khayril ‘amal*” from the adhān in Egypt (since the Sunnis do not proclaim it in adhān) and he even reinstated the celebration of Ashura as an ‘Id. Salāh ad-Din also had all Shi’ah libraries burnt and destroyed in Egypt

including the famous library of Alexandria (north of Egypt) that housed almost 200,000 books in different sciences. While he may have been brave, Salāh ad-Din is regarded by the Shi'ah as being a fanatic who sought to eliminate the Shi'ah and force them to become Shāfi'is and Mālikis.

The Ayyubid dynasty lasted until the mid-13th century and covered North Africa from Egypt to the borders of Tunisia; and in the Middle East it ruled over Syria, Hejaz, Yemen and parts of Iraq (Northern Mesopotamia). The other parts of the Muslim world were still ruled by the Abbāsids.

While the Crusaders attacked the Muslim empire from the Western regions (i.e. Europe), in the early 13th century, the Muslim Empire was attacked from the East (i.e. Asia) by the Mongols, under the leadership of Genghis Khān. This marked a violent end of the Abbāsid era. The Mongol Empire spread rapidly through Central Asia and Persia. They took over Isfahān (the capital of Persia), Baghdād (the capital of the Abbāsids) and all other major cities including Damascus and Aleppo (in Syria). The last Abbāsid Caliph al-Musta'sim was captured and killed and Baghdād was ransacked and destroyed.

In time, the Mongols were defeated by the Mamluks – the Turkish slaves of the Abbāsids who became powerful rulers and commanders and took over Egypt and Syria. The Mamluks also fought the Crusaders. Meanwhile, the defeated Mongol rulers embraced Islām as they favoured it over other religions.

In the 15th and 16th centuries three major Muslim empires emerged: the Sunni Uthmānid (or Ottoman) Empire in much of the Middle East and North Africa, the Shi'ah Safavid Empire in Iran and the Mughal Empire in South Asia (today's India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan).

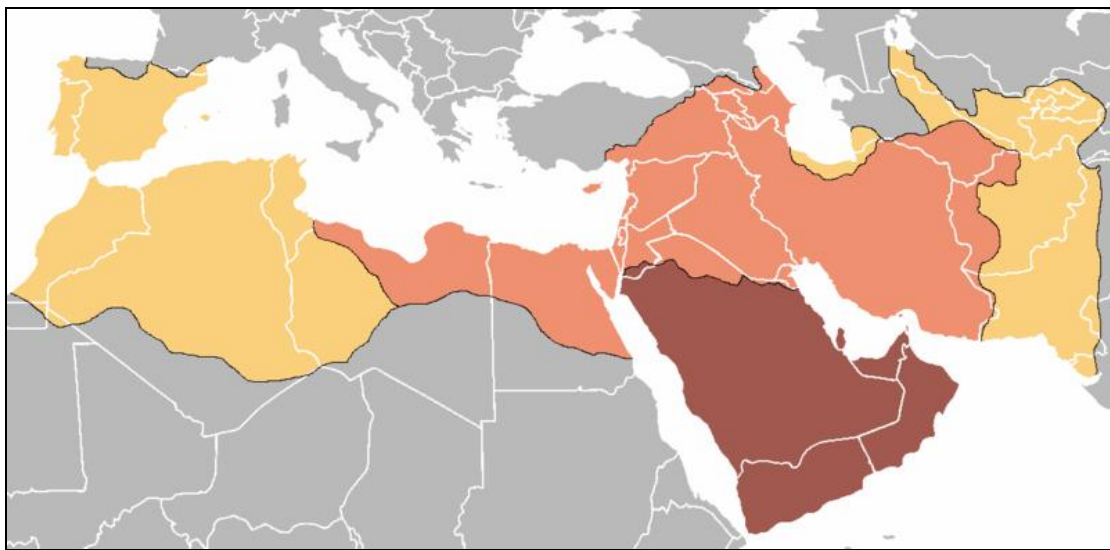
By the end of the 19th century all these three empires had declined significantly. The last to stand was the Ottoman Empire which was official abolished in July 1923 and reduced to what is now the Republic of Turkey. With the end of the Ottoman rule the last Muslim empire (or in the Sunni understanding the 'khilāfah') collapsed. Foreign powers took over the Middle East and broke it up into little countries.

Egypt then became the voice of the Sunni Muslims and Iran and Iraq as Shi'ah-majority countries (where most of the marāj'i were to be found) represented the voice of the Shi'ah. To a large degree the Shi'ah and Sunni lived peacefully in recognition of each other. In 1935, the Wāhhābis who hold extreme views of Islām (based on the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya) invaded Hejaz and renamed it to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in the 1950s and 1960s when they discovered oil wealth, they soon began propagating their teachings and replaced Egypt as the voice of Sunni Muslims. The Wāhhābi despise the Shi'ah and do not regard them as Muslims. The Shi'ah on the other hand have continued to promote Muslim unity throughout the world. Many Sunni Muslims do believe in Muslim unity as well but do not have a government to represent them and support their voice.

Also after the Second World War, the Jews attacked Palestine and took over the land to establish the State of Israel in the heart of the Muslim world. The strife and war between Israel and its neighbours continues to this today. Israel (or more appropriately 'Occupied Palestine') largely continues to survive and oppress the Palestinians living there today, with financial and military support from the United States.

Map Review

The map below shows the regions that were under Muslim rule during the time of Rasullāh (s), the first Four Caliphs and the Umayyads.

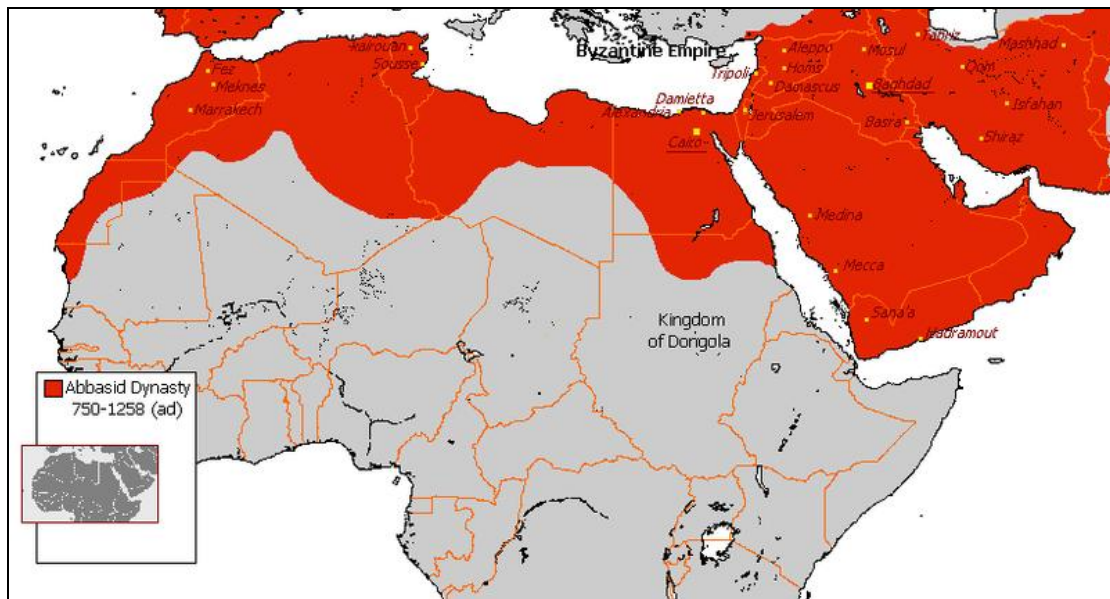


- Muslim Rule under Muhammad, 622-632 CE
- Expansion during the First Four Caliphs, 632-661 CE
- Expansion during the Umayyad Caliphate, 661-750 CE

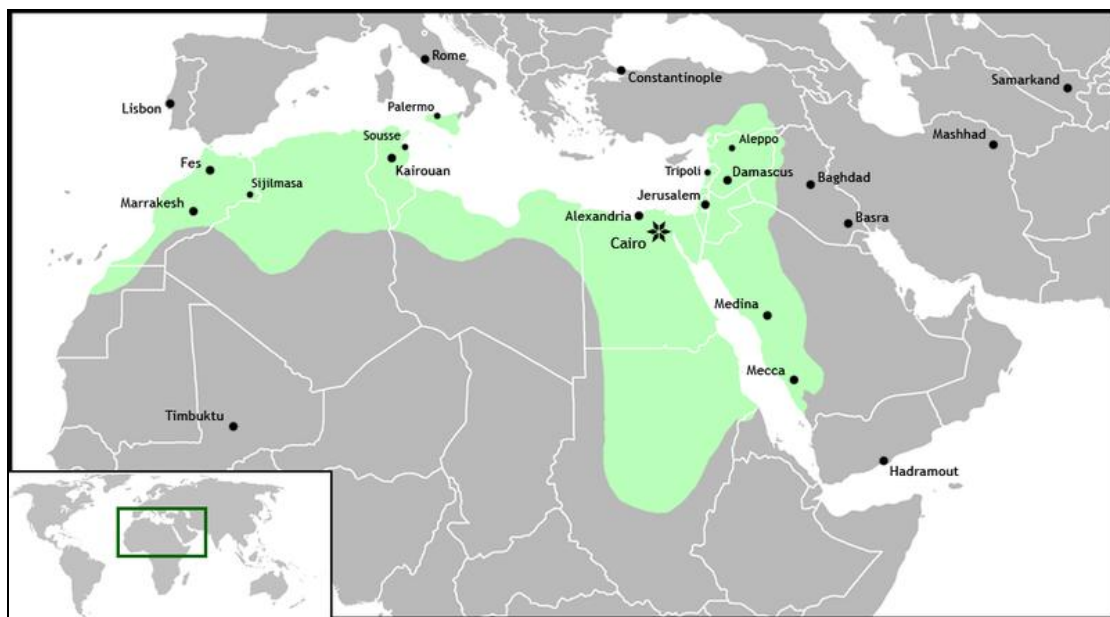
The Umayyads ruled, to the West across North Africa and into Spain. And to the East, until Iran and India.

The map on the next page shows the Abbāsīd Caliphate at its greatest extent:

The Abbāsīds ruled for over three centuries, except for Spain that continued to remain under the Umayyads. The Abbāsīds weakened because of being overcome by their Turkish slaves (later the Mamluks of Egypt) and because of the rise of the Fatimid Dynasty. They were finally destroyed by the invasion of the Mongols.

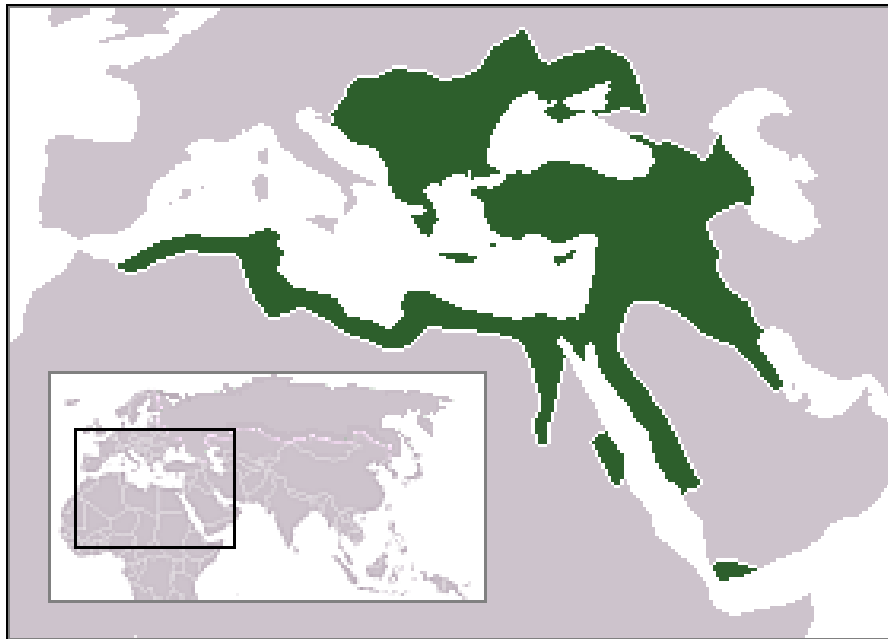


Below is the map of the Fatimid Caliphate showing its cities:



The Fatimids were a Shi'ah dynasty belonging to the Ismaili branch. They were known for being tolerant to other faiths including the non-Shi'ah Muslims and non-Ismaili Shi'ahs. They were defeated by the Ayyubids.

Below is the map of the Ottoman Caliphate:



From the 15th Century onwards, the Muslims were ruled by three empires: the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughals. The Ottoman Empire was the largest and the last to fall when it was abolished in 1923 and the Republic of Turkey was formed. At the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Ottoman Empire extended into three continents and ruled over southeastern Europe, North Africa and western Asia.

With Constantinople (now called Istanbul, the capital of Turkey) as its capital city, the Ottoman Empire was a centre of interaction between the Eastern and Western worlds for six centuries. One of its most famous rulers was Suleiman the Magnificent (who ruled from 1520 to 1566).

Homework Assignment:

Using an atlas, write down the names of the countries in the first map that shows the Muslim rule from the time of Rasulullāh (s) to the time of the Umayyads.

Lesson 4

Misconceptions about Islām in History

In this lesson and the next we shall study various issues that are surrounded by myths to the detriment of Islām. These myths have been propagated over the centuries either out of ignorance or maliciously with the intent of defaming Islām. The issues we will study inshā Allāh will include:

1. How did Islām Spread? The myth that it was spread by the sword.
2. Jihād in Islām. The myth that Islām promotes violence and terrorism.
3. The Marriages of Rasulullāh (s). The myth that Rasulullāh (s) married many wives like ancient kings and rulers, just for power and pleasure.
4. Slavery & Islām. The myth that Islām was not opposed to slavery.

1. How Did Islām Spread?

“Islām is an evil religion. It promotes violence.” These are some common labels used against Islām by the anti-Islāmic media. Such bias is based on the historical stereotype that the Arabs forced the non-Arabs into the Islāmic faith. In the recent past it was not uncommon to see books with drawings of an Arab riding his horse with sword in the one hand & the Qur’ān in the other.

So let us see how Islām spread in the world: by sword or by conversion?

The Qur’ān’s Perspective

The Qur’ān is very clear that there is no compulsion in becoming a Muslim:

﴿لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

There is no compulsion in religion; guidance has become clear from error. So whosoever rejects the idol and believes in Allāh, he has laid hold onto the most firm rope which will not break; Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:256

It makes perfect sense that there can be no force in accepting Islām; Islām wants sincere believers, not hypocrites. By forced conversion, you only increase the numbers of hypocrites, not the number of true believers.

Rasulullāh (s) is also mentioned in the Qur’ān as a “reminder only” - not as a person who forces Islām upon others:

﴿فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُسَيْطِرٍ﴾

Therefore, remind, for you are only a reminder; you are not a watcher over them.

- Surah al-Ghāshiyah, 88:21-22

The Prophet (s)’s Example

The mission of Rasulullāh (s) may be divided into two parts: (a) first thirteen years of preaching Islām in Makkah, and (b) the last eleven years of preaching Islām in Madina.

During the First Phase of Rasulullāh (s)’s mission that lasted 13 years (i.e. the Makkan era), the Muslims were in minority, always oppressed and being hunted by the Quraysh. So the use of force was out of question. Most of the followers of Rasulullāh (s) were the downtrodden and the weak who were being oppressed by the polytheist Quraysh.

During the Second Phase of Rasulullāh (s)’s mission that lasted 11 years (i.e. the Madinan era):

- 1st to 6th year AH: The Muslims were busy defending themselves against the aggression of the Makkah forces and their allies.
- 7th to 11th year AH: Islām was propagated through delegations sent to different rulers in different parts of Arabia and the result of this outreach programme is that almost the entire Arabian Peninsula embraced Islām.

To elaborate on this further:

We have said that in Makkah, the Muslims were too few and weak to have used force to convert anyone. When Rasulullāh (s) and these early Muslims were forced to migrate to Madina, the majority of the Madina Arabs were from the tribes of Aws and Khazraj who invited Rasulullāh (s) to guide them and bring peace between their warring tribes. And in fact the Aws and Khazraj accepted Islām even before Rasulullāh (s) entered Madina, so there was no question of forced conversion.

The other minority residents of Madina were the Jews who were not inclined to accepting Islām. Rasulullāh (s) met with them along with the Muslims and signed a

peace treaty to ensure everyone's rights were secure. The treaty conditions included:

- The Jews who enter into this treaty shall be protected from all insults and harm; they shall have an equal right as the Muslims in being supported.
- The Jews and Muslims shall protect Madina together against any attack from the Makkah enemies.
- The Jews shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims.
- The allies of the Jews in Madina shall enjoy the same security and freedom.

The Jews were later expelled from Madina because they violated the treaty and plotted with the Makkah and other external Jewish tribes to betray the Muslims in Madina [in the Battle of Ahzāb (Khandaq)]. But they were not forced to become Muslims.

This clearly shows that Rasullāh (s) did not force people to accept Islām (even though Islām was powerful enough to do that if it wished); rather he promoted peaceful coexistence with followers of other faiths.

The Wars During the Prophet (s)'s Life

Let us briefly look at the major battles in the life of Rasullāh (s):

2 AH - The Battle of Badr:

Muslims confronted the Makkah forces at Badr - 80 miles from Madina but 200 miles from Makkah. The distance of Badr from Makkah makes it obvious that the Makkans were the aggressors. The Muslims were 313 ill-equipped men and the Makkans were 1000 heavily-armed men.

3 AH - The Battle of Uhud:

Named after a mountain just outside Madina. Makkans came to take revenge for their defeat in Badr. The Muslims were 1000 men the Makkans were 3000.

5 AH - The Battle of Ahzāb (or Khandaq):

The Makkah polytheists, in alliance with the Jews of northern Arabia, surrounded Madina and came to attack the Muslims.

6 AH - The Peace-Treaty of Hudaibiyya:

The polytheists of Makkah agreed to a 10 year peace treaty with the Muslims. They broke this treaty in 3 years by attacking some of the allies of the Muslims. During the 3 year peace, Muslims organized themselves and began sending out delegations (wufud) to different parts of Arabia to invite the tribes and rulers to Islām – all without the use of the sword! The 9th year AH in particular is known as the Year of Delegations ('Aam al-Wufud). In some cases delegations came to Madina to find out

about Islām, such as the Christian delegation from Najrān that led to the incident of Mubāhala and the treaty with the Christians.

7 AH – The Battle of Khaybar:

The Jewish tribes expelled from Madina for their betrayal during the battle of Ahzāb, went to Khaybar where seven Jewish fortresses stood. From there they plotted an attack on Madina. Rasulullāh (s) confronted them before they could attack Madina and Imām Ali (‘a) played an important role in conquering the fortresses. After the Jews were defeated, they were not forced to accept Islām.

9 AH - The Conquest of Makkah:

When the Makkans broke the peace treaty, the Muslims marched to Makkah and the Makkans surrendered the city without any bloodshed. For all the suffering that the Makkans had afflicted on Rasulullāh (s), this was the time to take revenge but none was taken and Rasulullāh (s) forgave everyone. He got rid of all idol worship as this was the central message of Islām – to worship none by Allāh. Because the Makkans were idol worshippers, they embraced Islām. Even then, the idol-worshippers of Makkah were given a four months grace period to stay and study Islām. If they were still not convinced of Islām’s message, then they were to be asked to leave the holy territory of Makkah but not forced to become Muslims:

In all such cases, we see that neither the sword nor force was used to convert people to Islām. After the demise of Rasulullāh (s), the Muslim rulers gradually conquered Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iran and beyond. But there is a very important point to keep in mind:

It is true that Muslims conquered these neighbouring lands and countries but their aim was not to spread Islām. Their aim was to expand the Arab Empire. All historic accounts of the rulers (especially starting with the Banu Umayya and Banu Abbās onwards) suggest that the Caliphs saw themselves as kings and acted as tyrants. This confirms that the aim of the rulers was to dominate rather than convert. Anyone who converted to Islām did so voluntarily.

Why did these rulers prefer people not to convert to Islām? There was a reason: those who did not become Muslims had to sign a treaty that compelled them to pay an annual tax (called *jizya*) as revenue to the Muslim rulers. Therefore the less people converted, the more wealth they acquired!

In the majority of cities, the inhabitants continued to follow their own religions. The Muslim conquerors signed treaties guaranteeing to the conquered people the freedom to practice their religion as long as they paid the required *jizya* tax to the caliph’s treasury. The Caliphs were not in the business of promoting or spreading the Islāmic faith. They were simply interested in conquering land and ruling over people just like the Roman and Persian Empires before them.

So How did Islām Spread?

Islām spread around the world mostly through the efforts of individual scholars and pious ascetics who travelled to different regions of the world to share the message of Islām. To this day, history records of early Muslim settlers or ‘travelling Sufi saints’ who went to regions as far as the Himalaya mountains of India and China and the Caribbean Islands and South America.

Consider the following examples:

India: Muslims ruled India for about 800 years, but there never was a Muslim majority in that country. The numbers themselves show that force was not part of the spread of Islām in that region.

Far East: No Muslim army or navy ever landed in Malaysia or Indonesia. Yet even today, Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. Islām spread there only through Muslim traders and missionaries. It was the value of Islām to the common people rather than the elite, which caused it to spread in the Far East.

Similar situations in the spread of Islām are recorded for the African continent.

The Ottoman Empire: It was ruled by a Turkish caliph over a complex multi-religious, multi-cultural society. The Ottoman Empire dominated vast region of Christian land in Eastern Europe but it never forced its Christian citizens to convert to Islām; they were given the right to govern their own lives according to their own religious traditions. Greece, a neighbour of Turkey, was colonized by Muslim Turks for about 500 years, but there is not even a sizeable minority of Muslims among the Greeks today and there never was even in the past. In fact, according to some historians, when Greece became independent, many Greeks migrated into the Ottoman Empire because they found them to be better rulers than their own Greek masters.

Syria & Egypt: When Syria was conquered by the Muslims, the Christians had the choice to migrate to other Christian territories. They chose to remain in Syria. This shows there was no compulsion on them to accept Islām. Similarly after the conquests of Egypt, the Muslims allowed the non-Muslims complete liberty in the practice of their religion. In fact, the conversion of countries like Syria, Egypt and Persia to Islām was gradual and spread over more than a century. If Islām had spread through the sword, the conversions to Islām should have followed immediately after the conquests of these regions.

Spain: The Muslims ruled over Spain for some several hundred years. If the sword had been used to spread Islām, all the people of Spain would have been converted to Muslims; this was not the case. Furthermore, the Muslims were eventually expelled from Spain. If everyone in Spain has been forced to accept Islām by the sword, then over the centuries there would have been no Muslims to expel because everyone there would have been a Muslim!

Russia: The Muslims were the dominant power in Russia for over two hundred years. If they had used the sword to convert the people to Islām, there would be no non-Muslim in Russia today. The very fact that the Muslims lost Russia shows that no attempt was made to spread Islām through the sword.

The Mongols: When the Mongols dismantled the Abbāsīd Caliphate and occupied the Muslim lands, they held the swords over the heads of the Muslims. Their original aim had been to destroy Islām but they ended up converting to Islām themselves. Although Christianity tried its best to convert the Mongols, they failed and the Mongols accepted Islām. This was not out of any compulsion, but because they were convinced Islām was a superior faith.

Today Islām faces an enemy in form of the biased media. Yet amazingly, in spite of all these hurdles, Islām is still the fastest growing religion in the world. Muslims also have a strong presence in European nations such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany. This speaks volumes about how this religion has spread and is spreading even now.

If the majority of Muslims had followed the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) and their teachings then today most people in the world would have no problem accepting Islām. If the Shi’ah have been in minority throughout history, it is not because they are a breakaway sect or wrong but because they have always been suppressed by the non-Shi’ah Muslim rulers of all ages and the true message of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) has not been allowed to reveal itself freely. And sadly, this continues to this day.

Lesson 5

Misconceptions about Islām in History (cont'd)

2. Jihād in Islām

Ever since the 9/11 attacks in the USA, Islām has been criticized in the Western media for promoting violence. The attempts have been to convince the public that Islām support terrorism and that 'jihād' is all about killing non-Muslims in the name of Allāh, very similar perhaps to the Crusades when the Pope ordered Christians to attack the Muslim 'infidels' and take over Jerusalem in the name of Jesus.

In order to understand the matter and to be able to defend Islām as our faith, we must first understand what the Qur'ān really says about jihād and Islām's perspective on dealing with non-Muslims. We must also look at the āyāt of Qur'ān that are commonly misquoted by others to 'prove' Islām supports terrorism.

Islām is the Religion of Peace

Islām is primarily a religion of peace. Its name "Islām" comes from "*silm*" which means two things: one is "submitting to God" and the second is "peace". Both meanings are intertwined.

Whenever Muslims meet one another, they use the greeting of peace: "*as-salāmu 'alaykum* — peace be upon you", and the other person responds by saying "*'alaykum as-salām* — upon you be peace."

Peace and Justice in Qur'ān & Hadith

Even when dealing with war enemies, Islām always showed its preference for peace over war.

The Qur'ān commands the Muslims when dealing with their enemies:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ
أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

O you who believe, be maintainers of justice (and bearer of) witness for (the sake of) Allāh. Let not hatred of a people incite you to act unjustly; be just - this is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allāh surely Allāh is aware of what you do.

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:8

And as far as maintaining a friendship with the non-Muslims is concerned, the Qur'ān commands:

﴿لَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ. إِنَّمَا يَنْهَاكُمُ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَأَخْرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا عَلَىٰ إِخْرَاجِكُمْ أَنْ تَوَلَّوهُمْ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾

Allāh does **not** forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes; **that you deal with them with kindness and justice**. Indeed Allāh loves the just. Allāh forbids you **only in regard to those who made war against you** on account of religion and expelled you from your homes and supported [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them - it is they who are the wrongdoers
- Surah al-Mumtahana, 60:8-9

The very first battle in Islām took place 2 years after Rasulullāh (s) migrated to Madina (i.e. 2 AH) when the Muslims were allowed to take up arms to defend themselves. Even though they were outnumbered and ill-equipped, the Muslims defeated the Makkans and took seventy prisoners of war. The norm among all societies at that time was to either kill the Prisoners-of-War (POWs) or make them slaves. But Rasulullāh (s) instructed the Muslims to treat the POWs humanely; they were brought back safely to Madina and given decent lodging in the houses of the people who had taken them prisoners. The Qur'ān decreed that the POWs must not be ill-treated in any way.

According to a Western biographer of Rasulullāh (s), Sir William Muir, "In pursuance of Mahomet's commands, the citizens of Madina received the prisoners and treated them with much consideration. 'Blessings be on the men of Madina', said one of the prisoners in later days, 'they made us ride, while they themselves walked, they gave us wheaten bread to eat when there was little of it; contenting themselves with dates.'"

The method in which Rasulullāh (s) dealt with the prisoners was revolutionary. The prisoners that were poor were released free; those who came from affluent families of Makkah were returned for a specified ransom. But the most interesting case was of those prisoners who were literate – Rasulullāh (s) made a deal with them that they could go free if they could teach ten Muslim children how to read and write.

Even during battle, the Muslims were given strict rules to abide by:

- Do not kill anyone who is not fighting you in battle, especially those that are elderly and women and children.
- Do not cut down a tree unnecessarily, especially a fruit-bearing tree.

- Do not destroy any crops or burn down any palm-trees.
- Do not poison any water.
- Do not mutilate the bodies of your enemy.
- If the person facing you in battle drops his weapon and turns to flee, do not run after him to kill him.
- Do not harm or kill anyone who surrenders while fighting.

All this was a part of Islām 1400 years ago; long, long before the Geneva Convention.

Islām therefore holds human life as sacred, regardless of whether it is the life of a Muslim or non-Muslim. Muslims may dislike the values, culture or behaviour of the non-Muslims but they are not to hate another human being just because he or she is not a Muslim.

To kill an innocent person is a great crime in Islām, regardless of whether the individual is a Muslim or not. After narrating the story of the two sons of Nabi Adam ('a) and how Qābil killed his brother Hābil, the Qur'ān says:

﴿... مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا...﴾

Whosoever kills a person without any reason, it is as though he has killed all the people. And whosoever saves a single life, it is as though he has saved all the people.
- Surah al-Māidah, 5:32

Islām does not also allow a Muslim to justify killing an innocent person in any way. For example, some Muslim extremists will kidnap and kill innocent civilians and say, 'this is in revenge for what the non-Muslim armies or governments did to our fellow Muslims in such-and-such a land.' But this is not Islām. You cannot kill an innocent non-Muslim just because some other non-Muslims killed an innocent Muslim.

Similarly, suicide bombings against civilians are absolutely forbidden and those who commit it are not martyrs – they will burn in Hellfire for killing the innocent.

The matter of taking someone's life is very serious in Islām. It is only legislated for certain crimes and that too when it is proven beyond doubt in a legal court of law and the criminal is unrepentant. Besides that, going to war is only permissible if it is in defence of Islām or Muslim lands and property and it must be ordered by a legal and lawful Imām or his representative. No one can take the law in their hands.

So What About Jihād?

Many ignorant and malicious enemies of Islām claiming to be 'experts' in Islām try and 'prove' that Rasullāh (s) was, God forbid, 'a terrorist' and that Islām teaches

violence and hatred through the Qur'ān. So let us look at the meaning of jihād in Islām and these verses of Qur'ān that they love to misquote.

The Concept of Jihād

The word *jihād* does not mean “holy war”. This is a Western term of a broader concept in Islāmīc teaching and it has been coined by the Western media to resemble the Roman Catholic ‘holy war’ or Crusades against the Muslims in the 11th-13th centuries.

In Arabic the word jihād literally means ‘striving’, ‘struggling’ or ‘working hard’. A ‘mujtahid’ for example, is one who ‘struggles’ to find the correct laws in Islām and so he practises ‘*ijtihad*’ (a word that shares the same Arabic root verb as jihād). From hadith therefore, we are told that jihād is a religious duty for Muslims and it is of two kinds: minor jihād (*jihād al-asghar*) and major jihād (*jihād al-akbar*).

Minor jihād is a just and legitimate armed struggle that is fought in defence. It does not mean violence, taking the laws in one’s hands or a war of aggression that is fought only to occupy the lands of others or take over their resources.

Major jihād is the spiritual struggle that a Muslim undertakes to purify his or her self and it is a battle of the soul and body. It includes fighting the temptation for sin as well as fighting the love for the world and its pleasures (i.e. materialism). Islām expects Muslims to prefer their souls over their bodies and to prefer the life of the Hereafter over this temporary world.

The two terms - major and minor jihād - came about because of an incident when a group of soldiers returned to Madina after an expedition and Rasulullāh (s) said to them, ‘welcome back to a group that has returned from the minor jihād and now what awaits them is the major jihād.’ The soldiers were surprised and thinking a great battle awaited them asked, ‘and what is the major jihād, O Messenger of Allāh?’ and he replied, ‘jihād against your own selves.’

Jihād in the Qur'ān

The first battle fought by Rasulullāh (s) – the Battle of Badr - was a war of defence. On this occasion, the Qur'ān permitted the Muslims to engage in armed struggle but clearly explained the reason:

﴿أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا... الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ...﴾

Permission is granted to those who are fighting because they have been oppressed...those who have been expelled from their homes without any just cause...

- Surah al-Hajj, 22:39-40

Again, referring to the polytheists of Makkah who waged war after war against Rasullāh (s) and the Muslims in Madina, the Qur’ān states:

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ﴾

Fight in the way of God those who are fighting against you; and do not exceed (the limits). Verily Allāh does not love those who exceed (the limits)."

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:190

It is clear from these verses that the permission to fight is about responding to a war by defending oneself. There is no talk of initiating aggression at all. Even in the defensive mode of struggle, Allāh warns the Muslims that they should not “exceed” beyond the proper limits.

Islām teaches that Muslims should be strong in order to defend themselves, but that does not mean they have to become aggressive and unjust. This general guideline is given in the following verse:

﴿وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ
وَأَخْرَيْنَ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَهُمُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُهُمْ...﴾

Prepare against them (i.e., the enemy) with whatever force and trained horses you can in order to frighten thereby Allāh’s enemy, your enemy, and others besides them who you do not know but Allāh knows them....

- Surah al-Anfāl, 8:60

After giving this general guideline of being strong and prepared to defend themselves, immediately the Qur’ān reminds the Muslims in the next verse:

﴿وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلْمِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ...﴾

But if they (the enemies) incline to peace, then you (also) incline to it, and put your trust in Allāh...

- Surah al-Anfāl, 8:61

Reading the Qur’ān Out of Context

To read something ‘out of context’ means to purposely read only part of it because it suits a person’s goal to misguide others.

For example, we can take isolated parts of the Bible and show that the Bible preaches ‘violence and hate’. Here are examples:

“Take all the leader of these people, kill them.” (Numbers 25:7)

“Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.” (Numbers 31:17-18)

“Kill every male and every woman who is not a virgin.” (Judges 21:11)

You can see from the above examples how easy it is to misquote the Bible and ‘prove’ that it preaches terrorism. Yet no decent person will accept such out-of-context presentation of the Biblical verses. Surprisingly, we even see some Christian priests and missionaries do exactly the same with the Qur’ān and without any hesitation.

Here are some examples of Qur’ān verses often misquoted and read out of context. Your teacher may give only one example and ask you to read the rest as homework:

First Example:

﴿وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ...﴾

Kill them wherever you find them....

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:191

To understand the full context of this verse, let us read verses 190 to 193 together:

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ. وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجُوكُمْ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا تَقَاتِلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّى يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ فَإِنْ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوهُمْ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ. فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ. وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

*“And fight in the way of God **those who are fighting against you, and do not exceed the limits**, surely God does not love those who exceed the limits. And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them **out from whence they drove you out** – persecution is severer than slaughter. And **do not fight them** at the Sacred Mosque [in Makkah] **until they fight with you** in it; but **if they do fight you, then fight them**; such is the recompense of the unbelievers. **But if they hold back, then surely Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful**. And fight them until there is no persecution and religion should be only for Allāh; **but if they hold back, then there should be no hostility except against the oppressors.**”*

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:190-193

When we now read the same words in context, it becomes clear that verse 191 is only allowing the Muslims of Madina to defend themselves against the aggression of

the polytheists of Makkah who expelled them from their homes. It surely does not say that Muslims should go around the world killing any non-Muslim that they find!

Second Example:

﴿فَلْيُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يَشْرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ وَمَنْ يُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
فَيُقْتَلْ أَوْ يَغْلِبْ فَسَوْفَ نُؤْتِيهِ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا﴾

So let those fight in the way of Allāh who are willing to sell this world's life for the Hereafter; and whoever fights in the way of Allāh, then be he slain or be he victorious, We shall grant him a mighty reward.

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:74

Those who quote this verse, conveniently leave out the next verse (āyah. 75) that explains the purpose and justification for the minor jihād:

﴿وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانَ
الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَاجْعَل لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا
وَاجْعَل لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ نَصِيرًا﴾

*And what is the matter with you that you do not fight in the way of God **for [the sake of] the oppressed men, women, and children** who pray, 'Our Lord, take us out of this town whose people are oppressors, and appoint for us from Thee a guardian and give us from Thee a helper.'*

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:75

These two verses are clearly urging the Muslim to stand up for *the oppressed men, women and children* and should be read together. Should not divine religions defend the oppressed men, women and children?

Third Example:

﴿...فَقَاتِلُوا أئِمَّةَ الْكُفْرِ...﴾

Fight the leaders of unbelief.

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:12

The words above are just part of the whole passage where Allāh talks about the Muslims in Madina and their peace treaty with the polytheists of Makkah. Now look at the whole context:

﴿وَإِنْ نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَهْدِهِمْ وَطَعَنُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ فَقَاتِلُوا أُمَّةَ الْكُفْرِ إِنَّهُمْ لَا أَيْمَانَ لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْتَهُونَ. أَلَا تُقَاتِلُونَ قَوْمًا نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ وَهَمُّوا بِإِخْرَاجِ الرَّسُولِ وَهُمْ بَدَءُوكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ أَتَخْشَوْنَ اللَّهَ فَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَوْهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ. قَاتِلُوهُمْ يُعَذِّبَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِأَيْدِيكُمْ وَيُخْزِهِمْ وَيَنْصُرْكُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَيَشْفِ صُدُورَ قَوْمٍ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

*And if they break their oaths after their agreement and revile your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief – surely their oaths are of no value – so that they may desist. What is the matter with you that you do not fight a people who broke their oaths **and aimed at the expulsion of the Prophet [from Makkah], and they attacked you first?** Do you fear them? But Allāh is most deserving that you should fear Him, if you are believers. “Fight them; Allāh will punish them by your hands and bring them to disgrace, and assist you against them, heal the hearts of a believing people, remove the rage of their hearts, and Allāh turns (mercifully) to whom He pleases, and Allāh is Knowing, Wise.*

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:12-14

The context clearly gives the right of defence to the Muslim but, in no way, does it promote aggression.

Fourth Example:

﴿... وَقَاتِلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً ...﴾

Fight the polytheists all together.

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:36

In reality, this sentence is part of an entire verse in which God talks about the sacredness of four of the twelve months in which fighting is forbidden. Then it says:

﴿... وَقَاتِلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً كَمَا يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ كَافَّةً وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

*And fight the polytheists all together **as they fight you all together**; and know that God is with those who guard (evil).*

- Surah at-Tawbah, 9:36

Of course those who love to misquote the Qur’ān, conveniently miss out the part “as they fight you all together”. As you see, this verse is also responding to the aggression started by the polytheists against the Muslims; it does not talk about initiating a war.

Conclusion

From these examples, it is quite clear that Islām is not talking about the minor jihād for the sake of aggression; rather it is allowing the Muslims to physically defend their lives, properties, and lands against any aggression, and also to fight for ending tyranny against the oppressed men, women and children.

Some Christians argue that ‘Jesus taught that when someone slaps you, turn the other cheek’ and therefore we should not fight those who fight us. But this is not realistic at all. Islām deals with a realistic human society and not with an idealistic society. In the words of Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Muslims view the Christian ethics as being too sublime for ordinary human beings to follow; it seems that the injunction to turn the other cheek was being meant only for saints. Christian people over the centuries have not shown any more restraint in war than have non-Christians. The ideal preached and the practice followed has often little to do with each other.”⁴⁰

Misuse of “Jihād”

It is also important to note that just because the term “jihād” is misused by the media and some politicians, Muslims should not be ashamed to say that fighting in the way of Allāh can be necessary and valid at times. We neither need to abandon this noble concept of our faith nor be ashamed or apologetic about it.

While talking to non-Muslims about jihād, many Muslims will only describe the major (spiritual) jihād and shy away from mentioning the minor jihād in the sense of armed struggle for defence. As Muslims, we must stand by the teachings of Islām. Some misguided people may have hijacked the term but we must not reject even the minor Jihād in principle. Instead we should distinguish it by explaining when it is applicable (i.e. defence) as opposed to aggression and acts of terrorism.

The hijack of the term ‘jihād’ has not just been done by al-Qaida and the Talibān. Even governments like the United States have misused it for their own political interests. For example, during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, the U.S. Agency for International Development spent millions of dollars to supply Afghan school children with textbooks filled with violent images and “militant Islāmic” teachings. Published in the dominant Afghan languages of Dari and Pashtu, these textbooks were developed in the early 1980s under an ‘Aid grant’ to the University of Nebraska-Omaha and its Centre for Afghanistan Studies. The agency spent \$51 million dollars on the university’s education programs in Afghanistan from 1984 to 1994.

The books, which were filled with talk of jihād and featured drawings of guns, bullets, soldiers and mines, have served since then as the Afghan school system’s

⁴⁰ Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Peace & Jihād in Islām*, p. 9.

core curriculum. Unlike the children in the rest of the world whose math textbooks have pictures of apples and oranges, the Afghan children were taught to count with illustrations showing tanks, missiles and land mines.⁴¹

And so when it suited its strategic interests, the United States of America promoted the culture of jihād among the Afghan children in the 1980s (so that they would fight the Soviets) and President Reagan even welcomed the Afghan “mujāhideen” in the White House. Now that that culture of violence has come to haunt it, the US administration is absolutely against the idea of jihād and expects Muslims to abandon that concept in totality.

Muslims cannot be expected to change their views on the noble concept of jihād just because of some misguided Muslims or some world powers misuse the term. Muslims should strongly condemn the misuse of jihād and confidently affirm the concept of jihād as explained in the Qur’ān and the noble examples of Prophet Muhammad (s).

Media & Stereotyping the Muslims

Time and again we hear in the news of a Muslim who committed an act of terrorism. How should we respond to this? Our response is that the individual or group who committed it should be condemned without highlighting his or their religion. Targeting the Muslims or the Arabs based on guilt-by-association is absolutely wrong.

There is also a double standard in the media: When a bomb exploded in early days of September 2001 in Northern Ireland near a Catholic school in a Protestant neighbourhood, no one in the media blamed the entire Protestant community as “terrorists and murderers” even though it was in the same month as the 9/11 attacks. When the IRA committed acts of terror in Northern Ireland or United Kingdom, no one in the Western media labelled the Catholic faith “as the religion of terrorism”. When Dr. Goldstein, a Jewish settler in Israel, entered the mosque in Hebron a few years ago and gunned down Palestinian worshippers, no one said that all Jewish people are “terrorists”. When Serbians brutally massacred Muslims in Bosnia, the media never blamed the Serbian Orthodox Church for it even though some priests of that church used to bless the Serbian militia before they embarked on executing the Muslim prisoners. Yet we see that when a few Arabs or Muslims commit acts of terror, all the Muslims and all the Arabs are automatically branded as “terrorists and murderers.” This is of course unfair.

⁴¹ Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi, *Peace & Jihād in Islām*, p. 10-11.

Lesson 6

Misconceptions about Islām in History (cont'd)

3. The Marriages of Rasulullāh (s)

One of the most common myths against Islām is regarding Rasulullāh (s)'s many wives.

Polygamy in History

Rasulullāh (s) did not invent the system of polygamy. It existed long before the Qur'ān was revealed. The Bible says that Lamech, the grandson of Adam, "took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah."⁴² So polygamy has existed from the earliest days of human history.

Many holy personalities of the Bible had many wives at the same time. Abraham (Nabi Ibrāhim ('a)) had Sarah and Hajar. Abraham was first blessed with a son through Hajar whom he named Ishmael (Nabi Ismā'il ('a)), and then he was blessed with another son through Sarah whom he named Isaac (Nabi Ishāq ('a)).

Jacob (Nabi Ya'qub ('a)) had four wives: Leah and Rachel (both were Jacob's cousins), and he also had Bilhah and Zilpah (both were servant-girls given to Jacob by his wives). It is from these four ladies that Jacob had twelve sons who became ancestors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

David (Nabi Dāwud ('a)) had at least eight wives whose names are known, he had many others whose names have not been recorded. The Second Book of Samuel (in the Bible) talks about "the wives" of David in Hebron and also in Jerusalem.⁴³ [\[4\]](#)

When Rasulullāh (s) began preaching Islām, polygamy was a way of life. It wasn't about pleasure but a part of the social structure. People depended on having many children to help them on their farms and other responsibilities; having more than one wife, each with several children, was common.

Islām did however observe that often men who were wealthy would marry very many wives and then treat them unjustly or compete to have many wives simply as a show of power. It therefore modified and reformed the system, limiting the number of wives a man could have to only four.

⁴² The Book of Genesis, 4:19

⁴³ 2 Samuel 3:2-5, 13-16; 5:13-16.

Thereafter Islām also put strict conditions on a man who wanted to marry more than one wife: he must be able to provide and maintain the family, and also deal with all his wives with justice and fairness. He cannot neglect any of them or show preference for one over the other. The Qur’ān therefore cautions men:

﴿...فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً...﴾

...but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one...

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:3

The only exceptions to this rule were the prophets and messengers of Allāh. They were permitted to marry even more than four wives and in the case of Rasulullāh (s) we shall explain why he did this, for each one of his wives.

There are several psychological and social reasons that Islāmic scholars have discussed to explain why Islām has permitted polygamy and why it is a more natural solution to problems in society and less damaging to families than having nightclubs, massage parlours, prostitution, and married men having affairs, and so on. These scholars have also discussed why Islām has not permitted polygamy for women but of course this is all a lengthy discussion and a digression from our subject i.e. the marriages of Rasulullāh (s). Anyone interested in the concept of polygamy in Islām can find lots of resources on the internet.

The Prophet’s Marriages

The accusation by the enemies of Islām that Rasulullāh (s) had many wives only for pleasure and power is not new. In fact, if we read the Bible carefully we will see that no prophet was ever spared from some accusation or the other. According to the Bible, Nabi Lut (‘a)’s daughters got him drunk and then committed incest with him (*wal iyādhu billāh – we seek refuge with Allāh from such blasphemy*). The Bible also talks of Nabi Isa (‘a) converting water into wine for people to drink at a party (*wal iyādhu billāh*). These are all lies that were brought into scriptures in order to damage the reputation of the Prophets of Allāh, peace be on them. And therefore the accusations against Rasulullāh (s) as being a ‘terrorist’ or ‘womanizer’ (*wal iyādhu billāh*) should not surprise us.

If any sincere person takes the time to study the life of Rasulullāh (s) carefully, they will see that he was a man of the highest character even long before he started preaching Islām.

At the age of twenty-five, Rasulullāh (s) married a famous and a highly respected lady of Makkah, by the name of Khadija bint Khuwaylid, who was either the same age as Rasulullāh (s) or just two years older than him. Some writers have falsely

suggested that she was 15 years older than Rasulullāh (s) i.e. 40 years old while he was 25, but this has been proven wrong by Muslim researchers.⁴⁴

What is important for our discussion is that Rasulullāh (s) remained married to one wife only - Sayyida Khadija ('a) - for twenty-five years until she passed away in Makkah. Two years after her demise, Rasulullāh (s) migrated from Makkah to Madina.

So until the age of 52, Rasulullāh (s) had only one wife, Sayyida Khadija, whom he loved dearly and who was one of the strongest pillars of support in promoting his cause. It was only during the last 11 years of his life that he married other wives. To summarize:

- From birth to age 25: single.
- From age 25 to age 52: married to one wife, Sayyida Khadija ('a).
- From age 52 to age 63: married ten wives.

The Other Wives

During the last eleven years of his life, Rasulullāh (s) married ten wives. This has become an easy target for anti-Muslim writers and speakers who would like to tarnish the image of Rasulullāh (s) and portray him as someone who was driven by desires.

If Rasulullāh (s) was a man of uncontrollable desires, then why did he not marry any other woman when he was young and wealthy and lived in a society that accepted unlimited polygamous relationships (i.e. before he began preaching Islām)? Why did he not marry any other woman as long as Sayyida Khadija ('a) was alive even though it was the prime time of his youth and it was acceptable in society?

We must therefore realize that there must have been good reasons behind the other marriages of Rasulullāh (s) during the last eleven years of his life. And indeed, there were very good reasons as we shall explain below.

We can categorize Rasulullāh (s)'s marriages in Madina into different reasons, keeping in mind that some marriages could fall under more than one reason.

First Reason: To Provide Protection & Dignity to Widows so that Others May Follow That Example.

It is important to remember that 1400 years ago, women never went out of their homes to earn a living. They were completely dependent on a male family member to look after them. That is why as soon as a woman was divorced or widowed, she

⁴⁴ For references that prove this, see: Sayyid Rizvi, *Polygamy and Marriages of the Prophet*, p. 5.

would marry another man so that she had someone to provide her shelter and the necessities of life.

Another point to remember is that 1400 years ago people were not protected by a government but rather by their tribes. And if someone married a woman from another tribe, the “in-law tribe” would treat him like family and also offer him protection or at least not fight him without good reason.

Examples of such widows whom Rasulullāh (s) married were:

1. Sawdah bint Zam’ah: A Muslim lady whose husband had died in Abyssinia. When she returned to Makkah, she was a widow and her father and brother were polytheists and also enemies of Islām. She could not seek shelter with them. They were so opposed to Islām that they were willing to even torture her to death for accepting Islām. Rasulullāh (s), now a widower himself, married Sawdah in order to provide protection to her as well as to forge an important link of kinship with his opponents.
2. Zaynab bint Khuzaymah: a widow for the second time when her second husband ‘Abd Allāh b. Jahsh was martyred in the Battle of Uhud. She was known for her generosity, and was famous as “Umm al-Masākīn” (Mother of the Poor). Now she herself faced hard times. Rasulullāh (s) wanted to maintain her prestige, and so he married her in the 3rd year AH. She died less than a year after this marriage.
3. Umm Salamah. She was first married to ‘Abd Allāh Abu Salamah. She migrated to Abyssinia with her husband. She was known for her piety and wisdom. When she became a widow and had orphan children, Rasulullāh (s) married her in the 4th year AH. She was also the sister of the chief of Makhzum - a powerful Makkan tribe. This marriage had the element of forging the link of kinship with his opponents in Makkah.

Second Reason: To Set the Slaves Free

4. Juwayriyyah bint al-Hārith. After the Battle of Banu Mustaliq in the 5th year AH, the Muslims took two hundred families of that tribe as captives. By law, since they were not Muslims and had fought the Muslims in aggression, they would become slaves to the Muslims. Juwayriyyah, the daughter of the chief of that tribe, had become a widow. Rasulullāh (s) set her free and married her. Why? Because the Muslims, who had made the two hundred families of Banu Mustaliq their slaves, realized that by Juwayriyyah’s marriage to Rasulullāh (s), all these two hundred families were now related to Rasulullāh (s) by marriage. Out of courtesy to Rasulullāh (s), the Muslims set them all free so that the ‘in-laws’ of Rasulullāh (s) would not be slaves. Impressed by this nobility, the whole tribe of Banu Mustaliq became Muslim. By this marriage, Rasulullāh (s) was able to transform a hostile tribe into an ally.

Third Reason: To Forge Friendly Relations for the Sake of Islām

5. ‘Āisha bint Abi Bakr. She was the daughter of Abu Bakr, who later became the first caliph of the Muslims. Although the engagement was done in Makkah, she came into the household of Rasulullāh (s) after his migration to Madina. She was the youngest wife of Rasulullāh (s). The media likes to say that the Prophet (s) married a young child of 9 years old. That is not true. ‘Āisha was between the age of 16 and 19, an age when one is considered to be an adult in many cultures even today.⁴⁵ The engagement of Rasulullāh (s) to ‘Āisha in Makkah sealed the alliance with her father Abu Bakr so that he would be on the side of Muslims during the confrontation against the idol-worshippers of Makkah.
6. Hafsa bint ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb. She was the daughter of ‘Umar who later became the second caliph of the Muslims. She became a widow after her husband was killed in the Battle of Badr. Rasulullāh (s) married her in the 4th year AH on the request of her father. This marriage was also to seal Rasulullāh (s)’s alliance with ‘Umar.
7. Umm Habiba, daughter of Abu Sufyān. She was married to ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Jahsh and had migrated to Abyssinia. He became a Christian; while she continued the Islāmic faith and separated from him. Her father Abu Sufyān was the leader of the polytheist Quraysh tribe that ruled Makkah and he was a bitter enemy of Islām and constantly fought against Muslims. When she returned to Madina, Rasulullāh (s) married her in order to provide protection for her and also to soften the heart of Abu Sufyān. However, this marriage did not have the desired effect on Abu Sufyān.
8. Safiyya bint Huyaiy b. Akhtab. She was the daughter of the chief of Banu Nadhir, a Jewish tribe of Khaybar. She became a widow when her husband was killed in the Battle of Khaybar. She was taken as a captive by the Muslim forces. Rasulullāh (s) married her in the 7th year AH to maintain her noble status and also to establish marriage ties with her Jewish tribe.

Fourth Reason: The Desire to be Related to Rasulullāh (s)

9. Maymuna bint al-Hārith al-Hilāliyyah. Her second husband died in 7 AH. She came to Rasulullāh (s) and offered herself to him in marriage if he would accept her. She only desired the honour of being called “the wife of Rasulullāh (s)”. Rasulullāh (s) (based on verse 33:50 of the Qur’ān) accepted her as his wife.

Fifth Reason: To Break a Taboo & Set an Example

⁴⁵ For proofs on the age of ‘Aisha, see Sayyid Rizvi, *Polygamy and Marriages of the Prophet*, p. 8.

10. Zaynab bint Jahsh. She was a cousin of Rasulullāh (s); and she was a widow and a divorcee. The circumstance of her marriage to Rasulullāh (s) was very unusual. To show that Islām treated all humans equally and a white Arab had no greater distinction before Allāh than a black slave, except on the basis of piety, Rasulullāh (s) had originally arranged for Zaynab bint Jahsh to marry Zayd b. Hāritha, who was a freed slave and raised by Rasulullāh (s) as his adopted son.

The marriage of Zaynab to Zayd did not last however and in time, they broke up and had a divorce.

At the same time, because Zayd was raised by Rasulullāh (s) as an adopted child, people used to call him 'Zayd b. Muhammad'. Allāh revealed verses 4 and 5 of Surah 33 (Surah al-Ahzāb) to say that an adopted child is not like a biological child and should not be called by the name of the adopted father but by his own biological father's name. This was to ensure that matters related to marriage and inheritance do not become mixed up.

Thereafter, to ensure that the prevailing system of adoption was removed and to emphasize that Islām does not recognize an adopted child to be exactly the same as a biological child, Allāh commanded Rasulullāh (s) to marry Zaynab bint Jahsh.

Zayd was now called Zayd b. Hāritha i.e. by the name of his biological father and the marriage of Rasulullāh (s) to Zaynab bint Jahsh left a clear example for Muslims that Islām does not recognize adoptions in the sense that other cultures do because otherwise it would have been forbidden for Rasulullāh (s) to marry his "daughter-in-law".

Of course Islām highly encourages looking after orphans but without assuming them to be related like a blood relationship that affects marriage, inheritance, mahram and non-mahram, etc.

Conclusion

When Rasulullāh (s) was young and wealthy, he had only one wife. But in the last eleven years of his life when he was over fifty, he married different wives. With the exception of one ('Ā'isha), they were all widows and old.

It is also an established fact that even when Rasulullāh (s) had these other wives, his love for his first wife, Sayyida Khadija ('a), never diminished. Al-Bukhāri, quotes the youngest of his wives, 'Ā'isha as saying the following:

“I did not feel jealous of any of the wives of Rasulullāh (s) as much as I did of Khadīja...⁴⁶ because Rasulullāh (s) used to (remember and) mention her very often. And whenever he slaughtered a sheep, he would send (the choicest parts) to Khadīja’s family. When I sometimes said to him, ‘It appears that Khadīja was the only woman in the world,’ Rasulullāh (s) would say, ‘Khadīja was such-and-such, and from her I had children.’”⁴⁷

In another narration, according to al-Bukhāri, ‘Ā’isha reports: “Once Hālah, the sister of Khadīja, asked permission to enter the house.” Upon hearing Hālah’s voice, which sounded very similar to that of Khadīja, Rasulullāh (s) remembered her beloved wife.” ‘Ā’isha says, “I became jealous and said, ‘What makes you remember an old woman amongst the old women of Quraysh, an old toothless woman who died long ago, while God has given you somebody better than her?’”

Rasulullāh (s) became visibly upset, and he said, “By Allāh, I do not have anyone better than Khadīja. She believed in me when others were covered with disbelief. She testified to my truth when other rejected my claim. She helped me with her wealth when others deprived me. And Allāh gave me children by her.”⁴⁸

These sentiments of Rasulullāh (s), expressed to the youngest of his wives, clearly show that for him, Sayyida Khadīja was still the First Lady of Islām. All the other marriages had some social, political or religious reasons behind them. These marriages were not based on lust and passion, as many enemies of Islām would like the world to believe.

⁴⁶ Who passed away well before ‘Ā’isha came to the house of Rasulullāh (s).

⁴⁷ Bukhāri, *Sahih*, v. 5 p. 104.

⁴⁸ Ibid; Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Musnad*, v. 6 p. 117-118, 150; *Sahih* Tirmidhi; Ibn Kathir.

Lesson 7

Misconceptions about Islām in History (cont'd)

4. Slavery & Islām

Slavery is one of the oldest evils of society and has existed since the time of ancient civilizations. As we shall see in this lesson, not only is it untrue that Islām encouraged slavery but in fact, Islām is the only faith that was able to attack the very foundations of this evil. Yet it is ironic that the same people who nourished slavery, supported it, and derived benefit from it, later became champions of its abolition and accused Muslims and Arabs of engaging in slave trade.

Slavery in Ancient Times

Some of the earliest civilizations that practised slavery were the Greeks, the Persians, the Romans and the Jews, and later even the Christians.

During the time of the Romans, a slave was the personal property of his master who could do as he pleased with the slave and had full power over the slave's life and even death.

In Persia the palace of the Emperor had twelve thousand female slaves. When the Byzantine Emperor sat on the throne, thousands of slaves remained in attendance with full attention and hundreds of them bowed when he bent to put on his shoes. In Greece, the number of slaves was far greater than the number of free men, although Greece had produced great advocates of humanity and justice. Every army that won a battle would take its prisoners and their families as slaves and personal property.

At the time when Rasulullāh (s) was preaching Islām (in 7th century CE) slavery was rampant throughout India, Persia, Rome, the Arabian Peninsula, Romania and Greece. The elite and educated class of these countries did not regard the slaves eligible even for basic human rights. A slave was regarded as a commodity not worthier than cattle. Often he was sold cheaper than sheep and goat. On special social occasions the distinguished citizens of the State used to get together with the Head of the State to watch the gladiator-like games in which the slaves were made to fight with swords and spears just as in shows of animal-fights. The people cheered until one of the fighters was killed. The audience would then applaud the winner heartily.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, v. 3 p. 397 (New York, 1950).

Christianity and Slavery

Though slavery was an ancient practice, it is safe to say that this trade reached its peak through the Christian nations of Europe and America who, as is their nature, turned it into a meticulously organized commerce and started capturing slaves by thousands to be used as manpower in their newly acquired colonies.

It is well known that when Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, it did not condemn slavery and in fact the churches participated in slave-trade. In the name of Almighty God, their priests blessed the ships carrying human cargo to faraway lands and admonished the slaves to be obedient, but never urged the masters to be kind. As late as August 1970, the Roman Catholics purchased 1500 Indian girls at a price ranging from 250-300 British Pounds each, to be kept in convents because European girls did not like to live as nuns. When there was much outcry and the Vatican was asked to investigate this, they condemned the newspaper that published the article. Though, a Vatican spokesman admitted there was an “element of truth” to the report.⁵⁰

The following quotation graphically shows the attitude of early Islām and Christianity on the subject of slavery and race:

“Take away the Negro! I can have no discussion with him,” exclaimed the Christian Archbishop Cyrus when the Arab conquerors had sent a deputation of their ablest men to discuss terms of surrender of the capital of Egypt, headed by a ‘negro’ (i.e. black man) ‘Ubaydah as the ablest of them all. To the sacred Archbishop’s astonishment, he was told that this man was commissioned by General ‘Amr; that the Moslems held black men and white men in equal respect judging a man by his character and not by his colour.⁵¹

Islām Attacks Slavery

Before Islām came to Arabia, the Arabs were as bad offenders as their neighbours. Slaves were a commercial commodity, and slavery was an established institution. It was a source of livelihood for thousands and a source of labour for tens of thousands. To the elite, the number of slaves in the household was a symbol of status.

Slavery offended the spirit of Islām as much as idolatry did. But while the latter had its roots in spiritualism and hence could be countered by reason, slavery had its roots in commerce, in social structure, and in agriculture undertakings; and reason alone was a weak weapon against something so deeply rooted. How was Islām going to eradicate slavery?

⁵⁰ *Sunday Times* (London) as quoted in the *East African Standard* Newspaper (Nairobi, Kenya, August, 25, 1970).

⁵¹ Leeder, S.S., *Veiled Mysteries of Egypt* p.332 (London, 1912).

The ill-informed may suggest that Rasulullāh (s) could have used force. But the ineffectiveness of force is well recognised by any intelligent student of sociology and history. Force may achieve submission but in the end it only achieves hostility. Sometimes the hostility is even more evil than what was removed. A good example of this is the plight of the blacks in America who, even after the 'emancipation of slaves' in 1862, found the attitude of their former white masters towards them had not changed. To this day, the blacks in America complain that they are denied full human rights and opportunities as the white Americans in some States of the US.

Islām's war against slavery aimed at changing the *attitude and mentality* of the whole society, so that after emancipation, slaves would become full-fledged members of society without any need of demonstrations, strikes, civil disobedience and racial riots. And Islām achieved this seemingly impossible objective without any war. To say that Islām waged no war against slavery would not be a true statement. A war it waged, but a war in which neither sword was resorted to, nor was blood spilled.

Islām used three approaches to fight slavery.

Firstly, Islām placed restrictions on acquiring slaves. Prior to Islām, slavery was practised freely. If you couldn't pay your debt, you were made a slave to the Creditor. War captives were either killed or made slaves. In weaker nations, people were hunted like animals, killed or captured and reduced to slavery. Islām, very clearly forbade its followers to enslave people on any excuse. The only exception was a polytheist enemy captured in a war that was fought either in self-defence or with the permission of the Prophet (s) or his rightful successors (but not wars of aggression, such as to capture land or overcome weaker nations for more power). This exception was, in words of Ameer Ali, "in order to serve as guarantee for the preservation of the lives of the captives."⁵²

Thereafter, even for the slaves captured in a just war, the Qur'ān encouraged letting them go by saying, "*to let the captives go free, either with or without any ransom*" (Qur'ān 47:4). In the battles forced upon the Muslims, Rasulullāh (s) ordered very humane treatment of the prisoners who fell into Muslim hands. They could purchase their freedom on payment of small sums of money, and some of them were left off without any payment. The captives of the very first Islāmic battle, Badr, were freed on ransom (in form of money or work like teaching ten Muslim children how to read and write), while those of the tribe of Tay were freed without any ransom.

Other conditions were set: even when it was allowed to take someone as a slave, a mother was not to be separated from her child or brother from brother nor husband from wife or one member of a clan from his clan. The Prophet (s) and the first Imām, Ali bin Abi Tālib ('a) prescribed severe penalties for anyone who took a free man into slavery.

⁵² Ameer Ali, *Muhammadan Law*, vol.2, p.31.

Slavery by purchase was unknown even after Rasulullāh (s) until the Banu Umayya came to power and Mu'āwiya b. Abu Sufyān declared himself the first 'King' in Islām and introduced the practice of acquiring slaves by purchase again. During the reign of the early Banu Abbās caliphs, Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) is known to have preached against slavery, and his views were adopted by the Mu'tazilites. Thus we see that the earnest attempt of Islām to stop its followers from acquiring new slaves was foiled by the Banu Umayya.

The second approach Islām used to fight slavery was to actively campaign the freeing of slaves. Many hadith tell us that freeing a slave brings forgiveness for sins. In some cases, the kaffāra (expiation or 'punishment') for some sins was to free a slave. For example, if a man breaks his fast in the month of Ramadan intentionally, his kaffāra was to free a slave for each day of missed fast. If a person makes a vow (nadhr) and then does not fulfill it, they had to free a slave. If a woman tears her clothes out of grief and rage, she had to make up for it by freeing a slave. If a person killed someone by accident (manslaughter) the kaffāra was to free a slave.

All these examples show us that Islām wanted to free slaves on any excuse it could find. Our books of hadith have laws about freeing slaves (such as the above examples) but there are no āyāt of Qur'ān or ahādith on the recommendation or even rules of purchasing slaves!

Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) taught that if a slave is a Muslim and has worked for seven years then he should be set free. Forcing him to work after seven years is not permissible. It is because of this tradition (*hadith*) that the religious scholars are of the opinion that freeing the slave after seven years is a highly recommended deed.

To set an example for others, Imām Ali purchased and freed one thousand slaves, from his own money. The seventh Imām, Musa al-Kādhim ('a) freed the same number. The fourth Imām, Ali bin al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin ('a) used to free every slave in his house on the eve of 'Eid. The result was that when people imitated the Imāms and freed slaves by their own freewill, there was no hostility against the slaves because it was not imposed and forced on them by the State (as in the case of the slaves in America).

The Imāms also set an example to others by ensuring that the slaves who were in their home were treated like their own family members and when they were freed, they were given sufficient means to earn their livelihood respectably. Often times, because of the kind treatment of slaves, even when they were freed, the slaves did not want to leave their masters and requested to continue living in their homes as family members.

The third approach that Islām used to fight slavery was to restore the dignity of a slave as a human being and even enhanced their social status. Islām made no distinction between a slave and a free man, and all were treated with equality. Even when they stood in prayer, a slave and his master stood side-by-side, shoulder to shoulder. It was this fact that always attracted slaves to Islām. We saw in the

previous lesson how Rasulullāh (s) married his freed slave Zayd to his cousin Zaynab bint Jahsh.

This is something for Muslims to be proud of because to this day there are countries and religions where people are placed in ‘classes’ and the ‘lower class’ are not allowed to mingle with the ‘upper class’. In Book 11 we saw that one of the reasons that the Quraysh did not want Imām Ali (‘a) to be the Caliph was because he treated the Persians and other non-Arabs as equals to the Arabs and he gave credit and positions of authority to people only on the basis of taqwa (God-consciousness). May of the Muslim rulers after Rasulullāh (s) unfortunately had the pre-Islāmic mentality of the Quraysh, that the Arabs were superior to the rest of mankind even if they were Muslims.

Islām recognises no distinction of race or colour, black or white, citizens or soldiers, rulers or subjects, male or female; they are perfectly equal, not in theory only, but in practice. The first *mu’adhdhin* of Islām, a devoted follower of Rasulullāh (s), was a black slave – Bilāl al-Habashi (the Ethiopian).

The Qur’ān lays down the measure of superiority in Islām:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

O humankind! We have created you of a male and a female, and then We made you (into different) races and tribes so that you may get to know each other. Surely the most honourable of you with Allāh is the one who is most pious among you; surely Allāh is All-Knowing and Aware.

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:13

In other words, the only one criterion of superiority or honour of one human being over another is that of taqwa (God-consciousness), which is shown by complete obedience to Allāh. All other man-made distinctions of race and colour have no recognition and place in Islām.

In his famous sermon in ‘Arafah, on 9th Dhul Hijjah 9 AH, during his last pilgrimage, Rasulullāh (s) said, “...and your slaves, see that you feed them such food as you eat yourselves and dress him with what you yourself dress. And if they commit a mistake which you are not inclined to forgive then give them away, for they are the servants of Allāh and are not to be tormented...”

Another distinction in Islām is that the established practice in all nations was that a slave who committed a crime was punished more severely than his master. In Islām, the legal punishment (*hudúd*) for a slave was always half of the punishment of a free man.

Rasulullāh (s) always asked his followers to treat their slaves like family-members and his own household set this example first. Fātima, the Prophet (s)'s daughter, had a slave maid called Fidda. Sayyida Fātima ('a) would share all the housework with her such that she would work one day while Fidda rested and Fidda would work the next day and she would rest.

Imām Ali ('a) had a slave named Qanbar. He once took him shopping and bought two shirts, a cheap coarse one and an expensive one. Then he gave the expensive one to Qanbar. When Qanbar expressed shock at this and asked Imām Ali ('a) why he gave him the expensive shirt, Imām Ali ('a) did not make him feel inferior by saying, 'you are my slave and I wanted to be kind to you.' Instead he said to him, 'no, Qanbar, you are a young man and I am old. It is more right that the young should dress better.' There is no example of such kindness to slaves in the history of mankind!

All the Imāms insisted that when they sat to eat, all the slaves and maids in the house would sit with them and eat together at the same table. Incidents of this are well recorded from their lives where other strangers would even protest at this and the Imāms would refuse to eat without the slaves because, they upheld, 'before God, we are all equal.'⁵³

Muslims were forbidden to call their slaves by degrading names. Instead Muslims would call their male slaves 'young man' (*ghulām*) and the female slaves 'young lady' (*jāriya*).

Some of the most famous companions of Rasulullāh (s) who were once slaves and then freed include: Salmān al-Fārisi, Zayd b. Hāritha (adopted son of Rasulullāh (s)), Ammār Yāsir, Maytham at-Tammār and Bilāl al-Habashi.

This is the end of the Lesson. The notes below are for the student's personal reading and may be given as homework followed by an assignment to write an essay. Much of this lesson on slavery has been taken from the book by Sayyid Akhtar Rizvi, "Slavery from Islāmic and Christian Perspectives" (<http://www.al-Islām.org/slavery/>).

Additional Review Material on the History of Slavery

The Origins of Black Slavery

After Columbus discovered the "New World" in 1492, England, France, Holland and other European nations began claiming the new lands as their own colonies and as they discovered rich resources like cotton, tobacco and sugar in these lands of Africa

⁵³ As in the case of Imām Ali b. Musa ar-Ridā ('a) when he was being taken from Madina to Khorāsān and he would insist that the slaves sit and eat with them during the journey.

and India, they began realizing they needed manpower to work on the plantations to labour for them and produce these resources for their consumption.

The slave trade in West Africa was totally dominated by the Christians while the slave trade in East Africa was carried out with support and help from some Muslim Arab merchants, who unfortunately ignored the teachings of Islām and worked for the European masters for profit. But there were no Muslim Imāms or Shaykhs to encourage or bless this trade. What is most ironic is that when Western historians write about the Christian slave trade, they refer to it as the 'West Africa' or 'Atlantic' slave trade but when they refer to the slave trade in East Africa, they call it the 'Arab' or 'Muslim' slave trade. We saw this hypocrisy in a previous lesson as well when discussing terrorism and the attempts of the media to associate it to Islām when a Muslim commits violence.

The British in particular had colonized India, parts of the Caribbean and parts of Africa. They captured large number of slaves from Africa and shipped them to the Caribbean to labour on their tobacco and sugar plantations. This slave trade was 'booming business' in the 16th and 17th centuries. In time, as the British and French came to the Americas, slaves were brought to North, Central and South America to work in gold and silver mines as well as other plantations there. This notorious commerce in human beings lasted altogether for more than four hundred years, with the Atlantic slave-trade continuing until the late 1870's.

When the slaves were captured, they were forcibly separated from their families, shackled with chains and packed like sardines on the ships that took them across the Atlantic to work in a land they had never seen and to live amongst people whose language and culture they didn't understand. In other words, they lost everything and became tormented slaves overnight. Any resistance was met with severe brutality and oppression. Those who could not survive the whips and died were simply tossed overboard into the ocean.

From the time of the arrival of the Christian Europeans to Africa until 1600, about one million Africans were carried away in slave-ships. At one period, the Portuguese were the chief slave-traders in West Africa. They either took Africans to Brazil, which they had colonized, or they sold them to the Spanish settlers in Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean Islands. In the 17th century, some seven to eight million West Africans found their way across the Atlantic. The Dutch joined the Portuguese as the leading slave-traders in the 17th century, and in the following century the British were the biggest slave-traders. By the time the Atlantic slave-trade was at its height in the 18th century, British ships were carrying more than half of the total of slaves, leaving the rest to be divided up between the Dutch, the French, the Portuguese and the Danes.

By the 19th century, there was another change of the people who took the leading role in exploiting Africa. It was not European countries themselves but the Europeans who had settled in North America (i.e. the 'Americans') who were the ones who organized a large part of the trade. The Americans had recently gained

their independence from Britain and they played the biggest part in the last fifty years of the Atlantic slave-trade, taking away slaves at a greater rate than ever before.

The Christian priests knew about the suffering that was inflicted on people in Africa, on the slave-ships and on the slave-plantations of the Americas, but they remained silent. Many priests themselves carried on slave-trading, especially in Angola, and many others owned slaves in the Americas. The reason the Catholic Church justified slavery was because it gave them the opportunity to “save African souls” by baptising the slaves into Christianity. This was also similar to what the priests did with the Native Americans in Canada and the USA. According to one writer on the subject, Rodney, Walter, “there is no part of the history of the Christian Church which was more disgraceful than its support of the Atlantic slave-trade.”⁵⁴

It is true that there were a few individuals who protested against the Atlantic slave-trade but governments and traders paid no attention to them during the 15-17th centuries. It was not until the late 18th century that serious attempts were made to put a stop to this trade.

East African Slave-Trade

Like West Africa, the slave-trade in East Africa became prominent and was firmly established with the advance and endeavour of the Christian Europe. But this was not prominent until the 18th century when the Portuguese used the help of the Arabs to exploit the slave-trade in East Africa.

There was a lot of competition amongst the European nations in West Africa so the trade expanded to East Africa. Attempts have been made to blame the Arabs for the East Africa slave trade and to this day, on the island of Zanzibar (off the coast of Tanzania, East Africa), there is a Church that shows tourists the dungeons where the ‘Muslim Arabs’ kept slaves in pitiful conditions. What they conveniently forget to mention is that these slaves were held as cargo to be shipped to the Christian Europeans and that these greedy Arabs were only middlemen serving their well-paying masters.

The Sufferings of Slaves

We have already seen what Islām did to alleviate the plight of the slaves and how, for the first and last time in human history, slaves were regarded as human beings having rights. Now let us see how the Europeans captured and treated their slaves from Africa.

⁵⁴ Walter Rodney, *West African and the Atlantic Slave-Trade* (1967), p. 22.

The poor natives of Africa were captured in the cruellest of ways, separated from their families, carried away and treated worse than animals. The methods used by the slave hunters were crude and wasteful, because they were robbers, not warriors. Their practice was to surround some villages that they have marked down for their prey, and approach it silently at night. The village was usually a collection of primitive mud huts thatched with bamboo's and palm leaves, all highly inflammable, which they set alight without any guilt, generally at dawn. As the inhabitants woke to the crackling of flames and struggled into the open, they were rounded up and made prisoners.

Any of them who resisted were cut down, as the slave hunters had no mercy for them. They had no use for the old or infirm or for babies who were all killed on the spot, and only men and women in their prime and young boys and girls were spared, to be carried off into slavery, leaving behind the dead bodies and dying ashes, where once there had been happy homes and flourishing settlements. The waste was out of all proportion, from its first moments to the last.

Those captured far inland were less fortunate, for they had to march to the coast on their feet over many miles of thick forest and rough desert. They walked almost naked, with no protection against sharp thorns, and jagged stones. To prevent escape, they had heavy forked poles fastened round their necks; their hands, if they were troublesome, might be secured through holes in a rough wooden board, and they were fettered with chains on their ankles. Linked together by ropes, the long lines known as coffles, they trudged miserably on towards their terrifying fate. Their captors drove them relentlessly forward, ignoring wounds and whipping them if necessary. If any succumbed, he was thrown on one side; if any of them became too ill, they were left to die or more mercifully knocked on the head.⁵⁵

The slave's work on the plantation was really very hard. From the slave's point of view this was skilled work: he had to cultivate a crop unknown to him - for the most part sugar in the West Indies, cotton or tobacco in America. All was new and strange to him; he had, therefore, to be broken in; he had to be taught his new duties; he had to be 'seasoned' as the saying was. 'Seasoning' was the harsh discipline that every slave underwent.⁵⁶

The slaves were sold at auctions, being bought in stark naked, men and women, alike, and mounted on a chair, where the bidders handled and prodded them and felt their muscles and examined their teeth and made them jump and flex their arms, to satisfy themselves that they were not diseased or disabled. As the slaves were bought single, it followed that often husband and wife, children and parents went to different owners; and the loss of family and all that the slaves held dear was added to the loss of liberty. So the slave left the auction room, bereaved of everything, to begin a new life of 'abject, hopeless and crushing servitude'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Sherrard, *Freedom from Fear* (London, 1959), p. 61-62.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67

Why was Slavery Abolished

Someone may point out: Was it not Christian Britain which finally abolished the slavery? Well, if someone practices tyranny isn't he the one who has to give up that practice?

The truth of the matter is that Britain was the biggest slave-trader and when it called for abolishing slave-trade, the reason were not humane or moral – it was economic.

The movement against slavery was not spear-headed by Churches; it was led by a handful of moralists whose cries remained unheeded till the economic necessity compelled the British Parliament to pass a bill in 1807 against slave-trade. After 26 years, another bill was passed to abolish slavery itself in British-held countries in 1833.

As Professor D W Brogan writes in the introduction of Dr. Eric Williams' magnificent book *Capitalism and Slavery*, "the abolition of the slave-trade and later the abolition of slavery, were not merely the results of a rising standard of political ethics in Britain but were a form of cutting of losses. The West Indies sugar monopoly became intolerable to a booming industrial society..." To summarise, in the words of Prof. Brogan, the slave system was "tolerated, defended, praised as long as it was profitable."

What had happened is that the French at one point were able to produce more sugar than the English in West Indies. Up until then, there was a convenient "triangular trade" between Africa, the Caribbean and England. Slaves were taken from West Africa to the Caribbean to work the on the plantations. Sugar, tobacco, coffee and cotton were produced in the Caribbean and taken to England for processing. Utensils, guns, handcuffs and fetters were taken from England to Africa. The British had a monopoly on all this.⁵⁸

Between 1783 and 1789 the progress of the French sugar islands, of Saint Domingue especially, was the most amazing phenomenon in colonial development. The fertility of the French soil was decisive and French sugar cost one-fifth less than Britain.⁵⁹

The British had to stop the French and the only way to do so was to stop the slave trade. Of course the British had colonized India as well. If they could end the Atlantic slave trade to the West Indies and the Caribbean, they could still produce sugar for themselves in India.

Gaston-Martin, the well-known French historian of the slave-trade and the Caribbean colonies, has rightly accused the then British Prime Minister Pitt of his propaganda to free the slaves 'in the name, no doubt of humanity, but also to ruin French commerce.'

⁵⁸ Dr. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122

Hypocrisy of The Abolitionists

“Ironically enough,” says Dr. Williams, “it was the former slave owners of the West Indies (i.e. the British) who now held the humanitarian torch. Those who, in 1807, were predicting that abolition of the British slave-trade would ‘diminish commerce, diminish revenue and diminish navigation; and in the end... totally remove the great cornerstone of British prosperity,’ were, after 1807, the very men who protested against ‘a system of man-stealing against a poor and inoffensive people.’”⁶⁰

A great mass movement for abolition of the slave-trade developed in Jamaica in 1849. Overnight parties and sects were united on the question of justice to Africa. They denounced the slave-trade and slavery as “opposed to humanity - productive of the worst evils to Africa - degrading to all engaged in the traffic.”

And the worth of all such high-sounding phrases may be judged from the fact that the British capitalism, even after destroying West Indian slavery, “continued to thrive on Brazilian, Cuban and American slavery.”⁶¹ This was because the use of slave-produced sugar in the West Indies was bad for the British economy but no one proposed to stop the use of the slave-produced cotton from the United States. In fact, no one proposed seriously to stop the use of the slave-produced sugar from Brazil or Cuba. It was money - not a passion to be good - that was the deciding factor.

This hypocrisy is seen even today when a ‘superpower’ will condemn the nations it sees as its enemy for an act against democracy, the freedom of others and ‘human rights’ but it will turn a blind eye when its own ally does exact the same or even worse, support and aid it. The idea of unjust nations is always to use propaganda (i.e. the media) to mislead and confuse the masses.

The taking of slaves continued for at least another 25 years even after 1833.

Was the American Civil War to Emancipate the Slaves?

As the Europeans began opposing slavery in the guise of being humanitarian, the use of slaves continued to rage in America. Here lies another myth: Most North Americans believe that the 19th century American Civil War was fought to free the slaves and they give credit for this to Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States.

In those days, America was divided into ‘the Union’ and ‘the Confederacy’ and the Civil War was between the two parties. The Union (or “the North”) was led by Abraham Lincoln and was made up of 20 free States to the North and 5 border slave states and the Confederacy (or “the South”) was made up of 11 States to the South

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 175-6.

⁶¹ Ibid.

that still practised and upheld slavery.⁶² The South still practised slavery because that was where all the plantations were. The Northern States (closer to the Canadian border) were too cold to have slave plantations around the year anyway. Many slaves dreamt of and attempted escaping from the South to the North.

Did Lincoln really champion the fight to free the slaves? Let us see.

The famous author Dale Carnegie wrote in his book *Lincoln, the Unknown*:⁶³

‘Ask the average American citizen today why the Civil War was fought, and the chances are that he will reply, ‘To free the slaves’. Here is a sentence taken from Lincoln’s first inaugural address: “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it now exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so...”’

Carnegie also quotes Lincoln as saying, “My objective in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving the others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the coloured race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause; and I shall do more whenever I believe doing more will help the cause.”⁶⁴

Lincoln himself married into a slave-owning family. Part of the money that his wife received from the settlement of her father’s estate had come from the sale of slaves. And the only really intimate friend that Lincoln ever had, Joshua Speed, was a member of a slave-owning family.

As the battle between the Union and Confederacy continued, there was a risk that both France and England were on the verge of recognising the Confederacy and not the Union. France was ruled by Napoleon III who believed that if the Confederates won they would favour his new empire. In fact the South offered to give Napoleon III twelve million dollars worth of cotton if he would recognize the Confederacy and they promised to give him so many orders for import goods that it would start smoke rolling out of every factory chimney in France, night and day.

Napoleon III therefore urged Russia and England to join him in recognizing the Confederacy. The British listened eagerly to Napoleon’s plans. The United States was getting too rich and powerful to please them. They wanted to see the nation divided, the Union broken. Besides, they needed the South’s cotton. Many of England’s factories had closed, and a million people were not only idle but poor and reduced to actual paupers. Children were crying for food, hundreds of people were dying of

⁶² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_\(American_Civil_War\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_(American_Civil_War))

⁶³ Dale Carnegie, *Lincoln the Unknown* (1948), chapter 22.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

starvation. There was one way that England could get cotton and come out of poverty and that was to join Napoleon III in recognising the Confederacy. And besides, as far as the Europeans were concerned, the fighting between the North and the South in America was a meaningless battle. They had no particular reason to support one over the other, other than the economic advantages of supporting the South.

Now if that were done, what would happen in America? The South would get guns, food, railway equipment, and a tremendous lift in confidence and morale. And what would the North get? Two new and powerful enemies. The situation, bad enough now, would be hopeless then.

Abraham Lincoln knew this and he confessed in 1862, 'we must either change our tactics now or lose the game.' Lincoln realized that for him to win, Europe's attitude towards the war must be changed, and he knew how to do it. A million people in Europe had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - had read it and wept and learned to hate the heartaches and injustice of slavery. So Abraham Lincoln knew that if he issued his "Proclamation of Emancipation", Europeans would see the war in a different light. It would no longer be a bloody quarrel over the preservation of a Union that meant nothing to them. Instead, it would be respected as a holy crusade to destroy slavery. European Governments would then not dare recognise the South. Public opinion wouldn't tolerate aiding people who engaged in human slavery.

Finally, therefore, in July 1862 Lincoln decided to issue his Proclamation of Emancipation (i.e. the proclamation to free the slaves). His advisers however told him the timing was not good because their army had recently suffered humiliating defeats to the South. So Lincoln waited. Two months later, they gained some victory and so finally, the Proclamation of Emancipation was published in September 1862, which was to be effective on 1st January 1863.

As Carnegie put it, Lincoln may have been a humanitarian and perhaps he, from the depth of heart, was against slavery. 'But it does not mean that we should glorify him by false propaganda. The reality was that he did not fight the Civil War to emancipate the slaves; rather he emancipated the slaves to win the Civil War and save the Union.'⁶⁵

Territorial Slavery

So far we have discussed one type of slavery i.e., household slavery. There was a second type of slavery called Territorial Slavery or subjugation of one nation by another.

Though household slavery is now supposedly abolished, territorial slavery is still very much alive. In the past we had nations that were 'British Colonies' or 'French

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Colonies' and later these nations were given their flag independence. The Europeans used to take raw material from Africa and India and other places they colonized back to their own countries for processing and production. So when they gave these colonies their independence, the nations were left with no infrastructure. The result is that to this day, poor African nations will sell their raw material as cheap exports to the richer nations and then import back products made from their own raw material at higher prices. Often the goods sold to African nations are expired or 'old stock'.

Another form of Territorial Slavery can be seen in the Americas and places like Australia. The Native Indians who were the original inhabitants of "the New World" (including places like Canada) were hunted like buffaloes and gradually pushed out from their own lands and have now been forced to live in colder or less fertile lands called "Reserves". The Aborigines of Australia were subjected to the same treatment.

Dr. Eric Williams quotes a story of the Native Indian Chief Hatuey who, doomed to die for resisting the invaders, staunchly refused to accept the Christian faith as the gateway to salvation when he learned that his executioners, too, hope to get to Heaven.⁶⁶

Even more tragic was the fate of the Africans in Southern Africa. The Portuguese, armed with the Pope's decree to "reduce the infidels to servitude" until the recent past continued to keep Angola and Mozambique under the yoke of Territorial Slavery. Pope Paul VI would often issue statements on political problems of the world but never advised Portugal about its "subjects" in Africa. The Popes maintained special relations with Portugal and Spain, the two Roman Catholic nations that stubbornly refused to free their African colonies. In July 1970, Pope Paul VI received some leaders of freedom fighters of Portuguese African colonies. This meeting enraged Portugal, which issued a protest and the Vatican nervously issued an explanation. On July 11 1970, the *Standard* newspaper (in Kenya) published a news article, "Pope's note comforts Portugal" explaining that the Vatican had said that the Pope had received them (i.e., the leaders of liberation movements of Africa under Portuguese rule) as Catholics and Christians, without reference to their political functions. He reminded them to the Church's teaching that peaceful means should always be used even in seeking what one considers to be one's right.

Subsequently, a black Roman Catholic wrote a sarcastic letter that was published in the same newspaper to say, "The earlier news that the Holy Father had received the said leaders had perturbed me much. Now this clarification has put my anxiety to rest.... It was the Roman Catholic Church which established Western colonialism by dividing all the newly discovered lands and countries into two halves: giving the Spaniards the Western half (like Americas), and granting Portugal the Eastern half (like Africa and India). ...according to our beliefs of the Papal infallibility, Pope Paul VI is bound to carry on and justify whatever was decreed by his Holy predecessors.

⁶⁶ Dr. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, p. 8.

Therefore, according to my thinking he should not have encouraged those leaders. Now his clarification has comforted me a lot spiritually. Now I may sleep in peace with a sure knowledge that my Church has not condemned itself by implying that previous Popes were wrong in establishing and supporting the 'enlightenment' of this black continent under Portuguese Imperialism."⁶⁷

What is interesting is that the Pope advised those seeking freedom from their colonial masters to always seek "peaceful means" even for what was their right but there was no advice to the Portuguese colonialists. This was similar to the Catholic priests during the Atlantic slave-trade who would, at the time of sailings of the slave-ships, pray to the Almighty to ensure the safety of the ships and always admonish the black slaves to behave gently and obediently but never thought it necessary to advise the masters of the slaves to think of them as human beings.

And the same can be seen today where a wealthy or powerful nation will invade other countries when it feels its right is at stake; but when unarmed civilians want to free themselves from their oppressive rulers (who are puppets of the rich nation), the rich nation will 'urge' them to resort to 'dialogue' and 'ensure there is a peaceful transition.' There is therefore always hypocrisy with the nations that have power and weapons. They will speak of democracy and humanitarian rights when it serves them well but they will ignore it and turn a blind eye when it is in their political or economic interests.

The Middle East is another example of Territorial Slavery: the plight of the Palestinians enslaved by the Israelis (who are backed by the USA). Most Middle East nations are ruled by monarchies and there is no freedom of speech or election. Iran is always condemned because it is not submissive to the Western powers but the brutal treatment of civilians and the lack of women's rights in the other nations like Saudi Arabia are never mentioned because they are 'friends' and 'allies' to the hypocritical Western nations.

South Africa's Apartheid system or racial segregation that lasted from 1948 to 1993 is another example. There were clear signs and boundaries where only 'the white man' was allowed and 'blacks and dogs' were not permitted. The whole world condemned South Africa but the United States and the United Kingdom refused to impose any sanctions on South Africa. The Church did not condemn it either until much later when other African nations gained independence and it was politically the right thing to do. Rhodesia had the same fate as South Africa until its independence in 1980 when it became Zimbabwe. The common joke amongst the Africans is that of an African telling a European, "When you came, you had the Bible and we had the land. Now we have the Bible and you have the land."

Territorial slavery can therefore be direct (when a land is colonized or invaded) or it can be indirect, such as when a nation supports tyrannical rulers by supplying them with arms and using the media to favour them, even though the people of that land

⁶⁷ Akhtar Rizvi, *Islāmic and Christian Perspectives on Slavery*.

do not support or want these tyrannical rulers. Territorial slavery continues to thrive to this day by means of bribes and threats to control weaker nations.

After the Second World War, the United Nations was formed so that every nation in the world could be a member and have a platform to voice its concerns and demand justice. But some nations were given special “veto” powers. These five nations are America, Britain, China, Russia and France. This gives them special powers to ‘block’ any resolution or decision made by the rest of the world. In other words, the United Nations has become a ‘legal’ way to control the rest of the world by a few rich nations. If, for example, any nation speaks of the oppression of Israel at the United Nations, the United States will immediately ‘veto’ any proposal to condemn Israel.

Islām holds the last hope for humanity to free itself from all injustices and oppression of others. This hope is the return of Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) who will fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with injustice and tyranny. Amen.

﴿وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا﴾

And say, ‘The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Indeed falsehood is bound to vanish.’

- Surah Isrā, 17:81

