

Impressum

Klaus Bung (ed): The Satanic Verse and the Pursuit of Peace:
Philosophical Essays
in the Spirit of Bertrand Russell

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

In this volume, the editor has brought together thirteen texts which question the certainties which can turn well-meaning believers into fanatics, and fanatics into terrorists who believe their ideals are so holy and come from such a high authority (God) that they must override the prohibitions of secular law and the natural feelings of compassion with their victims. We hear the voices of (listed here in alphabetical order) Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Humanists, Jews and Muslims.

Klaus Bung (ed): The Satanic Verse and the Pursuit of Peace: Philosophical Essays in the Spirit of Bertrand Russell

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^(01) Yusuf Mubarak: The Satanic Verse

Impressum

Yusuf Mubarak: The Satanic Verse:
Do Muslims **have** to be fanatics?
Or: Learning to Live with Doubt

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

This essay deals with the Salman Rushdie ("The Satanic Verses") affair from the point of view of a young British Muslim, who has a progressive and affectionate attitude to his own religion, is averse to fanaticism and sees good and bad in the attitudes and actions of all parties involved in the affair. He sees that there are lessons to be learnt not only by his own community, but by followers of all religions and by Western secularists. Rushdie's book has something important to say to all of them.

The author describes the incident which gave rise to the title "The Satanic Verses" and its social background. If this incident is true, it is apt to destroy blind faith in any scripture. The author explains to western readers the mechanisms of Muslim sensitivities and taboos. He asks Muslim readers whether they are not oversensitive, and have not cultivated over the years a form of excessive respect to aspects of their own religion, which may be bordering on covert idolatry, which is in itself anti-Islamic.

He gives examples of misreadings of the novel "The Satanic Verses", and discusses the need for sensitive, i.e. metaphorical interpretation, of secular as well as of sacred literature. He discusses the benefits of doubt, e.g. that it reduces fanaticism and violence. This however is no cause for western readers to gloat and feel superior.

The essay concludes with examples of Solomonic judgements (fatwas) delivered by Muslim sages in past centuries about offending poets. These show how wise and tolerant the Islamic tradition can be and asks that this tradition be revived and cultivated.

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Yusuf Mubarak: The Satanic Verse: Do Muslims *have* to be fanatics? Or: Learning to Live with Doubt

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INTRODUCTION

One thousand four hundred years ago, on one occasion when the Holy Prophet dictated a passage of the Holy Qur'an to his scribes as it had been revealed to him, it is said, and we are not sure whether this is history, legend or slander, he uttered two verses which were not the inspiration of Allah, as he firmly believed, but which had in fact been "put on his tongue" by the devil. Promptly Allah's true messenger, the Archangel Gabriel, appeared to the Prophet, exposed the deception which had taken place and told him the correct version of the text, which is as we have it today in the Holy Qur'an. The verses in question dealt with idolatry.

Twelve years ago, when Salman Rushdie in his novel "The Satanic Verses" reminded the world of this incident (1) and explored its implications, an almighty row broke out which resulted in Salman Rushdie being sentenced to death for blasphemy by a highly placed elder of the Muslim community, a sentence (fatwa) which in turn caused the non-Muslim world to be up in arms against the allegedly fanatical, backward and uncivilised Muslim community and their sensitivities. As a result much of the debate at the time was pro-Islamic versus anti-Islamic rather than about specific philosophical or literary issues.

Islam is not a dead monolith. It is a living tradition. It is what its followers make it. Devout Muslims come in all shapes and sizes. Not all are and were fanatics, yet they can be devout. There are conservatives and progressives among them. Young Muslims sometimes perceive things differently from their elders. Now that the dust has settled, it will therefore be useful to look at the issues again. Westerners (I use this term loosely to refer to non-Muslims, especially Christians and Western secularists who share a similar way of thinking) have to understand more about Muslim (or often generally "Eastern") ways of thinking to see that the uproar was not quite as unreasonable as it then seemed. Those Muslims who were so grossly offended by "The Satanic Verses" have to consider whether they were carried away by emotions and whether it is not necessary to allow more

reason in the discussion of our religion. Many young Muslims in Britain, who live between two worlds, feel that way.

I shall illustrate the dangers of literalism by giving an example of how "The Satanic Verses" were misinterpreted, perhaps in good faith. I shall cite two famous fatwas to illustrate a dignified Muslim response to the liberties which poets take. Many of the lessons to be drawn apply to followers of **any** religion.

This is an exploratory essay. It does not try to lay down the law. The exploration will not be systematic but attached to issues arising from my examples.

The questions I intend to explore are the following:

1. Who guarantees that a Holy Scripture is true?
2. How do Muslim sensitivities differ from Western sensitivities?
3. The deeper meaning of idolatry
4. Can excessive respect lead to idolatry?
5. Is doubt dangerous? Can doubt be a blessing?
6. Do we **have** to be fanatics?
7. The dangers of literalism
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9. Why literature has to be ambiguous?
10. Is the Holy Qur'an unambiguous?

1 Satanic Seeds of Doubt

Many non-Muslims and even some Muslims have wondered about the significance of the title of Salman Rushdie's book "The Satanic Verses". It is obviously a racy title, but pious people may immediately take exception to it and fear something evil in a book carrying the name of iblis, the evil one, the shaitan, on its cover.

Some people can be worried about the mere **naming** of something bad or unclean, just as in good English society, say at a dinner party, merely the ejaculation of some dirty word can cause the same offence as if the offending object itself had been brought into the room. Some people will therefore be upset in their religious sentiments if something unclean or unholy appears in the close vicinity of something holy, or if it is connected to it even if only by some allusion. Since every society decides for itself, quite arbitrarily, which words and objects are considered offensive, the mere title "The Satanic Verses" can for such sensitive people be enough to be offensive. I like such sensitivity, since I have grown up with it. I think our culture is "superior" to Western secularism in that it still recognises some boundaries of respect (for elders, for what is holy, etc.), retains some sensitivities, has not yet become a society in which "anything goes" and is not yet as brutalised as much modern English culture has become.

1.1 What is Idolatry

But there is also a danger in the cultivation of such sensitivity, or oversensitivity: it may lead to "idolatry".

Some people define idolatry as merely the worship of idols (e.g. statues). In this form, idolatry is strongly condemned by our religion; it may almost be the greatest sin.

Others say idolatry is the worship of anyone other than God as if he or it were God. I think this comes closer to the truth. I would like to generalise even further: **Idolatry is a form of excessive respect.** It is therefore possible to practise "immaterial idolatry". The only question on which one can disagree is where does excess begin. Up to what boundary is respect necessary or legitimate?

Therefore our **oversensitivity**, if any, **may** be a form of idolatry. Do we see a kind of **material** holiness in the thing, idea, word or person (**other than God**) to be protected from contagion? We will take up this point again in Section 2.

However, the title "The Satanic Verses" has a much deeper significance and gives the clue for the understanding of the whole book, a clue which I feel has been regularly overlooked in the uproar about it. Our elders have complained about the

vulgarity of the book, about its lack of respect towards the Holy Prophet and his family, about the use of a medieval abusive nickname, etc. These have been popular issues, to which both ordinary Muslims and the Western public could respond (however wrongly) and with which they could somehow sympathise. This perhaps is the reason why these irrelevant issues were put into the foreground of the protest.

1.2 Doubt

However, the point at issue is much more abstract, much more important, and therefore much less popular and much less suitable for public debate. Moreover, it strikes at the heart of the documents (holy scriptures) not only of Islam but of any revealed religion, i.e. any religion which derives, or says it derives, its authority from a scripture.

The issue of "The Satanic Verses" is the issue of doubt.

Is doubt permitted or even desirable? How can we dispel doubt? Which person or which scripture, if any, is infallible? How can we be sure they are infallible? If they are not infallible, why should we believe them in cases where they are in conflict with our own intuition? How do we interpret them? Can any text be treated as infallible when we have to concede that no text is unambiguous and none can be understood without interpretation by fallible human beings and without re-formulation into language which may itself contain other ambiguities? Is there any solution to these problems, or do we have to accept that, in matters of religion at least, we have to continue to live with some uncertainty?

It does, by the way, not follow from these questions that we cannot or should not continue to follow in a sensible way the morals, life-style and religious practices of our parents and of our community. All this is compatible with doubt. Good Muslims do not have to be **blind** believers.

But if we accept the legitimacy of doubt, we can practise, and transmit to our children, the life-style (including its religion) of our community **without becoming fanatics**. This is the issue of The Satanic Verses.

1.3 Social Background to the Incident

The incident of the Satanic Verses is alluded to, but not described, in Rushdie's book. It is alleged to have happened during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet and is mentioned in some of the earliest commentaries (written by devout Muslims) on surah 53:19 and related verses. Since the incident, if true, undermines (not faith as such but) blind faith in the reliability of the text of the Holy Qur'an, all Muslims would be happier if it had not occurred or could be proved to be untrue or legendary, perhaps an invention of the enemies of Islam. As devout Muslims we have so-to-speak a vested interest in the falsity of this story, while it may be said that the enemies of Islam have a vested interest in its being true. Accordingly, there are some Muslim scholars who have dismissed the incident as legendary, untrue, or anti-Islamic propaganda (an anti-faith time bomb). Over the centuries, our elders have done their best to commit the embarrassing story to oblivion. But there are other Islamic scholars who, like most Western scholars of Islam, argue that the incident is probably historical, on the grounds that the devoted early Muslim commentators who included it in their commentaries on the Holy Book would not have done so if they had regarded it as untrue and hostile to Islam. They were closer to the original event or sources, had the same vested interest in the story being a fabrication, and only their scrupulous honesty, regardless of propagandistic considerations, forced them to record the story and thus preserve it for posterity. To them it is the one remotely embarrassing incident in the life of our otherwise perfect Holy Prophet (PBUH).

To understand the incident, it is important to know a little about the way in which the Holy Qur'an came into existence. It was revealed to the Holy Prophet over a period of twenty-three years in smaller or larger segments. The message was carried to the Holy Prophet by the Archangel Gabriel. The Holy Prophet had to repeat what he heard to ensure that he had understood correctly. Since he himself could not write, he dictated the verses to other people who wrote them down on any material that came to hand. Revelations usually came to him during nights of prayer in holy and lonely places and dealt not only with general questions of faith but also with quite topical matters affecting his small, but steadily growing, band of followers.

Hostility to his preaching was great. Mecca, the desert town in which he started his mission, was not only a big trading point where various caravan routes crossed each other but also a place of pilgrimage in which three goddesses, Al-Lat (meaning simply "Goddess", the feminine form of the Arabic word "Al-Lah"), Al-Uzzah and Al-Manat were worshipped. People who arrived from all over the Arabian Peninsula to worship their images also brought trade and prosperity, as modern pilgrims to the holy places of Islam (and pilgrims of any religion elsewhere) do today. The "new religion" which preached that there was only one true God, and invisible at that, would, if successful, have lead to the

abolition of the cults of the three goddesses, the destruction of their shrines, which were so profitable to the merchants of Mecca, their families and their employees and the many other people who depended on them for their livelihood. They were therefore very reluctant to accept the religion which threatened to put them out of work.

Nobody knows what thoughts may have been in the mind of the Holy Prophet at that time. We believe that he simply followed the words or instructions he received through the Archangel. Apparently there were negotiations between him and the most influential merchants of Mecca aimed at reconciling their interests in maintaining the existence of the three shrines and the message of the Archangel Gabriel that there was only one God and he alone should be worshipped.

One compromise which seems to have been discussed and which, as is alleged, the Holy Prophet may have put to God in prayer was that the three deities could be approached for "intercession" (as opposed to "be worshipped"), i.e. play the role of mediators between human beings and Allah. Their shrines could then have been preserved in some form or other and the trade with the pilgrims to these shrines could have continued.

1.4 The Incident

I now quote from W Montgomery Watt: "Muhammad at Mecca" (2) where more details can be found:

"When Muhammad saw that the Meccans were turning from his message, he had a great desire to make it easier for them to accept it. At this juncture Surat an-Najm (3) was revealed; but when Muhammad came to the verses, 'Have ye considered al-Lat and al-'Uzza, And Manat, the third, the other?' (4) Then, the tradition continues, 'as he was saying it to himself, eager to bring it to his people, Satan threw upon his tongue (the verses), "These are the swans exalted, Whose intercession is to be hoped for"'. On hearing this the Meccans were delighted, and at the end when Muhammad prostrated himself, they all did likewise. And the news of this even reached the Muslims in Abyssinia. Then Gabriel came to Muhammad and showed him his error; for his comfort God revealed 22.51, and abrogated the satanic verses by revealing the true continuation of the Surah." (p 102)

"The Muslim scholars, not possessing the modern Western concept of gradual development, considered Muhammad from the very first to have been explicitly aware of the full range of orthodox dogma. Consequently it was difficult for them to explain how he failed to notice the heterodoxy of the satanic verses. The truth rather is that his monotheism was originally, like that of his more enlightened contemporaries, somewhat vague, and in particular was not so strict that the recognition of inferior divine beings was felt to be incompatible with it. He probably regarded al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat as celestial beings of a lower grade than God, in much the same way as Judaism and Christianity have recognised the existence of angels." (p 104)

W Montgomery Watt (5) summarises the situation:

"Some Muslims today reject this whole story, but it is difficult to see how any Muslim would have invented it, or how a non-Muslim could have persuaded distinguished Muslim scholars accept it."

After the "Satanic Verses" had been eliminated from the Holy Qur'an, Surah 53:19-26 read as follows, as it does today:

"Have ye seen Lat and 'Uzza and another, the third goddess, Manat? What! For you the male sex and for Him, the female? Behold, such would be indeed a division most unfair! These are nothing but names which ye have devised, -- ye and your fathers, -- for which God has sent down no authority whatever... (19-23) ... How many-so-ever be the angels in the heavens, their intercession will avail nothing.(26)" (p 1445) (6)

1.5 The Problem with Infallibility

Why is this story so dangerous to the continuance of **blind** faith in a person's life? Why does it stir up the uncertainty which means that nobody can any longer complain of, or act against, blasphemy with total conviction and rigour? If this story is true (and, regrettably, even if it is not true but remembered as a wicked tale!), it prompts any intelligent child, or at least teenager, to ask: If even the Holy Prophet (PBUH) could be deceived by Satan assuming the form of the Archangel Gabriel and making him utter false verses, how can we be sure that some similar deception did not occur (without being corrected later) in some other part of the Holy Qur'an? True, Allah sent the Archangel to save the Holy Prophet from perpetuating his error and made him correct the verses. But how do we know that this second "apparition" was the Archangel himself and that there was not then some interference from Satan? And if we are to believe that the Archangel could come and correct the Satanic Verses and prevent Satan from interfering on this second occasion, why did he not intervene on the first?

But if we can not trust in the Holy Prophet and in the Holy Qur'an, not absolutely trust I mean, in whom and in what can we "absolutely" trust? Only in our common sense? In our tradition? In our varying levels of understanding, which lead us to judge what is plausible and what is implausible, what is desirable and what is undesirable?

This is how it seems to be in the modern stage of some other revealed religions, for example in Christianity (7). Christians also say that they are strictly following the bible, and its words are decisive, divine and absolute truth. Their practice, however, is different.

Examples:

1. The Anglican Church now has women priests even though Jesus had only male apostles and the Bible expressly forbids women to speak in church:

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be obedient, as also says

the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." (Bible, New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

2. Jesus told people, in effect, not to save money, not to hoard goods, not to take out insurance policies:

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Salman in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these... Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." (Bible, New Testament, Matthew 6:26-34)

Nevertheless, this is what they all do.

If there is some verse in the Bible which, taken literally, seems impracticable or unreasonably harsh or unrealistic, Christian theologians are only too ready to say: "This is not how it was meant, it is to be interpreted with common sense, etc.". Common sense decides what was "meant" or "not meant".

The Jewish Bible says that anyone who tries to persuade the citizens to serve other Gods is to be strangled or stoned to death (Deuteronomy 13:6-12). Yet for reasons best known to the Jews themselves, no such sentence has been carried out for many a year or century. Are they disobeying God's word in the name of common sense? Or must we all, sometimes, disobey God's apparent word (if it is God's word) in the name of common sense?

Whatever the Holy Scripture, the Scripture itself cannot decide or tell us whether or not it is to be obeyed, whether or not it is to be obeyed literally, and to what extent it is to be re-interpreted. Attempting this would lead to a vicious circle. The validity of the Holy Scripture therefore is derived not from what the scripture says about itself (since each scripture will demand strict obedience for itself) (8), but from authorities outside the scripture, e.g. tradition, the opinion of our parents and elders, or even common sense (none of which, by the way, is infallible; none of which, especially, is as infallible as the Scripture claims to be or is claimed to be!)

Do similar considerations not also apply of necessity to the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an?

They do not if the Holy Qur'an is more holy, more true, "more absolute" than the Bible, as we have been brought up to believe. But the incident of the Satanic Verses or the mere idea that such an incident could have occurred, the mere idea casts us back into uncertainty, even about our Holy Qur'an and throws us back to the human resource of common sense, which we then bolster up by underpinning our traditions by reference to the Holy Qur'an, the sayings of the Holy Prophet and other religious precepts.

Each community has its social values and customs, all equally valid (whatever the community and religion), and then underpins them by establishing a link with divine revelation.

Problems of a similar nature arise for Hindus. The authority of the Vedas is officially recognised by all Hindu sects and establishes their unity. In many ways it has been overtaken by quite different philosophies, such as those contained in the Bhagavad Gita and in the many radically differing interpretations derived from it (at least six distinct schools of philosophy which are considered orthodox) (9). If interpretations can differ to such an extent, it makes little sense to speak, if anybody does, of the "absolute" authority of the Vedas. However, **having an unchanging text can make sure that, at least, the interpretations do not drift too far apart.** For each fresh translation or each fresh interpretation one goes back to the same text in the same original language. Thus at least the Chinese whispers syndrome is avoided. In practice even Hindus do not go back to the Vedas but base their philosophical teaching on the Gita and the Upanishads, which are much more advanced than the Vedas, much more spiritual and, especially, "monotheistic", which my teachers at Mosque tended to forget when they railed against Hinduism (thereby implicitly encouraging us to bait our Hindu fellow pupils, whereas we do not like others to bait "our" invisible God.)

Christians are faced with a similar problem of authority and interpretation. Max Müller has discussed this in his autobiography. (10) If I, or anyone, accept that a scripture is infallible because somebody (e.g. a commentator) tells me so, I must also accept that that person is infallible, which plainly he isn't since he isn't God, who alone is infallible. To assume anything else would be dangerously near to committing idolatry. It therefore depends on my reason (common sense) whether I accept a scripture as infallible or the incident of the Satanic Verses as true. It is my duty to exercise my judgement well (that's why God gave me reason), in case I accept a false scripture as true (Satanic Verse syndrome!). **The Holy Qur'an continuously appeals to my reason** to induce me to believe. But if I agree as a result of arguments, is my attitude that of belief or of knowledge?

Here is just one example, chosen at random from dozens of others, of the Holy Qur'an appealing to my reason. The question whether people of today would consider the arguments valid is not at issue here, but only the fact that the Holy Qur'an attempts to appeal to my reason in order to induce belief and to make me accept its authority. My acceptance of the Holy Qur'an is therefore based on reason (another word for common sense).

"Say: 'Who is more worthy, Allah or the idols they serve besides Him? Surely worthier is He who made the heavens and the earth. He sends down water from the sky, bringing forth gardens of delight. Try as you may, you cannot cause such trees to grow. (59-60)... Surely worthier is He who answers the oppressed when they cry out to Him and relieves their affliction. It is He who has given you the earth to inherit. Another god besides Allah? How little you reflect!' (62) ... The unbelievers say: 'When we and our fathers are turned to dust, shall we be raised to life?

We were promised this once before, and so were our fathers. It is but a fable of the ancients.' Say: 'Roam the world and see what was the end of the guilty...' (69-70). (Surah 27:59-70) (11)

Obviously there is a decision to be made!

Once and for all or repeated as insights and understanding change? If only once (the problem of the "apostate"), why? If arguments are a legitimate means to turn me from unbelief to belief, then arguments are a legitimate means to turn me from one belief to another.

The question which arises for Christians is why the Bible is infallible. Because the Pope says so? Is the pope infallible? Who says so? Your parents? How do you know they are right? Are your parents infallible? And so on, ad infinitum. Here too it boils down to a matter of common sense - on which different communities and human beings will not agree.

But even in Islam we have at least one outstanding example demonstrating, I regret to say, the relativity of our holiest text, where at least some of us quite deliberately no longer follow its original instructions. This is the institution of muta marriage (temporary marriage), still practised by Shi'i Muslims but no longer by Sunnis. It was instituted through the Holy Prophet in Surah 4:24, which reads:

"You are permitted in addition to seek out wives with your wealth in modest conduct but not in fornication; give them their pay for the enjoyment you have had of them as a duty"

The words "for a specified period" used to be added. Umar ibn-al-Khattab (Omar) (12), the second caliph, tried to abolish the institution, and the Sunnis follow his ruling, whereas the Shi'is do not, arguing: "What the Holy Prophet has instituted no Caliph can abrogate" (13). In Sunni translations of the Holy Qur'an the passage is often almost incomprehensible. Its meaning comes out clearly in Shi'i translations and even more so in its commentaries, whereas Sunni commentaries seem to be designed to obscure the meaning of the passage.

Shi'i translation:

"And it is allowed for you, besides in these that ye may seek them by means of your wealth taking them into marriage and not committing fornication; and as such of them ye had Muta with them, give them their dowries as a fixed reward; and it shall not be a sin on you, in whatever ye mutually agree to vary after the fixed reward". (Surah 4:24) (14)

2 The Satanic Curse: Idoliteralism



In 1989, in a northern English town, I attended a lecture by Ahmed Deedat (1918–2005), founder of the Islamic Propagation Centre in Birmingham, England, (15), in a packed townhall.

It was entitled: "How Rushdie Fooled the West: 'The Satanic Verses' Unexpurgated."

It had been advertised in the shop windows of the many local Muslim shops with posters stating: "Not suitable for bashful women and children". Nevertheless a handful of women attended. No non-Muslims were present.

Wikipedia says about Ahmed Deedat: He

"was a South African and Indian [Gujarati] self-taught Muslim thinker, author, and orator on Comparative Religion. He was best known as a Muslim missionary, who held numerous inter-religious public debates with evangelical Christians, as well as video lectures on Islam, Christianity, and the Bible."

He "wrote several widely distributed booklets on Islam and Christianity. He was awarded the King Faisal International Prize in 1986 for his fifty years of missionary work. He wrote and lectured in English."

Deedat (PBUH) was a dignified and kindly old scholar. I am fond of him and respect him, his scholarship and his age, and do not want to lay him open to ridicule, in spite of the serious criticism I have to make of his booklet: Like Salman Rushdie he has given us something to think about. I am capable of simultaneously respecting his age and learning with my mind, and laughing at his foibles with my belly. Perhaps he is laughing at me right now for having taken his spoof seriously. But was it a spoof?

Deedat presented what he punningly called "a novel approach" (page 3) to Salman Rushdie's work and the campaign to get "The Satanic Verses" banned in Britain. His campaign took the form of a lecture he gave on Sunday, 1 October 1989, in the Royal Albert Hall in London, and repeated in Bradford, Leicester, Birmingham and other English towns with large Muslim populations. I was present at one of them. The poster advertising the lecture

(reservations at the Royal Albert Hall: £2 per seat) contained a quaint "Warning: Definitely NOT for prudes, children and bashful men and women" and offered "Special FREE reservations for men of letters". (16)

The basic argument of the lecture and of the booklet, which documents it and was distributed to the many thousands who attended this lecture all over the country, was:

The English refuse to ban the book (the general problem of whether we should have blasphemy laws, and to whom they should apply) because they neither understand how Rushdie has insulted us Muslims nor would they care about it if they did because they have not been hurt themselves. The only way to induce them to impose a ban is to make them feel the pain for themselves. We therefore have to show them that Rushdie insults and slanders not only Muslims but also the entire English nation.

Anyone who, like me, has grown up in this country would know that this strategy could not possibly work. The English have no sense of izzat (collective honour) and cannot be collectively insulted. Their upper lip, if nothing else, remains stiff. You can question the legitimacy of an individual and thereby provoke a rage, but you cannot evoke much of a response from the nation as a whole (perhaps because the illegitimacy of an ever increasing part of the younger population is beyond all reasonable doubt).

The book then sets out to prove that Salman Rushdie insults the English and their most respected figures, e.g. the then Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, and even the Queen. Every member of the audience received one copy of the booklet with the instruction to make himself a martyr in the good cause by duplicating and re-printing it in large quantities. (17)

Go out and distribute this booklet in the street,
we were told,

wait for the public to protest, get yourself arrested and taken to court for contempt of Her Majesty the Queen and for distributing slanderous and offensive literature. Then argue in court that these are not your own insults, but those of Salman Rushdie, that you love the Queen, and Mrs Thatcher, and the English nation, and the Conservative Party (Peace be upon them! Yes, my old friend still has not lost his sense of humour and you should have seen the twinkle in his eye), and the Labour Party (Peace be upon them too, just in case they win the next election) and your local council, and the Church of England, and your Bobbie on the Beat, and Allen Shearer, and your wife and children and your paternal-auntie, and if you deserve to be punished for these insults, then Mr Rushdie himself should be punished and his book be banned.

These are compelling arguments.

Western readers may regard this as surrealism, and perhaps it is: perhaps old Ahmed Deedat has taken us all for ride. I would not put it past him.

But we must also consider the important possibility that Ahmed Deedat spoke in earnest. The strange question then arises how kindness, age and learning (Islamic and biblical scholarship) and the respect which we rightly accord such a person in our culture can go hand in hand with extreme ignorance and incompetence in matters of interpretation of literature.

2.1 What Causes Offence

To justify as far as possible what Ahmed Deedat said during his lecture and the upset of those Muslims for whom he was speaking, I must discuss in some detail some peculiarly Muslim sensitivities before presenting some strange quotations from his booklet.

The extreme sensitivity of our elders can in a way be understood, and yet not be understood or no longer be approved of, by us younger Muslims when we consider the fact that in our culture both holiness and profanity (offence) may often reside in the word, object or situation itself, without regard to the way in which it is being used. The mere mention, the mere presence of it, causes the offence. (18)

An innocuous example, not from our culture: People like Ahmed Deedat would be offended equally by the statement "This book is shit" and by "I think the word 'shit' should not be used." With such sensitivities applied to "The Satanic Verses", the book had to run into trouble, even though not necessarily legitimate trouble. I only want to make the issue understood.

Unlike most Christians today, but like Jews and like Hindus (19), we feel strongly the link between physical cleanliness, spiritual purity and holiness. For us, cleanliness is not only a social, but also a religious duty. For example: We bathe before we pray. We have a number of objects which are considered unclean (polluting), e.g. dogs and pigs. We will not eat pig meat and we will not touch or be near to pigs or dogs. If we touch them accidentally, we will take ritual ablutions not only to wash any scientifically detectable traces of these animals off our bodies but also to regain spiritual purity before we eat or pray or touch the Holy Book.

But our deeply ingrained respect for what is sacred and fear of what may be profane or profane us goes further. It has now become an end in itself, no longer capable of being detected by a forensic scientist. We will not like to see pictures of dogs or pigs (even they become mentally polluting) and we will not like to take their names in our mouths or hear them in our ears. If English people visit us and talk about these things in their usual uninhibited way, we understand the reason, smile indulgently, cringe secretly, but say nothing which they would not understand anyway, and hope that the conversation will move on to a different subject. We can't teach old dogs (sit venia verbo!) new tricks.

We cannot easily understand the difference between a word and the object (for example) or the word and an action, or we do not want to understand it, because it is a feature of our culture that we are gentle and sensitive in these matters (unlike the fairly brutalised Western secular society), and we do not want to lose this sensitivity: It is a virtue, provided it is not taken too far.

The refusal to distinguish between word and object is not a sign of stupidity and does not make us incapable of reading and understanding Ferdinand de Saussure, it has nothing to do with our objective perception of the world but with our value system. And value systems are arbitrary. Every society or community is entitled to have its own: and all provide certain benefits to those supporting them and suffer from certain shortcomings which are unavoidably linked with them.

English people will understand this better when they consider that offence may be caused even among liberal-minded and generally outspoken people if, at the dinner-table, the word "shit" is used, or the bad toilet facilities in a southern European country or the workings of an abattoir are discussed while they eat the best of British veal. The offence is in the word or idea itself, at the time when people eat and therefore want to think only of edible things and not of objects or places which would pollute them. When dinner is over, the same people might be quite coarse in the language they use. Similarly people will be more careful with the language they use in a church as opposed to outside. If the pulpit collapses under the weight of the ancient priest, he will not, or should not, shout "Jesus Christ" or "Fuck it" - not in a church. (20) Similarly, it used to be common that people in the West (perhaps still in Ireland) avoided using the word "devil" and replaced it by various euphemisms accompanied by the sign of the cross, because they believed that the word itself was "evil", was polluting and had the power of calling the evil spirit denoted by it. In the same vein, Hindus make no distinction between the holy name of God and God himself, and by repeating such a name in a mantra they know that God himself will be present in them.

Therefore the sentence "You should not call the Holy Prophet such and such" can cause the same, or almost the same, offence (or pain) to the listener, as actually hearing him called such and such. (21)

Western readers may not believe this, and I will therefore illustrate it with an example from commentaries on the Holy Qur'an.

Arabic "ra'ina"	= "Listen to us"
Hebrew "rā`ina"	= "Our evil one"
Arabic "undhurna"	= "Look upon us"

Jewish Arabs exploited the ambiguity of "ra'ina" to scorn the Holy Prophet. Dawood (p 335) explains this in a note attached to his translation of Surah 2:104, which tells believers not to use the innocuous Arabic expression "ra'ina" because it provided an opportunity for this abuse: "Believers, do not say to Our apostle (Prophet) Ra'ina, but say Undhurna." (22)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his translation and commentary on the Holy Qur'an cannot bring himself to write the word "ra'ina" in the text itself, even though it is contained in the original of the Holy Qur'an itself. He is more sensitive than the Holy Prophet, therefore perhaps oversensitive (the general point I am trying to make in this essay). He translates the word "ra'ina" by "words of ambiguous import" because he does not want a potentially disrespectful word to disfigure the Holy Qur'an. "O ye of Faith! Say not to the Apostle words of ambiguous import, but words of respect." His commentary says: "The word disapproved is 'Rai'na', which as used by the Muslims meant 'Please look at us, attend to us'. But it was used by enemies by a little twist to suggest some insulting meaning. So an unambiguous word, 'unzurna', with the same meaning is suggested." (p 46) – The translation by Mir Ahmed Ali has no qualms over using the delicate word (p 79 and p 132).

Having something holy and something profane in close vicinity, in the same book, in the same sentence can be offensive for us. Such is our culture, and Christian culture, not too long ago, was not all that different in this respect.

In this respect our, sensitive and verbally restrictive, culture is no less valuable than a culture where everything goes. There are benefits for both approaches: neither is **intrinsically** superior. Therefore it may even be possible for us younger Muslims sometimes to support and practise the approaches of one culture and sometimes those of the other. Since we cannot swear in our own language (there is no such tradition), we swear heartily in English (when out of earshot of our parents). This is not schizophrenia but natural and beneficial and leads us to have a certain degree of tolerance which our elders or less educated people may not have.

This attributing sanctity or profanity to a word regardless of the sentence in which it is embedded is one of the manifestations of what I call "literalism". In a certain sense it is magic ("Hoc est enim") or, as I argue, covert idolatry, i.e. truly satanic.

Satan (like God?) (23) prefers to hide where he is least likely to be detected. (24)

I used to be, judiciously in private, a defender of Salman Rushdie, especially when I heard my favourite younger sister say when she saw his face on television: "May he rot in hell", even though she has never read his book and will be forever incapable of reading it, and she is the sweetest, most harmless soul imaginable. I have now learnt to keep my own counsel. There is no getting through, even though I think that it would be beneficial for the future our culture and our religion if I did manage to get through.

I tried to explain the difference between fiction and history. I explained that the book never mentions the Holy Prophet by name, that it did not set out to describe any incidents in his life, and therefore did not tell lies or slanders. To simplify things and not provoke further irrelevant misunderstandings, I denied certain things about the book which I should not have denied. But when, in this long and gentle conversation (with me winning all the points), my sister asked me whether Salman Rushdie had in his book perhaps in any way been "inspired" by events in the life of the Holy Prophet and used(!) them for the purpose of creating a work of fiction, I felt I could not possibly, and need not, deny that, because the parallels are important features for the, as I feel positive, religious message of the book. Then my sister said quietly and sadly: "In that case, he should not have done it. You must not make use of the Holy Prophet for anything other than listen to his message and follow his example." (25)

I have never argued about this matter with her again. It would have been impossible without hurting her and without undermining the faith which sustains her whom I love deeply. She has been brought up, in this country, with these sensitivities and she will die with them.

We Muslims are not alone in cultivating respect as a virtue in its own right. I once brought an English friend to a Hindu household. On entering we took off our shoes out of respect for the house of our hosts and in order to observe the rules of cleanliness which we have in common with Hindus. My friend had an attaché case with him. When we parted and put on our shoes again, my friend rested his foot on his attaché case in order to tie his laces. His Hindu hostess, who knew him well and wanted to do him a favour by teaching him something, pointed out that this is not done. The attaché case probably contains books. All books (not only sacred ones) are to be respected because they represent the spirit. One therefore does not step on them or even a box containing them, one does not use them as a support for one's feet or shoes, which are by definition (and because they are made of leather) "unclean" and polluting. This is a symbolic matter. It is irrelevant whether there is physical contact between the shoe and the book.

By contrast I once observed with utter amazement during a yoga class that was held in the gymnasium of an English school that the the mainly English students fetched bibles and hymn books which were kept there in order to use them as supports and sit on them. Any notion of respect for sacred things seems to have utterly disappeared in a country in which this can happen. We will not even put the Holy Qur'an temporarily on a chair or on a floor because these two areas have come in contact with two parts of the body which are considered "unclean". But actually to sit on a religious book! We think that, in this regard, our culture is more refined.

I see the value of these sensitivities, and deplore the reduction in "culture" in western society which has lost these, formerly existing, sensitivities. But I feel at the same time that a slightly more robust, slightly less "literalist" approach to religion is desirable, if only to ensure that religious leaders do not become overbearing and exploit the ignorance of their uneducated followers, and in fact prevent them from becoming more educated and thinking for themselves. Therefore I argue for a less "idolatrous" approach to our holy symbols. Such an approach is implicit in the spirit of Islam. But in all justice, and in order not to feed naïve Christian and secularist feelings of superiority, a point made by Rana Kabbani, I had to justify first our traditional sensitivities and defend their value.

2.2 Are Christians Superior

As long as they themselves are protected by blasphemy laws, Christians have no right to rail against Muslims for objecting to blasphemy. All blasphemy laws in all countries, for all religions, should be abolished. As long as they exist, Christians have no reason to feel superior to Muslims on the grounds that they would not impose a death sentence on a blaspheming Christian. This only shows that they are quite ready to ignore the injunctions of their Holy Scripture: According to their New Testament Jesus was executed for blasphemy.(26) If the Muslim hierarchy and their uneducated followers made a mistake during the Rushdie affair, it was not by imposing or supporting a death sentence on Rushdie (however much many other Muslims disapproved of it), but by getting so upset about alleged blasphemy (if it had been blasphemy) on the one hand and by being so unable to understand and distinguish the subtleties of assertion, suggestion, question, etc., involved in poetic and literary expression.(27) Rana Kabbani (28) has explained some of the historical reasons which made this difficult, and I will pick up her arguments.

2.3 Idolatry

Sensitivity and reverence for the sacred is often a good thing: but practised in excess it can become a vice.

In this sense our very touchiness concerning anything "dirty" or "disrespectful" coming in any way near the Holy Book or our Holy Prophet (regardless of what is being asserted) is a form of idolatry and therefore against our own religion.

It is not good to give too much respect and too much protection to the messenger of God's word (a creature of flesh and blood) (29), to his Holy Book (a material object no less than the golden calf) (30) and to its words. All words are human, never divine, even if they come from God. God does not "speak" or "think" in human language. "His words", however holy and authentic, are still not (and can never be) identical with God's absolute and divine reality.

Therefore if we give too much respect to these, then we offend unwittingly against the spirit of religion, and especially of a religion which prides itself on being spiritual and on not confusing God, who is spirit, with his imperfect creatures, including His spirit imperfectly embodied in the imperfect language and historically conditioned mind of his imperfect creatures. Note: Even God's words are not God himself, they are his creation and therefore do not deserve equal protection, even if any protection were required.

However, Rana Kabbani has a point when she says that the Muslim fury has to be seen in the context of Muslim-Christian relations over the centuries, where Muslims have often (except when they managed to conquer North Africa and Spain and establish the Ottoman Empire) been at the receiving end of Christian military, economic and allegedly spiritual superiority. They are therefore touchy about being accorded adequate respect. (More touchy than God, who, unlike his Muslim devotees, is so sure of his position that he does not have to demand respect!)

Since Muslims are regularly denied this respect, they may sometimes demand it in a hysterical fashion. The issues are then confused. There is confusion between the alleged perpetrator, Rushdie, and his Western or Christian supporters, and the Rushdie affair is seen as a Western or Christian attack against Islam. (It would have been better if there had been more committed Muslim supporters of Salman Rushdie: that would have removed some of the partisan aspects from the affair.) In return, the liberal western party, in a vicious circle, becomes even more contemptuous of Muslims, such as Fay Weldon (as quoted by Rana Kabbani!):

"The Koran is food for no-thought. It is not a poem on which a society can be safely or sensibly based. It gives weapons and strength to the thought police -- and the thought police are easily set marching, and they frighten ... I see it as a limited and limiting text when it comes

to the comprehension of what I define as God. ... You can build a decent society around the Bible ... but the Koran? No." (31)

Was the Ottoman empire not a tolerant and orderly society? More tolerant than Spain that expelled, and Germany that murdered, its Jews, more orderly than the successors of that empire in the former territory of Yugoslavia! Was the society, built around the bible, that murdered the Cathars or that which gave supreme power to Torquemada a decent society? And today's British society, if it is more decent than others (formerly or elsewhere), is not built around the bible but round the idea of human rights established through the French revolution and not through the Church.

Klaus Bung's poem "Burnt Offerings" makes the point for me:

**Klaus Bung:
Burnt Offerings**
(32)

**DEUS, IN ADIUTORIUM MEUM INTENDE.
DOMINE, AD ADIUVANDUM ME FESTINA.**
(33)

Miguel Serveto of Tudela
thought too deeply about
Baptism and the Holy Trinity.
He corresponded with Calvin.
Come, Mephistophilis, let vs dispute again!
(34)

Calvin issued a fatwa against him:
"You just dare to come and see me in Geneva,
and I promise you will not leave my bloody town alive."
Serveto did not believe his fellow searcher for truth.

But it befell that some of his letters to Calvin
fell into the hands of the
Come, Mephistophilis, let vs dispute again!
Inquisitor General at Lyon.

Sur le pont de Lyon
on y mente, on y mente,
sur le pont de Lyon
on y mente tous en rond.
(35)

cheerfully chanted the innocent children.

Miguel was arrested, his books
were confiscated, during his trial
he wisely escaped.
He was found guilty
in his absence and burnt in effigy
by the Catholics.

"A pen for Serveto, a penny for Miguel!",

cheerfully called the innocent children.

Thinking he would be safe in Geneva,
Come, Mephasttophilis, let vs dispute again!
because effigies were allowed neither there nor in Mecca,
and therefore couldn't be burnt
(they insist on the Real Thing Coca Cola)
and considering himself
a pen-friend of Johnny Calvin,
he made his way to Geneva
looking forward, in vain,
for the Red Cross to protect him.
He was a visionary, far ahead of his time.

The Calvinists tried (and succeeded)
him for heresy
Come, Mephasttophilis, let vs dispute again!
and found him guilty,
because he had
cleverly concocted a doctrine
about the Spirit of God
so good that it upset
all the parties, Papists
and Calvies alike.
Therefore it must
have been the truth,
or very close to it.

If he had gone
from Geneva to Constance,
he would have been burnt by the Pope there
together with Hus.
Come, Mephasttophilis, let vs dispute again!
It never occurred to him
to go to Ulster and get himself shot
by the two parties at once.
Come, Mephasttophilis, let vs dispute again!

They all did it and do it or would
do it if only they could:
Catholics and Protesters: I think
they deserve one another, they stink
each in his own peculiar way.
While most of Serveto's colleagues
were friends with one of these
parties and were burnt by the other, if only
in effigy,
Serveto managed
to needle them both.
The hunted heretic was
on the run for much of his life,
had only his pen for to prick with,
and he lacked the two chairs
that are commonly needed
for sitting between them.

Come, Mephasttophilis, let vs dispute again!

In Geneva the ecological movement
had taken root. Oecolampadius,
or Johann Huszgen or Home as he is homely known,
Patron of Friends of the Earth,
and balding chauvinist Hansgen Calvin (36)
wanted his scalp, his head,
not his ashes,
to reduce global warming, they said,
which at the time was progressing
at an alarming pace, Joan of Arc
had lit the spark,
what with bitches
burnt as witches,
here Jan Hus
there Spanish Jews.
Illuminations turned Europe
into a Blackpool, flames flaring,
bin of ashes, black pool of blood,
buggers (37) burning like candles
to honour this threefool'd schizo-
phrenic man-
made God.

Would one had used the waters
of the Jordan,
of all baptismal fonts and all rivers
to put out these blasphemous fires!

On 27 October
in the fucking Year of the Lord 1553,
the hunted Serveto,
man of ancient Tudela, city of Benjamin,
of Juda Ha-Levi and wise Ibn Ezra,
servants of God all,
was burned alive. I detest

this cruel mode of punishment. It depletes
our forests
and the stench of burning flesh
Auschwitz-like
pollutes the atmosphere.
The crucifix was
a much more civilised mode
of execution - only two
pieces of timber, that's just one tree
per victim. The cross can even be
recycled. Just imagine
how many more thinkers
can be executed that way
at less cost
to the environment and
to the pious tax-payer!

But, after St Jesus, St Peter
and kilted St Andrew, of course,
nobody was worthy
of being killed in that manner.
Only sometimes
Yugoslavian women these days
are nailed to the cross of the bed.

If only we could rid ourselves of
our addiction to that mad phrenic construct
The Truth,
that Moloch (38), King of Shame.

Would that we could
like Herod the King kill all prophets
before they can train disciples!

And AIDS on both their houses!
(39)

DEUS, IN ADIUTORIUM MEUM INTENDE.

Come, Mepbasttophilis, let vs dispute again!

DOMINE, AD ADIUVANDUM ME FESTINA.

Therefore, what people say in these outbursts cannot always be taken literally. Often they say one thing but mean something that is subtly different. This may even apply to Fay Weldon. These ill-considered paragraphs may be her "Satanic Verses", out of character. Perhaps we all have our Satanic Verses. The more reason, perhaps, to forgive and forget them all?

Muslims must do their own blaspheming. Even Ahmed Deedat swears, albeit in English: "I dream in English and I also swear in English".(40) "Blaspheming" is necessary in order to purify a religion. Rushdie made a contribution to this process of purification. He needed Christian and western support but, regrettably and predictably, this support made things worse because it transformed an incident in which a Muslim or ex-Muslim took "liberties" with his religion into one where Muslims felt that they had been attacked by outsiders, and their ancient grievances and inferiority complexes were thereby triggered.

2.4 Aberrations of Literalism

I can now continue my exposition of the aberrations of literalism, for those of my friends who are capable of getting the point and help to renew our approach to religion, not for the amusement of non-Muslim readers, who have enough weaknesses of their own (past and present) to worry about.

EXAMPLE 1: BELOVED SISTERS

Since Ahmed Deedat quotes sentences out of context and his misinterpretations become apparent only if one knows it, I start with a quote from "The Satanic Verses" itself.

"After the first nervous days on the ground, during which the three turbaned young hijackers went perilously close to the edges of insanity, screaming into the desert night 'you bastards, come and get us,' or, alternatively, 'o god o god they're going to send in the fucking commandos, the motherfucking Americans, yaar, the sisterfucking British', moments during which the remaining hostages closed their eyes and prayed, because they were always most afraid when the hijackers showed signs of weakness, -- everything settled down into what began to feel like a normality." (hardback edition, p. 80)

Ahmed Deedat sees the essence of this passage not in the question whether hijackers do or do not swear but whether the British fuck their sisters and neglect the complex duty they owe to their mothers, and whether the Americans err in the opposite direction. He writes:

"Now see, how he repays his British god-fathers for all their kind and generous hospitality.

He charges his British benefactors as an incestuous people. He calls them "THE SISTER FUCKING BRITISH." This is the unkindest cut of them all. He marries Pamela Lovelace according to his story in The Satanic Verses. And according to his own philosophy she was destined "FOR FUCKING AND THROWING OVER", which he did by divorcing her. Where did he get the information from that the British fuck their own sisters? Perhaps his Pamela may have confided in him, and maybe he betrayed her trust" (p 13-14 of the booklet).

Ahmed Deedat's last sentence requires some elucidation for Western readers.

Rushdie was married to a British woman, named Pamela. Ahmed Deedat's train of thought runs like this:

No Englishman will admit, even if true, that he has done such a disreputable thing to his sister. A fortiori, no English woman will admit that she suffered this shameful ordeal at the hands of her brother. Therefore it is quite impossible for Rushdie, who is not English and therefore never did it to his sister, to know about such matters. Then how can he assert it? Ah, there is only one explanation; this is what must have happened: Salman Rushdie was married to a British woman. On the wedding night he will have discovered to his dismay that she was no longer a virgin. He will have demanded an explanation. She will have hesitated. He will have insisted and threatened to divorce her immediately under the Trade Descriptions Act ('shop-soiled goods'). She will then have struck a bargain with him: "All right, I will tell you a shameful secret provided you promise never ever to reveal this to anybody else...". He promised, she told him the truth, and then he betrayed her trust, went and published her shame for all the world to read - since, if it is true that "the English are sister fuckers" then it follows syllogistically (41) that Pamela was fucked by her brother. (If her brother had not fucked her, one could not call the English sisterfuckers.) Rushdie betrayed her secret. Mathematical logic!

All that is encapsulated in the sentence "Perhaps his Pamela may have confided in him, and maybe he betrayed her trust".

EXAMPLE 2: GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME

"The Satanic Verses" describe a conversation of two angry disaffected characters as follows:

"Chamcha was confused. 'I'm talking about you-know-who,' Valance explained helpfully. 'Torture. Maggie the bitch.' Oh. 'She's radical all right. What she wants -- what she actually thinks she can fucking achieve -- is literally to invent a whole goddamn new middle class in this country.' " ("The Satanic Verses", p 269 f)

For Ahmed Deedat the question arises whether it is true that Mrs Maggie Thatcher was a bitch (for lying, he knew, was a sin, a sin). Where is the evidence, he asked during the lecture but not in the booklet, that while Mrs Thatcher was a student in Cambridge, the young men were queuing up outside her room to receive her favours? If they weren't, she isn't a bitch.

Nor will a disclaimer, as is used at the beginning of films, save Rushdie out from the obvious accusation of having slandered Mrs Thatcher and having sullied her reputation. What will her son Mark make of this since Rushdie has, implicitly but inescapably, called him a son-of-a-bitch? Will he accept that epithet without evidence, or will he not rather go and shoot Salman Rushdie and do us a favour? If Rushdie cannot produce such evidence and is found guilty of attacking the reputation of a respectable lady, he has to expect severe punishment in accordance with Islamic law. Here is how Ahmed Deedat puts the argument:

Rushdie claims that his "The Satanic Verses" is only an novel, it is fiction, it is a dream within a dream. Don't you remember that every movie before its screening, at one time, displayed a notice to wit -- "All characters in this film are fictitious and the similarity of any name to persons living or dead are merely coincidental." Tell that to Mark Thatcher or Carol Thatcher, Mrs. Thatcher's son and daughter, and see what they do to you! Nobody will blame them for any grievous bodily harm. Try! Try!

In the house of Islam, anyone traducing the fair name of any lady, living or dead, will be required to produce four "EYE WITNESSES" to the alleged indiscretion to qualify as a "bitch," and if under cross-examination one of them fails, all the four witnesses will receive 80 lashes each. Cruel! Barbaric! You say. You would not say that if your mother's integrity was involved. I bet! If Rushdie himself was an eye witness to his wife's adultery, he may divorce her on the ground but he would not be allowed to have her arrayed before an Islamic court without three other impeccable eye witnesses to corroborate his charge, failing which he too will receive eighty lashes.

This kind of "literalist" approach to the interpretation of literature and to questions of truth and falsity does not do us younger members of the Muslim community any good. It can, if anything, only undermine our trust in our elders.

Not every man of God today can be expected to be a new Averroës. (42) Nevertheless it may be fair to ask whether people who are capable of misinterpreting the passages from Rushdie's book which we have quoted in such a misguided manner are truly capable of giving any valid interpretation of the Holy Qur'an (and no scriptural truth or meaning exists without interpretation (43)). The misinterpretation of Rushdie's book results from methods and approaches which come from habits which also lead to the misinterpretation of the Holy Qur'an or any other "prophetic" scripture. (44)

The problem of blasphemy, and whether blasphemy can be objectively perpetrated by anyone or exists only in the misguided mind of a beholder, is also closely linked with this problem of perception of holy scriptures, God, holy persons and symbols.

But why does a pious old man, who normally preaches worthy sermons and admonishes his fellow-believers to lead good lives, and who has hardly ever in his life used a filthy word, write abusive passages such as the following? Does excess of piety lead to impiety?

"All this shit of Rushdie will not satiate Peter Mayer, the Director of Penguin, and his fellow gluttons. They need something more sticky and stinky to satisfy their depraved tastes. And, Rushdie is their man of the hour. There will never be another to get away with the lampooning of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Jews. Blacks as well as all whites! Not even sparing the "Iron Lady," nor the Queen of Great Britain." (page 6)

Could it be that piety leads to stupidity (which Allah forbid) and that therefore the same man has to be venerated for his piety but shunned or ridiculed for his stupidity?

The final paragraph of this booklet went even beyond my, modern and therefore high, threshold of toleration:

"Mired in misery,
may all his filthy lucre
choke in his throat,
and may he die a coward's death,
a hundred times a day,
and eventually
when death catches up with him,
may he simmer in hell
for all eternity!"

Is this a prayer in which Allah takes pleasure? The prayer of a God-fearing man? Or the prayer of a person who is sucking up to the big boss?

I, a Muslim, could not bear to have these cruel sentences stand on my shelf without invalidating them by, sit venia verbo, crossing them out. May Ahmed Deedat (P.B.U.H.) be forgiven for his aberration!

I wrote a holy symbol beneath the curse to cancel out the evil that resided in it. **This was the truly SATANIC VERSE that everyone had missed.** It is in the nature of Satan that he turns up in guises in which you do not recognise him, as he did when he assumed the shape of the Archangel Gabriel or as he did when for thirty seconds he laid this sentence on the tongue of my old friend Ahmed Deedat.

He, like me **and all human beings** (even the greatest and most holy), has his moments of error, even if otherwise guided by Allah, and perhaps that is the deepest significance of, the lesson to be learnt from the story, or incident, of the Satanic Verses: it makes us aware of the difference between fallible human beings and God, between God and his messenger, who is so close to him and almost indistinguishable from him, and it is therefore a cautionary tale, to put us on guard against idolatry, especially well-intentioned covert idolatry.

For this is the true text of the Holy Qur'an:	
<p> Wa-immā nuriyannaka b`aḍa-llazī na`iduhum aw natawaffayannaka fa-'innamaa `alayka l-balāgu wa-`alayna l-ḥisāb. (Surah 13:40) </p>	<p> Whether We (Allah) let you (the Holy Prophet) witness the punishment with which We threaten them, or cause you to die before it is fulfilled, your mission is only to give warning: it is for Us to do the reckoning. (Surah 13:40) </p>

Allah does not have to be helped or speeded up by our curses on alleged mockers or disbelievers. On the contrary, since truth will ultimately prevail, even in sinners, even in unbelievers, we must wish them peace and pray for them, for the Holy Qur'an says:

<p> Wa-qilihi yā-Rabbi 'inna hā-'ulā-'i qawmu lā yu'minūn! Fa-ṣfaḥ `anhum wa-qul Salām! Fa-sawfa </p>	<p> The apostle says: 'Lord, these men are unbelievers.' Bear with them and wish them peace. They shall before long know their error. (Surah 43:88-89) </p>
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Surely this applies to Salman Rushdie (Peace be upon him!)(45)

Or did Ahmed Deedat take us for a ride, even with his feigned fury against Salman Rushdie. In that case may the two clowns happily meet in paradise and rejoice in each other's company and find that in Allah all opposites coincide. (46)

2.5 Metaphorical Interpretation of Texts

Salman Rushdie is **not** an enemy of Islam and bent on destroying it. By the way in which he treated incidents analogous to those in the history of Islam Salman Rushdie was, as an insider, i.e. as a Muslim, trying to contribute to the reform of Islam and of literalist approaches to religion in general: these are concerns not only for Muslims but for all mankind, as I have pointed out repeatedly in this essay. Jews have wrestled with the problem through the midrash method of exploring their sacred texts. Christian scholars have applied similar methods to theirs (e.g. Bishop John Spong in "Born of a woman"(47) and other books), and often caused an outrage in their own communities, from which it does not follow that they are wrong. The Holy Prophet, when he started preaching, caused an outrage among the unbelievers (or

among the Christians some of whose beliefs he castigated (48): he was not therefore wrong. To the extent, however, that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was the successor of the Jewish and Christian prophets, the work of Jewish and Christian scholars is not necessarily a priori irrelevant to us: it deals with our antecedents. It is worthwhile to have at least a look at it to see if there are any analogies and lessons to be learnt. Centuries ago in Muslim Spain, our own Averroës wrestled with the problem of metaphorical interpretation.

Rushdie wrote a book which, like the Holy Qur'an (may I be forgiven the comparison which will appear odious to some people), can be understood properly only if the text is read with affection, subtlety and compassion, with the intention of discovering its truth (which, as in all poetry and literature, is encoded or hidden below the surface and can be seen only by well-intentioned readers searching for the truth rather than for faults), and not as if it were a mathematical equation, a computer manual, or an Act of Parliament.

2.6 Can the Holy Qur'an be "idolised"?

Like the bible, the Holy Qur'an is not the foundation of a tradition, but a document (albeit holy and of the greatest importance) of that tradition (with a complex history of dictation and compilation) and very much conditioned by the audience to which it was addressed, by the social circumstances of the time, and the purpose for which the holy words were received or uttered. It cannot be understood or properly applied if these are not taken into account. Contrary to popular Islamic tradition, it is not literally engraved in stone (that would be evident idolatry), it is not an eternal document as we were fondly taught to believe:

"Every age has its scripture. Allah confirms or abrogates what He pleases. His is the Eternal Book." (Surah 13:39)

There is a difference between the "eternal book" in heaven and its manifestation through the holy words of his Messenger or through the holy words written on parchment or paper and visible to our eyes.

Similarly, in spite of their traditional name, the Hindu "sanathana dharma" (eternal laws of righteousness) are in fact not eternal but have changed and are slowly changing, so that a history of their development could be written, evidence enough that they are not eternal. Eternal things do not change.(49)

The incident to which the title of Rushdie's book refers is symptomatic for, or symbolic of, the fundamental question whether the Holy Qur'an (or any other Scripture) (or any human words,

even if transmitted by God) can have any absolute value and can be an absolutely reliable source of truth (and therefore be accorded ABSOLUTE respect), or whether as, for example, the Sufis (and the Quakers) believe, it is the spirit that matters and the holy words are only there to help us explore the spirit from which they come. Is there an inner meaning of a scripture (or custom) which is not readily apparent from its "external meaning", as the Spanish Muslim philosopher Averroës (50) argued?

By treating the Holy Qur'an as if it were absolute, not requiring sensitive interpretation, and, indeed, paying as much respect to it as Hindus, symbolically, give to their murtis (51), we commit the sin of idolatry, which is one of the greatest sins our religion warns us of.

2.7 The Use of Arabic for Daily Prayers

This has the consequence that the Arabic text is revered (idolised?) to such an extent that Muslims who do not speak Arabic recite the text in the original holy language (52), rather than in a translation in their native language, in which it would have a meaning, albeit only one of the several possible meanings and interpretations that the original text permits.(53) Because of this "idolatry" of the original text and the original but accidental language, many Muslims do not know for themselves the contents of their Holy Book (54) other than those passages which they have learnt as children to use for their regular prayers. To that extent the excessive emphasis on the importance of the original text disregarding the Arabic origins of the original teaching (idolatry) has been counterproductive. It has had an effect which the Holy Prophet cannot have envisaged when he said that the message was given in Arabic, i.e. in the native language of his audience, specifically in order that they may understand it in every detail (and not only in a summary transmitted by theologians or teachers).

Excessive respect therefore leads to less rather than more knowledge of the Holy Book – and therefore to less understanding of the Book which was proclaimed in order to increase understanding!

The question of the language in which the Holy Qur'an is written is so important in the question of covert idolatry and untouchability of texts, that I must quote here at length what the Holy Book says about it. The matter must have been of importance at the time; otherwise the point would not have been restated so often.

Seen in conjunction, these verses show why Arabic was chosen for the revelation, how important these reasons were for the Holy Prophet, and give a strong indication as to the role of these holy texts in other countries and other linguistic (and historical) environments.

- 1 "We have revealed the Koran in the Arabic tongue so that you may understand it." (Surah 12:2)
- 2 "Thus We have revealed it, a code of judgements in the Arabic tongue." (Surah 13:37)
- 3 "Each apostle We have sent has spoken in the language of his own people, so that he might make plain to them his message." (Surah 14:4)
- 4 "We have revealed to you the Koran in your own tongue..." (Surah 19:97)
- 5 "Thus We have revealed the Koran in the Arabic tongue..." (Surah 20:113)
- 6 "This Book is revealed by the Lord of the Creation. The faithful Spirit brought it down into your heart, that you might warn mankind in plain Arabic speech." (Surah 26:192-195)
- 7 "Had We revealed the Koran in a foreign tongue they would have said: 'If only its verses were expounded! Why in a foreign tongue, when the Prophet is Arabian?'" (Surah 41:44)
- 8 "Thus We have revealed to you an Arabic Koran, that you may warn the mother-city ..." (Surah 42:7)
- 9 "We have revealed the Koran in the Arabic tongue that you may grasp its meaning." (Surah 43:3)
- 10 "We have revealed this to you in your own tongue so that they may take heed." (Surah 44:58)
- 11 "It is revealed in the Arabic tongue to forewarn the wrongdoers ..." (Surah 46:12)

Arabic, then, was chosen for the revelation, not because it was a divine or superior or unambiguous language but because, unlike for example Hebrew, Greek and Latin, it was the mother tongue of the Holy Prophet and he was sent to address Arab people, who had not yet had a prophet of their own (55), who needed to be reminded of the forgotten or distorted divine message and had to be addressed in the vernacular.

The text in this language, arising out of local circumstances and for practical reasons, is all we have of the original revelation. Whenever we interpret and translate the text, we must go back to this original to avoid the Chinese whisper syndrome and to prevent interpretations and translations unstoppably drifting away from the original message. However, the original words are not so holy that it is better to learn and repeat them without understanding and therefore without meaning (a form of idolatry and magic) than to learn, pray and use them today in our own languages, be it Urdu, English, French or whatever. Beware of idolatry!

The holy words were lampooned at the time (e.g. by the unbelieving poets and intellectuals) and had to contend with that. Happily, the Holy Prophet gave as good as he got (and we today can do the same), with sarcasms and with threats and warnings of divine punishment in the afterlife. That was a fair contest, and I, as a young British Muslim, am not afraid of

continuing it. I feel that I do not need more protection today than the Holy Prophet needed in his time (and was he not hugely successful in the end!) and that Allah will indeed prevail with each offending individual (even though the world will never be perfect and without evil). I do not have to inflict any secular punishment or call Allah's wrath down on the sinner in the hope that Allah will love me more for being such an eager supporter. I feel that free competition with words (no punches pulled and no holds barred) is more dignified for us who have Allah on our side than to insult Him by giving Him support which He does not need. I diminish Allah in the sight of the unbelievers if I try to protect His dignity, which cannot be touched and tarnished even if a blasphemy had been committed. Only the unbelievers think so little of God. Should we arrogate His power to punish or pardon the offender?

Salman Rushdie, in his poetic, i.e. ambiguous, way (and this at present is the only possible way) makes us aware of this danger of idolatry, not only by what he says in the book, but also by the unexpected but "idolatrous" events which came in its train.

Salman Rushdie's book, by digging up, or ploughing the solidified ground again (an activity which has been considered blasphemous) has in fact given his open-minded Muslim readers the chance to re-vivify their religion by looking at it with new eyes and from fresh angles. Our religion is vibrant and viable enough to stand up to such inspection and discussion. Jesus said: "Unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest." (56) This saying may also be applied to the cultivation of the soil for the rebirth of a religion.

We want the words and the teachings of the Holy Qur'an to flourish on a fertile field, not to stand dried up and shrivelled on barren hardened clay or planted like metal spikes in concrete or on tablets of stone. If they are to flourish, the field has to be made fertile, to be cultivated by digging and loosening it up. This is what Salman Rushdie has done. And others must do it after him at regular intervals. Of course, the language I am using here is only metaphorical. It is not to be taken literally. I know well that the Holy Qur'an itself (or popular tradition) states that the Holy Words are chiselled in tablets of stone:

Surah 85:21-22: Surely this is a glorious Qur'an, inscribed on a preserved tablet.

Surah 56:77-79: ... this is a glorious Qur'an, inscribed in a hidden book which none may touch except the purified.

Surah 43:4: It is a transcript of Our eternal book, sublime, and full of wisdom.

But that language too is to be interpreted metaphorically. The Holy Book itself recognises that it contains such passages:

Surah 3:7: "He it is Who has sent down to you the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the book: others are allegorical."

The Qur'an commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, p 123, notes on this:

"If we refer to 11:1 and 39:23, we shall find that in a sense the whole of the Qur'an has both 'established meaning' and allegorical meaning. The division is not between the verses, but between the meanings to be attached to them. Each verse is but a Sign or Symbol: what it represents is something immediately applicable, and something eternal and independent of time and space, - the "Forms of Ideas" in Plato's Philosophy. The wise man will understand that there is an 'essence' and an illustrative clothing given to the essence, throughout the Book. We must try to understand it as best we can, but not waste our energies in disputing about matters beyond our depth."

Like much else in the Holy Qur'an, the story of the tablets (of stone, or eternal, etc.) wants to put over the idea that the holy words are of extreme importance and are to be held in great respect, but not that they should be treated as if they were dead or straightjackets or metal spikes, or instruments of torture. Metaphorical language can exaggerate one aspect of the truth at the expense of another, in order to achieve a specific purpose in a specific situation. It has to be interpreted with common sense. The truth lies somewhere in between the two extremes.

Since we can interpret the Holy Qur'an sensitively, we are also capable of doing so, and should do so, with secular and less difficult literature and do justice to the intentions of their authors.

2.8 Literature and its Ambiguities

As true Muslims we recognise only one God, and that God is spirit. If we "idolise" any of his prophets, even the last, or even his Holy Book, we may be transgressing a divine boundary. That is a matter to be considered, and the publication of "The Satanic Verses" forces us to consider it seriously rather than rejecting it out of hand: It is one of the purposes of literature, as opposed to edicts, that it induces people to think about matters which are not yet ready for legislation or simple solutions, or for which simple solutions will never exist. That's why literary "assertions" are hidden in jokes, exaggerations, stories, fictions and ambiguities. Just as there are divine things which can never be adequately expressed in unambiguous human language, there are other things in life which can only be hinted at, somehow considered, and which are therefore formulated through the ambiguities of literary texts. In trying to puzzle them out, we are forced to think about, perhaps "unthinkable", matters which require thinking about, from time to time.

Rushdie's book forces us to come out into the open about this idolatry and provokes a discussion about the interpretation of

books, any book, including the interpretation of holy scriptures. He therefore kicks or drags us, screaming and shouting, closer to the truth, even though this may be, in fact, greater uncertainty. Perhaps a degree of uncertainty is all we can have, in spite of all revelations, in matters divine. One might therefore say, quite seriously, and without wanting to be blasphemous again, i.e. with due respect, that like the Holy Qur'an "The Satanic Verses" are a holy book, a theological book, which may in due course, perhaps after centuries (once it has been properly understood and the politically motivated rage has abated), turn out to have been an important work (perhaps a turning point) in the history and positive development of our religion.

2.9 The virtue of doubt

The real offence (if it was one) of Rushdie's book, even though this seems to have been hardly ever stated in public (in a discussion which was overshadowed by passion and communal politics) was that even mentioning the incident of the Satanic Verses sows a seed of doubt. The book reminded people of that incident, popularised it, could have made them think about it if they had read the book properly, and therefore sowed doubt. The question is whether we Muslims are strong enough in faith to live with doubt. I think we are, and we will become spiritually stronger, more fit for life in this world and in our time, if we learn to cope with doubt. Doubt does not mean rejection but it may mean openness.

The Hindus have a saying "Ahimsa (non-violence) is the greatest virtue". Even though we do not traditionally emphasise this virtue as much as they do, it might make good sense for us and for Western secularists if all of us did. Islam can support many radically different lifestyles (this is the message of the beautiful parable by Naguib Mahfouz: "The Journey of Ibn Fattouma" (57) and take many different forms in different countries and environments and ages, as it does in England.

Much pain and suffering could be avoided if we at least strove for this ideal. To such a code of virtue, even we unafraid young Muslims of today might, as a Hindu pandit recently did, add two other maxims: "The second highest virtue is to doubt, and the third highest virtue is the spreading of doubt." This sounds absurd, and in certain circumstances does not apply (e.g. nobody should undermine the faith of simple people), but in many situations it can be extremely important and beneficial. Let me explain.

The three virtues are linked. Idolising any virtue, even "God" or what we believe to be his Words, in their imperfect human form and their uncertain human interpretation (= meaning) (58) can lead to violence, cruelty, abuse and infinite suffering, as the history of the Christian church (e.g. inquisition), the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany (Hitler's henchmen were firm believers in his absurd ideology), the history of many

Islamic countries, even today, and last, but not least, the Salman Rushdie affair, have shown. It gives people who often do not deserve it a means to obtain, and hold on to, political power (as the Salman Rushdie affair has also shown).

**Doubt is necessary
in the quest for truth
and for the preservation of mercy.**

All religions are tools for the pursuit of truth, and all advocate mercy, most of all Islam who, in contrast with other religions, makes mercy the most prominent, most repeated "attribute" of Allah.

Bismillaahir	- In the name of ALLAH
Rahmannir	- the Compassionate
Rahiim	- the Merciful

It is our duty to emulate the virtues of Allah, including his mercy and compassion. Paradoxically, an element of doubt is a helper in this pursuit.

Doubt tempers what we dare do in the name of, or under the pretext of, truth and God. Doubt therefore reduces violence. The dissemination of doubt therefore spreads peace. If the followers of the Nazis had had at least some doubt about the validity of their ideology, they would not have committed the atrocities they did and not so many Jews would have been ill-treated and not six million of them would have been murdered in the gas chambers.

These concisely formulated virtues should of course be understood in the sense in which they are intended and not be abused by literalist interpretation and not be turned against our religion or the religions of others.

3 Salmanic Wisdom in Islam

Salmanic judgements are not the prerogative of the bible (59) or the Caucasian Chalk Circle (Brecht). There have also been many of them (exemplifying wisdom and tolerance) in the 1400-year history of Islam. Regretfully they are not well enough known. They are not systematically promulgated and set up as examples. They are known

- neither to the Islamic extremists (who could learn to model their ideas of virtue on them) and their fundamentally peaceful but uneducated followers,
- nor to their Western critics (who are liable to condemn anything Islamic indiscriminately and would benefit if this tradition of wisdom were more easily accessible to them).

Are the English identical with their football hooligans and their imbeciles or with their greatest literary and artistic minds? Are Muslims identical with their rabble and their rabble-rousers or their great minds, sadly unknown in the west and even to uneducated Muslims themselves. But the uneducated of any community, be they Muslim or English, do not know the great minds of their own communities. of their own histories.

I think there is an urgent task for educated Muslims and for a progressive and history-conscious Islamic organisation to collect and publish examples of Islamic wisdom and tolerance, in popular format. I am thinking not so much of stories which are so idiosyncratic that only Muslims can be moved by them but of stories and histories of wisdom that can be understood and appreciated, that can benefit, today, all of humanity, even people who have no inclination to convert to Islam. Can Islamic wisdom, if well propagated, not become as peacefully popular in the West as Hindu wisdom is today?

This would be one step towards improving the image of Islam as a whole in the eyes of non-Muslims. It would reduce their contempt of, and attacks on, Islam. It would also (if books can have any influence at all) curb the excesses of politically motivated Islamic fanatics. It would reduce their emotional need for increasing their excesses in response to the contempt and neglect they experience from many non-Muslims. Someone reading this essay may perhaps feel prompted to take up this task.

Two examples of Islamic wisdom which would have served us well if it had been applied to Salman Rushdie has been made known to the West through Goethe, himself a poet, who entered into a poetic dialogue with Islamic culture in his collection of poems called "Westöstlicher Divan" (West Eastern Divan). The Islamic Solomonic judgements on which Goethe bases four poems in this collection should be made known to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, including those Christians and politicians in England who want to give equal rights in blasphemy affairs to Christians, Jews and

Muslims. The right approach to do this is not to extend the blasphemy laws, which at present protect only Christianity, to cover Islam and Judaism as well (or as badly) as Christianity, and thereby make our society ever more intolerant, but by abolishing them altogether. We and Allah do not need such petty-minded protection.

My source for what I am about to describe are the four poems by Goethe and the notes provided by the editor of Goethe's Works (60). I will confine myself to giving a prose translation of Goethe's poems and of some of the notes. This material deserves to be much better known to Muslims and non-Muslims outside Germany (to each group for its own reasons). Most of what we read here is definitely not Goethe's wisdom (Western wisdom) but Islamic wisdom, because, as the notes show, Goethe largely follows the original fatwa argument in all its brevity, only putting it into beautiful German verse, an example which, regrettably, I cannot emulate in English. Perhaps a reader will take up the challenge and produce verse translations into English and Urdu.

In his poems, Goethe refers to the Persian poet Hafez (61). He was a follower of Sufism (a gentle and inward-looking branch of Islam) and on many occasions in trouble with the authorities. He refined traditional poetic forms which had the convention of dealing by preference with love and wine, -- the praise of a wine, of course, being in conflict with the sober lifestyle of devout traditional Muslims. "His poetry is characterised by love of humanity, contempt for hypocrisy and mediocrity, and an ability to universalise everyday experience and relate it to the mystic's un-ending search for union with God." (62)

The first poem is called "Anklage" (Indictment).

In the setting of Goethe's poem, ordinary Muslims are confused by the verses of their celebrated national poet, whom they want to regard with pride as their own and of whom they have to be nevertheless suspicious because of his daring verses, which seem to transgress traditional boundaries and contradict accepted rules of behaviour. This reaction might apply to devout people of any religion when faced with the works of their famous but unconventional artists.

3.1 Poets in the Holy Qur'an

The Muslims in Goethe's poem, however, have even more reason to be wary and confused because poets and their bad ways (as Salman Rushdie vividly illustrates in "The Satanic Verses") go back even to the days of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), and their mischief is noted even in the Holy Qur'an itself, where a whole Surah (No 26) is devoted to them. (63) In the days of the Holy Prophet, they made a particular nuisance of themselves (often instigated and paid for by the Prophet's rich enemies) by writing scurrilous verses about him and his mission and undermining his work more effectively than their rich but dim paymasters could have done. They were the journalists and spin doctors of the day. With their wit and skill they were dangerous enemies to have. The Holy Prophet therefore had reason to regard poets with suspicion. Salman Rushdie's novel alludes to this fact in various places. These poets were the comedians, cynics and blasphemers of the time. But they were not blaspheming against an established religion.

The Holy Prophet had to contend with poets in two ways:

1. He was ridiculed himself as being no better than a poet, an inventor of tales, or mad as a poet. (64)
2. Poets lampooned him and his message.

Various verses of the Holy Qur'an defend him in both respects

Surah 37:36: "When it was said to them (the evil-doers), 'There is no god but Allah', they replied with scorn, 'Are we to renounce our gods for the sake of a mad poet?'"

Surah 52:30: "... they say, 'He is a poet: we are waiting for some misfortune to befall him.'"

Surah 36:69: "We (Allah) have taught Mohammed no poetry, nor does it become him to be a poet."

All this is evidence, if evidence were needed, that the Message was first preached in a country in which (oral) literature and literary play and interplay flourished and was socially very important. In this society a special effort had to be made to establish the distinction between "performance poetry" and what must have sounded like "revivalist preaching" (if both anachronisms may be forgiven). Salman Rushdie describes this literary bantering in his book.

The Message arose and flourished in a sophisticated literary culture, it showed that it was alive by being debated and tossed around with no holds barred.

Surely it did not arise in order to kill that culture!

Yet today there are followers who, in consequence of their love and excessive respect for the Message, have become needlessly

rigid. If they expect the message to be simply and reverently accepted, they turn it into, and deliver it as, a dead message, a message not to be debated (even in the seemingly frivolous style that is sometimes the hallmark of literature), and our religion into a dead religion.

Excessive respect and **oversensitivity** makes these Believers, paradoxically, **insensitive** inasmuch as they are sensitive only to vague notions of holiness but not to the subtle shades of literary communication. Meaning has been replaced by emotion. Literature, in this context, is something that tries to communicate things which are (like all matters divine) too complex, too subtle, to be communicated with the blunt words of a surveyor's report.

Having elucidated the role of the poet in the time of the Holy Prophet we can return to Goethe's fatwa poems, starting with the indictment of Hafez.

3.2 Goethe's Poems

The Holy Qur'an says:

"Poets are followed by none except erring men. Behold how aimlessly they roam in every valley, preaching what they never practise. Not so the true believers who do good works and remember Allah and defend themselves when wronged." (Surah 26:224-227) (65)

Goethe's "Indictment" refers to this text.

The indictment mentions not only Hafez but also another poet, Mirza. Mirza is a name borne by various Persian poets and stands here simply for poets in general.

Goethe puts the indictment like this:

INDICTMENT

Do you know for whom
the devils lie in wait,

in the desert,
between rock and walls?

How they wait
for the right moment,

grab their victim,
carry him to hell?

It's the liars
and the evil-doers
they are waiting for.

Now, why is it
that the poet
likes the company
of such people?
(6 6)

Does the poet know
with whom he shares
his walks and ways,
he, who is always
acting from madness?

Without boundaries,
he is driven into solitude
by his obstinate loves.

The rhymes of his laments
are written into sand
and are blown
away by the winds
in an instant;
he does not
understand what he says,
and what he says
he will not keep.

Nevertheless, one allows
his song to be sung,

even though
it goes against
the Holy Qur'an.

Therefore now teach us,
you who know the Law,
you wise and pious
highly learned men, the firm duty
of devout Muslims.

Especially Hafiz
causes offence,
whereas Mizra
blasts the mind
into uncertain spaces.

Tell us what
we have to do
and from what
we have to refrain.

This indictment was brought (in terms of the poems) to the Sage **Ebusuud Efendi**, a historical person. He was a famous mufti in 16th century Constantinople and was actually asked for an opinion (fatwa) about Hafiz, by then an established classic and long dead. Ebusuud wrote (67) (and what follows is the actual text of his fatwa):

"The poems of Hafiz contain many important and unchallengeable truths, but here and there are some small points which are indeed outside the boundaries of the law. The safest thing to do is to distinguish these two kinds of verse carefully from one another, not to swallow the poison of serpents as if it were treacle (theriac) (68), to indulge only in the pure pleasures of good actions and beware of those pleasures which lead to eternal pain (69). This was written by poor Ebusuud: may God forgive his sins."

How much happier the world would have been if the Ayatollah Khomeini (may Allah forgive his sins and peace be with him, for it is such as he who need God's mercy and our prayer!) had issued this sober and humble fatwa about Salman Rushdie!

The central point of Ebusuud's fatwa is that **books have to be read with care and with discrimination.**

Most of the uneducated Muslims (and the majority of all people is always uneducated) who were whipped up into high passions against Salman Rushdie's book by quotations and reports, distorted and out of context like those cited in Part 2 of this essay [The Satanic Curse: Idoliteralism], would, admittedly, not have been able to distinguish between what is good and what may be bad,

between treacle and poison, in it. But they would also never have been exposed to the potential, or alleged, poison. They would have been unable to swallow the poison even if they had not recognised it. They were never in any danger. (And neither was Allah! Then who was in danger? Who had to be defended?)

Salman Rushdie carefully protected them from any poison in his book by writing in such a way that uneducated readers would never get past the first page. This page was his cattle grid. Unfortunately the political rabble-rousers flew in by helicopter. The morals of uneducated Muslims and their faith in the Holy Qur'an were therefore never put at risk.

Even those people who considered themselves educated, who went through the motions of reading the book (e.g. by counting and publishing all occurrences of the word "fucking" in it and checking whether every sentence had a subject and a predicate), came to the wrong conclusions. They carefully extracted the poison without the antidote which Salman Rushdie had provided to balance it (a bucket of water next to every bale of straw), spread the poison by mobilising the masses against the book, miserably failed in understanding it and it's profound message against covert idolatry in Islam (as the, admittedly extreme, example of Ahmed Deedat shows, whose booklet is a kind of "distilled poison"). Yet no harm came to them, as their continued faith in Islam and their continued enthusiasm for the anti-Rushdie campaign shows. Obviously Rushdie's "poison" was not virulent.

Goethe's first "Fetwa" poem ("Hafis' Dichterzüge...") is an exact versification of Ebusuud's original fatwa.

Goethe follows this with a Western response, given in the name of Western individualist poets.

DER DEUTSCHE DANKT

(The German Poet
Expresses his Thanks)

Holy Ebusuud,
how right you are!

You are the sort of saint
the poet wishes for;
for it is exactly
these little things
which are just outside
the boundary of the law
which are the inherited estate
on which the poet moves audaciously,
joking even while he suffers.

To him
serpent poison and treacle
must seem alike.

The former will not kill
and the latter not cure:
for true life
is the eternal
innocence of action
which manifests itself in such a way
that he harms no one but himself.

And therefore the old poet can hope,
that the Huris in paradise
will receive him well
as a transfigured youth.
(70)

Holy Ebusuud,
how right you are!

Goethe follows this with another fatwa, also based on a historical decision, and therefore subtle Islamic wisdom and tolerance. (71)

FETWA (FATWA)

The Mufti read
Misri's poems.

One after the other,
all together.

Thoughtfully he threw them into the flames,
the beautifully written book it was destroyed.
(72)

"Burnt be everybody", spoke the judge,
"who speaks and who believes as Misri -
Misri alone
be excepted
from the punishment of death.

For Allah gave his talent to the poet.

If he abuses it by sinful life,
then it is up to him
to make his peace with God."

Footnotes

1. For simplicity's sake, I will continue to call it "the Incident" without prejudice to the question whether it was historical or not.
2. W Montgomery Watt: "Muhammad at Mecca", Oxford, 1953, p 102ff
3. Surat an-Najm: Surah 53
4. Have ye considered ... the other: Surah 53:19
5. Encyclopaedia of Religions, p 139 (article about Muhammad)
6. Have ye seen Lat ...: Translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 1946, published by Islamic Propagation Centre International, Durban, South Africa
7. We do not have to rely on extreme examples of "deviation" or "modernism" such as those in the writings of "radical reformists" (or rationalists) such as Bishops John Spong ("Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism", San Francisco, 1991), John A T Robinson ("Honest to God", London, 1963; "But that I can't believe", London 1967) and David Jenkins ("Guide to the Debate about God", Cambridge, 1966). Many more mainstream examples can be found where current Christian practice follows common sense rather than the bible.
8. obedience for itself: People interject in English, quite colloquially: "Believe you me!", "I swear it" to reassure their partners in conversation. Hindu scriptures almost routinely start or end with often exaggerated promises of the benefits that will accrue to the person who reads the scripture or recites it to others. The reader has to take these promises as a valid expression of reassurance but the precise wording as a literary convention which should not be taken literally. The intention is to induce people to read the book and thus to get the benefit of knowledge and spiritual improvement. This inducement is coached in a conventionalised language which even simple minds will understand and respond to. If I receive an advertising coupon which promises a million pounds to everybody posting it to the manufacturers of some product, I would be naïve if I did not suspect that there was a snag in the small print.

The Holy Qur'an contains similar expressions. The majority of those listening to the original message must have been uneducated (the majority always is) and the formulation of the message therefore had to be kept simple. The Holy Prophet had to find a way to get through to the blockheads facing him. From time to time that required oversimplification or shouting. Therefore we find such

exhortations to believe also in the Holy Qur'an, but that does not solve the problem for a thinking or sceptical reader who is uncertain about the exhortation itself. There is no solution to the problem of credibility.

Surah 2:1 contains a telling example which also demonstrates the ambiguity of the original text and our dependence on believing one fallible human being (translator) or another when deciding what the text means.

Dawood (Penguin edition, p 326) translates: "This Book is not to be doubted. It is a guide to the righteous."

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, p 17, translates: "This is the Book; / In it is guidance sure, without doubt, / To those who fear God."

9. The traditional six Hindu schools of interpretation are:

1. Samkhya
2. Yoga
3. Nyaya
4. Vaisheshika
5. Mimamsa
6. Vedanta

You can google them or read:

Max Müller (1899): The six systems of Hindu Philosophy.
Longmans Green, London, 521 pp

10. Max Müller (1901): "My Autobiography". Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, USA
11. Say, who is more worthy ...: Translation by Dawood, Penguin Books
12. Umar ibn-al-Khattab (Omar), 581-644 AD
(reigned 634-644 AD)
13. What the Holy Prophet has instituted ...: Details of the institution can be found in Shahla Haeri: "Law of desire. Temporary marriage in Iran." London 1989
14. And it is allowed for you ... fixed reward: Translated by S V Mir Ahmed Ali, Publisher: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., P.O.Box 731115, Elmhurst, New York 11373-0115, USA., Second Edition, 1995 (Shia translation)
15. Islamic Propagation Centre, 481 Coventry Road, Small Heath, Birmingham B10-0JS, England. I checked in 2024, and the Centre still exists. This is their website:
<https://www.ipci-iv.co.uk/>
16. You can hear and watch the Albert Hall lecture on YouTube (still accessible in 2024 when I last checked).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljh1jY4W74w>

Rumour has it that Salman Rushdie, the great clown, applied for one of these seats and was refused entry on the grounds that his "abominable" book was not good enough for him to qualify as a man of letters, but I won't believe that for a minute. I have it on good authority that this was a ruse designed cunningly (like the rest of the campaign) for the sole purpose of luring Salman Rushdie into one of these halls by offering him free entry. The poster did not say whether his exit would be free.

A complete copy of the book can be downloaded from:
https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/ahmed_deedat/1989_00_00_how_rushdie_fooled_the_west.pdf

17. in large quantities: "OPEN ORDER: We grant you an open licence the reproduce or translate into any language this booklet as well as every other publication of ours."
 (Inner Front Cover Page)
18. causes the offence ...: On deeper consideration, as I will show later, giving such properties of holiness or unholiness to a mere word or object, may be a form of idolatry, quite absurd if it were found to be practised in our religion at whose heart is the fight against idolatry, even in the very incident of the Satanic Verses.
19. like Jews and like Hindus ...: Patanjali, Yoga Sutras, on "shauca" (purity and cleanliness)
20. not in a church: David Jenkins, former Bishop of Durham became famous because he once used the words "bloody" and "damn" in a sermon. Source: "Bishop banned from pulpit for swearing", The Sunday Times, 2006-08-27 -
<https://web.archive.org/web/20110604110530/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article620772.ece> - Retrieved 2024-12-02
21. called such and such: Some offence would no doubt be caused even in liberal America if an organisation put up huge posters all over the country proclaiming "President Clinton is not a Y", where Y is an obscene word. This might be read by some people as saying the opposite, by linking his name with Y.
22. but say Undhurna ...: This substitution is similar to the current trend in English to replace the correct word "sex" (in contexts where the subject is not issues of grammar and grammatical gender) by the incorrect word "gender", which should be used only as a technical term of grammar, the reason for the substitution being that oversensitive people want to avoid the connotations of

sexual activity which the word "sex" has acquired.

23. Satan (like God?): Allah is omnipresent. Could he be hiding in the heart of a blasphemer?
24. least likely to be detected ...: See C S Lewis: The Screwtape Letters
25. follow his example ...: In the same way and for the same reason, extreme respect, it is considered offensive if not blasphemous to depict the Holy Prophet in a picture or a film (however tastefully and respectfully made), it is offensive to make him the subject of a work of fiction or of any light-hearted treatment, however gentle and kind the approach.
26. executed for blasphemy ...: Matthew 26:65-66, about Jesus: "He hath spoken blasphemy... He is guilty of death." Leviticus 24:16: "And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well as the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death."
27. poetic and literary expression ...: To clarify my line of thinking, which may be surprising to some people, here is an analogous example: The murder of six million Jews in Nazi Germany was a terrible crime for those who participated in it, but the even greater crime (with even more perpetrators) was the fact that so many Germans held their Jewish fellow-creatures in such contempt. Without that contempt (the root cause!), the murder and associated crimes could not have been committed. Nobody should commit crimes. But there is little virtue in not committing a crime because you are too weak, the state will punish you (which did not happen in Nazi Germany) or you are too weak or too scared. This is the position of many people elsewhere, say in England, concerning their racial minorities, who are only too ready to feel virtuous and cast the first stone. Of course, the murder of even one Jew is unforgivable, and for the victim that may be the worst aspect. But for the moral standing of the perpetrator, his feelings of contempt, his lack of respect (regarding another human as "subhuman") for the victim is the real sin. Without those feelings the "external sin" would not have been committed. That applies to the six million victims in Germany as well. By condemning contempt, I condemn murder.

I do not wish to justify the "death sentence" on Salman Rushdie but to draw attention to the emotional soil on which it grew. If we want to avoid fanaticism and return to ancient Islamic wisdom we have to remedy the causes more than tinkering with the symptoms. By condemning

- idoliteralism, I condemn death sentences on authors.
28. Rana Kabbani: A Letter to Christendom. Virago, London, 1989
 29. a creature of flesh and blood ...: Paradoxically, the Wahhabis, though "scriptural literalists" themselves, would see this point while disagreeing with the others.
 30. no less than the golden calf ...:
"Moses said to his people, "O my people, you have wronged yourselves by taking the calf, so repent to your Maker, and face yourselves. That is better for you with your Maker, so He would forgive you. He is the Forgiving, the Compassionate." (Surah 2:54). Translation: Yüksel, Edip (et al) (eds) (2007): "Quran: A Reformist Translation". Brainbow Press, London, 521 pp
 31. Fay Weldon (as quoted by Rana Kabbani ...: Fay Weldon: "Sacred Cows", Chatto and Windus, London, 1989, pp. 6, 12, 29-30; as quoted by Rana Kabbani, "Letter to Christendom", Virago Books, London, 1989, p 3
 32. Burnt Offerings: The footnotes attached to the poem are Klaus Bung's.
 33. ad adiuvandum me festina ...: Make haste, o God, to deliver me: make haste to aid me, o Lord. (Psalm 70:1 [King James] = Psalm 69:1 Vulgata). To be prayed by Benedictine Monks at the beginning of services and at the beginning of any monastic enterprise.
 34. Come, Mephasttophilis....: Marlowe: Dr Faustus, 641
 35. On the bridge of Lyon people are lying all over the place.
 36. Latin calvus, calvinus = bald; French chauve = bald. Calvin, Chauvin and Cauvin were Latin and French variants of the same name
 37. bougre: name given to the Cathars, the southern French heretics
 38. Leviticus 18:21: And you shall not let any of your children be sacrificed in the fire to Moloch.
 39. Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet, 3.1:102
 40. Even Ahmed Deedat swears: p 16 of his booklet
 41. it follows syllogistically: averroically?
(The question mark is intentional.)

42. Averroës: Muslim religious philosopher who lived in Spain from 1126 to 1198, much concerned with establishing valid rules for interpreting the scriptures.
43. Susan Sontag: "Against interpretation and other essays.". Deutsch, London, 1987
44. The misinterpretation of Rushdie's book results Exactly what such errors are may be a topic for somebody's thesis.
45. Surely this applies: Admittedly the Holy Qur'an also says "As for those who break Allah's covenant after accepting it, who part with what He has bidden to be united and commit evil in the land, a curse shall be laid on them and they shall have an evil end." (Surah 13:35) This could be interpreted as contradicting Surah 13:40, which says implicitly that punishment is in Allah's hand.

In the case of such contradictions (which occur in the scriptures of all religions) and in case of doubt, I would think it wise for human beings to take their cue rather from Allah the Merciful than from Allah the Just, and not be too eager to lay curses on evildoers or to speed them to their "evil end". Allah in Surah 13:35 does not make it the duty of any human being to utter such curses or to bring about his evil end. The curse of which the Holy Qur'an speaks does not have to be an imprecation like the one uttered by AA but simply exists in the fact that Allah has a determined an evil end for such a person. In that case it is Allah (and not a human being) who lays the curse and Allah who executes the sentence. It is safe for him to do so since he (unlike human beings) can determine with certainty whether a person (for example Salman Rushdie) is or is not an evildoer. Human beings, however pious and however high in rank, can never be sure (*Errare humanum est*), as the example of AA shows.

Similarly, the words "They shall have an evil end" do not impose on any Muslim the duty to bring about this evil end, but are merely a prediction of what will happen to a person whom Allah (not a fallible human being) has judged to be an evildoer. In order to avoid injustice it is therefore advisable refrain from all cursing, however great the apparent provocation, and from harming alleged apostates.

46. in Allah all opposites coincide: Nicolaus Cusanus (Nicholas of Cusa; German medieval philosopher, 1401-1464): *coincidentia oppositorum* (the union of opposites)
47. John Spong: "Born of a woman: a bishop rethinks the birth of Jesus", San Francisco, 1992

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48. beliefs he castigated: Jesus Son of God; Trinity etc.
 49. Eternal things do not change: Pandurang Vaman Kane:
"History of Dharmashastra (Ancient and mediaeval
religious and civil law)". Bhandarkar Oriental Research
Institute, Poona, India, 1974. 8 volumes.
 50. Spanish Muslim philosopher Averroës: 1126-1198
 51. Murtis are statues representing deities.

Hindus were wrongly accused by my Muslim teachers of polytheism, even though they also believe that there is only one god (whom they call Brahman but who might as well be called Allah), who resides in all murtis (statues of deities) and in all creation. Even when fencing with Hindus we sometimes bandy about words (e.g. the word "god" and "gods") rather than looking at meaning. Even for naming God, each prophet uses the language of the people he addresses, be it Arabic, Sanskrit, English or Latin, etc.

52. the original holy language ...: It has for them only a "summary" of a meaning and a vague notion of dutifulness and holiness.
53. original text permits: It is easy to be "orthodox" if all that is required is that one affirms the truth of words which one does not understand in detail.

Goethe's Mephistopheles says sarcastically:

Denn eben wo Begriffe fehlen, Da stellt ein Wort zur rechten Zeit sich ein. Mit Worten läßt sich trefflich streiten, Mit Worten ein System bereiten, An Worte läßt sich trefflich glauben, Von einem Wort läßt sich kein Jota rauben. Goethe: Faust 1, Studierzimmer, Schüler, line 1995-2000	Just where concepts are missing, a word will conveniently take its place. It is easy to fence with words, construct a system of words, it is easy to believe in words, and you must not remove a dot from a word.
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54. contents of their Holy Book: Roman Catholic lay-people before and even after the Reformation were discouraged from reading the bible for themselves. They depended, and were meant to depend, on the priesthood as intermediaries between them and God's revelation! But Islam does not encourage intermediaries.
55. a prophet of their own: Surah 2:151: "Thus We (Allah) have sent forth to you an apostle (prophet) of your own who will recite to you Our revelations and purify you of sin, who will instruct you in the Book and in wisdom and teach you that of which you have no knowledge."
56. yields a rich harvest: John 12:24
57. Naguib Mahfouz: "The Journey of Ibn Fattouma". Doubleday Paperback, London, 1993
58. uncertain human interpretation ...: They never reach us, even as native speakers of Arabic, except fraught with uncertainty.
59. Salmanic judgements ...: 1 Kings 3:16-28
60. notes provided by the editor ...: Goethes Werke, Hamburger Ausgabe, Vol. 2, Christian Wegner Verlag, Hamburg, p 21-23 (poems) and p 563-565 (notes)
61. Also spelt Hafiz, 1325-1390 AD. His works are available in English translation.
62. His poetry is characterised: Encyclopaedia Britannica 1998
63. a whole Surah (No 26) is devoted to them: Significantly there is no chapter in the bible devoted to poets, and it seems that the word "poet" does not occur in the bible either, unless we take the Psalmist David as an example of a poet.
64. mad as a poet:
cf Shakespeare, Midsummer Night's Dream, 5.1:7-8:
"The lunatic, the lover and the poet

Are of imagination all compact."

65. (Surah 26:224-227): Translation by N J Dawood, Penguin Books, p 204)
66. of such people: Guilt by association. The enemies of Jesus said: "Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." (Matthew 11:19)
67. Ebusuud wrote: Text taken from Goethe, Vol. 2, p 564
68. theriac: The word "treacle" is derived from "theriac", a sweet antidote to snake poison, and goes back to Greek "therion" (little wild beast) and "ther" ("th(f)erocious"[!] beast).
69. eternal pain: cf Bhagavad Gita 18:38: "That happiness which arises from the contact of the senses and their objects and which is like nectar at first but like poison at the end ..."
70. that the Huris: Or Houris: Beautiful maidens who will reward good people by being their companions in paradise.
71. Islamic wisdom and tolerance: For sources, see Goethe, Vol 2, p 564
72. the beautifully written book: Before the days of printing an invaluable hand-written illuminated copy.

eof

^(02) Klaus Bung: And Peace on Earth

A story

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Two neighbours, Kevin and Shahabuddin, have a long-standing feud. After a public slanging match, Shahabuddin writes a masterly letter of complaint to the police. They resolve the dispute on Christmas Eve.

Klaus Bung: And peace on earth




The brave traveller who tries to make his way across the hills which mercifully separate Darwen from Blackburn and keep the thieves of Darwen away from the burglars of Blackburn, and vice versa, may haply come across the obscure village of Rossenham, hidden in a narrow valley, with its picturesque church, its ancient pub ('The Cock and Bull'), a barber, a grocer's, no post office, and only one long line of terrace houses, inhabited by the families of 79 goras (1), 18 Muslims, 1 Bajan (2), 1 Nigerian prince, 3 Hindus, 2 Sikhs and 1 militant atheist, who spends his weekends in the pub, holding forth in front of a crowd of 78 goras and 1 renegade Muslim that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem (3) (not the least among the cities of Juda) and that in fact he wasn't born anywhere at all and is as legendary or historical as Little Red Riding Hood, and threatens with

	eternal damnation all who do not accept this as gospel truth.
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One of the sights of Rossenham, a relic from the times when it was still a thriving mill-town and even once produced a poet ('The Rossenham Poet', as she is known to the world), is its police station, still manned by 7 officers, 8 more than this sleepy village needs, for all its citizens live very peacefully side by side and don't care much about what Usama gets up to or what happens in Haiti, or in Kashmir, or in Sri Lanka, or Northern Ireland, or Sudan, or Rwanda, or Palestine, or Bosnia, or Ukraine, or London ('Where is that?'), or at whose fireplace the Home Secretary (Whatsisname?) warms himself from October to April. They keep theirselves to theirselves, love or hate their neighbours wherever they come from (like their Father which is in heaven and maketh his sun to rise (4) on the evil and on the good , and sendeth rain, in Blackburn and Rossenham especially rain, on the just and on the unjust alike) and duly ignore whatever spiteful things their respective gods tell them in their holy scriptures.

'We ain't here to serve God,' one of them declared, 'God is here to serve us, and if he does the job he is paid for, we will have peace.'

	Now the thing with the overstuffed police station of Rossenham was this. The Home Secretary had been so busy for many years, what with his private life and spreading joy, and with computer systems breaking down or never starting to work in the first place, and an avalanche of passport applications, and armies of bogus asylum seekers and benefit scroungers invading this country ('a menace greater than Hitler', the man, blinded by prejudice, is rumoured to have said), and to crown it all Mrs Saddam Hussain and Mrs Usama bint Laden applying for political asylum, - he had simply forgotten to close down Rossenham Police Station when he axed so many others in the country side, and the people of Rossenham had seen no reason to remind him.
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When our weary traveller arrives in the Cock and Bull, he will first be questioned for news from the outside world. Then he will hear the story of the quarrel between Kevin and his neighbour, Sheikh Shahabuddin.



Shahabuddin lives in a small terrace house, where he runs a Social Club for elderly Muslims. One day Kevin bought a caravan, which he uses for only two weeks in the year, during which he goes holidaying in Padiham.

Shahabuddin is not a literary man, he is a bit greedy, a bit stupid, his English is rudimentary (except that he understands swearing when he hears it and can give as good as he gets), and he is not good at writing letters or filling in application forms.

So he employs a part-time assistant, Aisha, to do his paperwork. Aisha does not hold him in high regard. She doesn't call him a bit stupid, she just calls him stupid, she thinks he is lazy ('Why does he have to sit in front of my face from morning to night? Hasn't he got anything better to do?'), and she strongly suspects him of fiddling his accounts and the charitable funds for which she has to apply on his behalf.

On her good days she calls him an IBM, which is Egyptian for 'Idiot Bastard Mummyfucker' - 'cos he is dead boring', as she explains with an apologetic smile as if butter couldn't melt in her mouth.


When the neighbour started parking his caravan outside Shahabuddin's bay window, completely blocking his view, she had to write innumerable useless letters: to the police, to the council, to half a dozen solicitors, to the mosque, to the church, to the newspapers, etc.

Then he had this street brawl with Kevin. He called the police. The police arrived at 12.00 noon the following day. Shahabuddin sent them away. 'You were supposed to come at 10, now it is 12, you have to learn to be punctual. We said 10 o'clock English time, not 10 o'clock Indian time. I am too busy to wait for you all day long, go home and make another appointment', he told them and sat down to continue staring at Aisha for the rest of the afternoon.

He was furious: 'Write a letter of complaint to the police.'

Aisha felt that he was in the wrong and wrote a constrained letter requesting another appointment.

'That letter is no good: I want you to write an angry letter, real angry, English angry. Tell them how lazy and useless they are.'

	<p>'You don't want to start jihad because of one ignorant kafir (5): Have a sip of Qibla Cola (6) and think of something holy and peaceful, that will make you feel better. Is it not written ...,' said she, but Shahabuddin let fly a profanity which was so unholy that it would make even a Spaniard blush (8), or so Aisha thought.</p> <p>She phoned a friend for advice.</p> <p>'If you write an angry letter, he will get into trouble.'</p> <p>'I want him to get into trouble.'</p>
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So Aisha wrote an angry letter. 'That's what he wants, so that's what he gets.'

'This is a very important letter,' she said to Shahabuddin. 'It must be perfect. Otherwise the police won't see how angry you are and how much they have hurt you. I must take it home and get it checked by a native English speaker to make sure it is really angry. Tomorrow you can sign it and post it.'

So it came to pass that this letter was written, Shahabuddin knew that it had been double-checked, read it, approved of it and signed it, and it was posted.

It is now one of the prized possessions of Rossenham's police.

Our traveller is taken from the pub to the old police station, where the seven officers sit, talk, smoke, drink tea, play darts and watch the porn channel on the telly, and there on the south wall, under glass, is the letter, the only letter ever received by this station.

CSACI

**Centre for the Support of the Aged, the Crippled and the Insane
786 Corporation Street, Rossenham, Lancashire, BB13 8SU**

Dear Mister Policeman,

I have this neighbour and he parks his caravan permanently outside my window so that I cannot get any sunlight. Then he harrasses me and our clients. Yesterday he even came and started swearing at us.

7 December 2004

Dear Mister Policeman,

I have this neighbour and he parks his caravan permanently outside my window so that I cannot get any sunlight. Then he harasses me and our clients. Yesterday he even came and started swearing at us.

This is very upsetting for me and my elderly clients, because they aren't used to swearing and don't even swear when they pour boiling water over their hands or hit their thumb with a hammer or drop the baby; and the baby wouldn't swear either, not even when it is dead: it is too stupid for swearing. But the old people don't swear because God don't like it.

And English swearing is much worse than Urdu swearing and has only

four letters to do it with, and our old people don't like to hear such language at all. They get enough of it from their own children, so why should my neighbour add to their distress? You tell me that!

They are all very upset and deeply offended, and I am upset and angry too. I could strangle this here neighbour, but I won't do it because it's against the law. So you have to do it for me, that's what you are their for.

So yesterday I phoned the police station, and you promised to send someone over here and sort him out good and proper, but you didn't, did you? That makes me even more angry.

Where is your sense of responsibility? You don't want any murder or ethnic cleansing to start in this street. It is the English who do the cleansing because it mustn't be ethnic.

I want you to come over here and swear at him for me, because if I swear he doesn't understand it so it doesn't hurt his black heart, so you have to do it for me.

This neighbour man is very wicked and needs to be stopped, and you are so powerful, you are the one to stop him.

So please hurry over here quickly and impose the Queen's law on this wicked neighbour, or else I would not be responsible for whatever happens to me.

And don't let me down a second time, otherwise I might feel like swearing at you, and you wouldn't

like that, would you?

Your devoted citizen and friend,
Sheikh Shahabuddin
CSACI
Rossenham

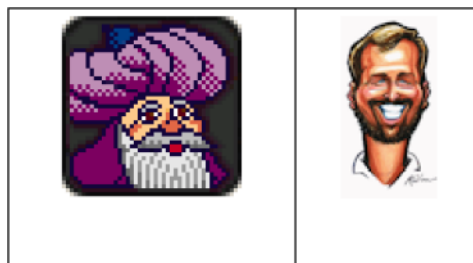
When this letter arrived at the police station, the seven officers marched to 786 Corporation Street like one man and invited Kevin and Shahabuddin to celebrate his literary masterpiece.



The two warring neighbours could not resist this temptation, especially at Christmas time, Kevin had a pint of Thwaites (9), but Shahabuddin, who is a god-fearing man and only fiddles the accounts when Allah is not looking, contented himself with a bottle of Mecca Cola(TM) ('Ne buvez plus idiot, buvez engagé!' (10) as it says on the bottle).



That happened on Christmas Eve. Kevin began to like his Shahabuddin, and especially enjoyed the innumerable jokes that are told about him (a drink together can work wonders, even if it isn't a Double Diamond) (11).



'Et in terra pax,' twittered the sparrers perched on top of the caravan, 'wa salam salam shalom', admonished a voice from heaven, and they flapped their tiny wings in adoration.

Kevin parked his caravan in front of Paddy's house across the road and now has a good old feud going with him. He doesn't like the Irish and thinks they are fair game.

Paddy is trying to get Aisha to write some letters for him, to the police, to the council, to half a dozen solicitors, to the mosque, to the church, to the newspapers, etc. He thinks she has brains. She has acquired quite a reputation in Corporation Street, for kindness, impartiality and a sense of humour. She is loved by all communities. She has had her share of joys and troubles, but loves the absurdities which life throws at her. 'Life is so funny,' she says when yet another misfortune befalls her, 'it could make you cry'.

She was never invited to the celebration at the Police Station. 'Women have no brains and no morals: they should stay at home, wear their hijab (12) and never meddle in men's affairs,' says Shahabuddin, and Kevin wishes English women too would live by these sensible maxims, 'stands to reason, dunnit?' 'Muslims are not as stupid as they look,' he said, and affectionately slapped his new-found friend Shahabuddin on the shoulder. Here was something they could agree on.

In February Shahabuddin went for a long holiday in his village in Panjab. He invited Kevin to follow him in his caravan. He has a beautiful niece who wants an English passport, and Kevin wants an obedient wife. 'You can't say no fairer than that, can ya?'

Kevin is ready to leave the moment he receives his transit visa for Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. He must be looking for trouble. (13) If not en route, he'll find it in Panjab.

'And how is the police in England?' asked Shahabuddin's brother.

'Not too bad, not bad at all,' said Shahabuddin.

'They have framed me,' he added triumphantly.

FOOTNOTES

1. gora: Urdu for 'white' (like English 'nigger' for 'black', Trinidadian 'coolie' for East Indian as opposed to ex-African, "He's a gora, but he's a good gora. She's a gori and as bad as they come."
2. Bajan: native of Barbados (aka smart-ass, or 'small-islander')
3. Bethlehem: Matth. 2:6

4. maketh his sun to rise: Matth. 5:45
5. kafir: Arabic: unbeliever, infidel
6. qibla: Arabic: 'direction', and specifically 'THE direction', i.e. the direction towards Mecca which Muslims face when saying their daily prayers
7. Qibla Cola and Mecca Cola. Mecca Cola is the French product, Qibla Cola is its British 'look-alike' and rival. Background of the two companies and the Cola Wars: FINANCIAL TIMES, Thursday, 8 Jan 2004, p 13: 'New colas wage battle for hearts and minds'.

There is Ummah Cola (the Ummah is the world-wide community of believers), whose website is down, is i.a. sold in Britain and, according to the label, may be made in Egypt. [image not found]

 <p>The image shows two cans of Zam Zam Cola on the left. One is red with 'ZAM ZAM Cola' in blue and white text, and the other is orange. To the right is a red circular logo with white Arabic calligraphy and the word 'Zam' in yellow. Below the cans, the words 'ZAM ZAM' are written in large, bold, blue letters with a white outline.</p>	<p>There is also Zamzam Cola, made in Iran, and selling well there, in Saudi Arabia and in other Arab countries. It is named after Mecca's Zamzam holy spring water. Muslim tradition has it that the Zamzam was opened by the angel Jibril to save Hagar and her son Ismail from dying of thirst when they were out in the desert.</p>
 <p>The image shows several bottles and cans of MuslimUp. There are two blue cans in the foreground and two larger bottles (one clear, one dark) behind them. All have the 'MuslimUp' logo, which includes the word 'Muslim' in blue and 'Up' in a stylized font with a crescent moon and star.</p>	<p>SevenUp (TM) now has a rival in MuslimUp</p>
 <p>The image is an advertisement for 'Jesus Jeans'. It shows a pair of denim jeans worn by a person, with the buttocks visible. The text 'Chi mi ama mi segua.' is printed in white across the buttocks. At the bottom, the 'Jesus jeans' logo is visible.</p>	<p>Similarly inspired by pious sentiments was Italy's brand 'Jesus Jeans' (1973), with the words 'Follow me' (Mark 1:17) or 'Chi mi ama mi segua' (If you love me, follow me) printed on juicy female bums.</p>

8. Spaniards: Everybody knows that the Spaniards hold an Olympic gold medal in creative swearing in which they abuse their mothers, their god and their saints ('todos los santos jodidos', an expression too awful to be ever translated into English).

9. Thwaites: long established Blackburn brewery
10. Ne buvez plus idiot, buvez engagé: Stop drinking like an idiot, drink with political engagement (20% of the price of Mecca Cola goes to Palestinian charities)



11. Double Diamond: a brand of beer

Advertising jingle:

A Double Diamond works wonders, works wonders,
A Double Diamond works wonders,
So get one today

12. hijab = Muslim head scarf

13. trouble and strife: domestic bliss

Cockney rhyming slang:

Trouble and strife:
Wife

Therefore
"He is looking for trouble." =
"He is looking for a wife."

Analogously:
Butcher's hook:
Look

Therefore:
She gave him a butcher's: =
She gave him a look.

&c

The following products to be further explored: La Ummah Cola es la que sigue el camino de la Samsam Cola (Samsam – fuente en la Mecca cercana a Caaba), la Mecca Cola, Arab Cola, Salam Cola y Kubla Cola (dirigida a Caaba – a donde van los musulmanes a la hora de los rezos).

eof

^(03) G E Lessing: The True Religion

Impressum

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: The True Religion

Giovanni Boccaccio: The Story of the Rings

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- Footnotes

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

In this story, which Gotthold Ephraim Lessing based on a story by Boccaccio, the narrator provides us with a foolproof method of determining which of the three Abrahamic religions is the true one. The proposed method is eminently useful because it abolishes the need for war or force or legislation to determine this and to induce people to pray to the true God. (1)

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: The True Religion

A conversation between Sultan Saladin, the Muslim, and Wise Nathan, the Jew	
	
<p>Sultan Saladin (2) (Saladinus, by Cristofano dell'Altissimo, before 1568)</p>	<p>Wise Nathan (3) Ludwig Wüllner as Nathan in Lessing's "Nathan der Weise"</p>

Die Ringparabel	The Parable of the Ring
<p>Saladin. Ich heische deinen Unterricht in ganz Was anderm; ganz was anderm. - Da du nun So weise bist: so sage mir doch einmal - Was für ein Glaube, was für ein Gesetz Hat dir am meisten eingeleuchtet?</p>	<p>Saladin: I request your teaching in something quite different. You are reputed to be wise: therefore please tell me which faith, which law, seemed most reasonable to you.</p>
<p>Nathan. Sultan, Ich bin ein Jud'.</p>	<p>Nathan: Sultan, I am a Jew...</p>
<p>Saladin. Und ich ein Muselmann. Der Christ ist zwischen uns. - Von diesen drei Religionen kann doch eine nur Die wahre sein. - Ein Mann, wie du, bleibt da Nicht stehen, wo der Zufall der Geburt Ihn hingeworfen: oder wenn er bleibt, Bleibt er aus Einsicht, Gründen, Wahl des Bessern.</p> <p>Wohlan! so teile deine Einsicht mir Dann mit. Laß mich die Gründe hören, denen Ich selber nachzugrübeln, nicht die Zeit Gehabt. Laß mich die Wahl, die diese Gründe Bestimmt, - versteht sich, im Vertrauen - wissen, Damit ich sie zu meiner mache.</p>	<p>Saladin: And I a Muslim. The Christian stands between us. - Of these three religions only one can be the true one. - I man like you will not remain where the accident of his birth has thrown him: or, if he remains there, he remains because of some insight, because of reasons, because he has chosen what is best.</p> <p>All right! Tell me your insights. Let me hear the reasons which for lack of time I have been unable to work out. Let me know the choice which has been determined by these reasons (in complete confidence, of course), so that I can make the same choice.</p>

<p>Wie? Du stutest? wägst mich mit dem Auge? - Kann Wohl sein, daß ich der erste Sultan bin, Der eine solche Grille hat; die mich Doch eines Sultans eben nicht so ganz Unwürdig dünkt. - Nicht wahr? - So rede doch! Sprich! - Oder willst du einen Augenblick, Dich zu bedenken? Gut, ich geb ihn dir.</p>	<p>What? You you are surprised? You are weighing me with your eyes? Perhaps I am the first Sultan who has such a whim; but it is a whim not completely unworthy of a Sultan. You agree? All right, speak then! Say something. Or do you want a moment to think about it? All right, I will give you that time.</p>
<p>(Ob sie wohl horcht? Ich will sie doch belauschen; Will hören, ob ich's recht gemacht. -)</p>	<p>Whispers: (I wonder if she is listening? I must find out; I must find out whether I have set the trap as she wanted me to.)</p>
<p>Denk nach. Geschwind denk nach! Ich säume nicht, zurück-Zukommen. (Er geht in das Nebenzimmer, nach welchem sich Sittah begeben.)</p>	<p>Think about it. Make it snappy. I will be back in a minute. (He goes into the adjoining room, to which Sittah has gone.)</p>
<p>Nathan allein.</p> <p>Hm! hm! - wunderlich! - Wie ist Mir denn? - Was will der Sultan? was? - Ich bin Auf Geld gefaßt; und er will - Wahrheit. Wahrheit! Und will sie so, - so bar, so blank, - als ob Die Wahrheit Münze wäre! -</p> <p>ja, wenn noch Uralte Münze, die gewogen ward! - Das ginge noch! Allein so neue Münze, Die nur der Stempel macht, die man aufs Brett Nur zählen darf, das ist sie doch nun nicht! Wie Geld in Sack, so striche man in Kopf Auch Wahrheit ein? Wer ist denn hier der Jude? Ich oder er? -</p> <p>Doch wie? Sollt' er auch wohl Die Wahrheit nicht in Wahrheit fodern? - Zwar, Zwar der Verdacht, daß er die Wahrheit nur Als Falle brauche, wär' auch gar zu klein! -</p> <p>Zu klein? - Was ist für einen Großen denn Zu klein? - Gewiß, gewiß: er stürzte mit Der Türe so ins Haus! Man pocht doch, hört Doch erst, wenn man als Freund sich naht. -</p> <p>Ich muß Behutsam gehn! - Und wie? wie das? - So ganz Stockjude sein zu wollen, geht schon nicht. - Und ganz und gar nicht Jude, geht noch minder. Denn, wenn kein Jude, dürft' er mich nur fragen, Warum kein Muselmann? -</p>	<p>Nathan alone:</p> <p>Hm, hm! strange! I feel funny. What does the Sultan want? What? I am expecting a demand for money, but he demands truth. Truth! And he wants it in such a simple form, so plain, as if truth were a gold coin!</p> <p>Well, if at least he were asking for the old type of coin which has to be weighed. I could let that pass. But he wants it like one of those new-fangled coins, which derive their value only by the impression made on it, which one only has to count on the table. Truth is not like that! One cannot put truth into a head as one can put money into a bag. In this setup, who is the Jew, I or he?</p> <p>But wait! Could it be that he is not in truth demanding truth? Of course, the suspicion that he is using truth only as a trap is too demeaning.</p> <p>Too demeaning? Is anything too demeaning for a powerful man? Sure, sure: he practically kicked the door open! Normally one would knock gently and listen if one comes as a friend.</p> <p>I have to proceed warily. And how? To be an inflexible Jew will not do. And not to be a Jew at all is even worse. For, if not a Jew, then he only has to ask, why not a Muslim.</p>

<p>Das war's! Das kann Mich retten! - Nicht die Kinder bloß, speist man Mit Märchen ab. -</p> <p>Er kommt. Er komme nur!</p>	<p>Ah, I have an idea. This will save me. It is not only children whom one can satisfy with fairy tales.</p> <p>He comes. Let him come.</p>
<p>Saladin. (So ist das Feld hier rein!) - Ich komm dir doch Nicht zu geschwind zurück? Du bist zu Rande Mit deiner Überlegung. - Nun so rede! Es hört uns keine Seele.</p>	<p>Saladin: (Nobody is spying on us.) I hope I have not returned too quickly. Have you finished your considerations? Well, talk then. Nobody is spying on us.</p>
<p>Nathan. Möcht' auch doch Die ganze Welt uns hören.</p>	<p>Nathan: I wished the whole world were listening.</p>
<p>Saladin. So gewiß Ist Nathan seiner Sache? Ha! das nenn Ich einen Weisen! Nie die Wahrheit zu Verhehlen! für sie alles auf das Spiel Zu setzen! Leib und Leben! Gut und Blut!</p>	<p>Saladin: Nathan is so sure of his case? Well, that is truly a wise man! Never to hide the truth. To risk everything for it! Body and life! Property and blood!</p>
<p>Nathan. Ja! Ja! wann's nötig ist und nutzt.</p>	<p>Nathan: Yes! Yes! If it is necessary and if it is useful.</p>
<p>Saladin. Von nun An darf ich hoffen, einen meiner Titel, Verbesserer der Welt und des Gesetzes, Mit Recht zu führen.</p>	<p>Saladin: From now on I may hope to merit one of my titles 'Improver of the world and of the law'.</p>
<p>Nathan. Traun, ein schöner Titel! Doch, Sultan, eh' ich mich dir ganz vertraue, Erlaubst du wohl, dir ein Geschichtchen zu Erzählen?</p>	<p>Nathan: A beautiful title indeed. But, Sultan, before I give you my full confidence, would you permit me to tell you a little story?</p>
<p>Saladin. Warum das nicht? Ich bin stets Ein Freund gewesen von Geschichtchen, gut Erzählt.</p>	<p>Saladin: Why not? I have always been a friend of little stories, provided they were well told.</p>
<p>Nathan. Ja, gut erzählen, das ist nun Wohl eben meine Sache nicht.</p>	<p>Nathan: Well, to tell stories well, that is not really my strong point.</p>
<p>Saladin. Schon wieder So stolz bescheiden? - Mach! erzähl, erzähle!</p>	<p>Saladin: Again so proudly humble? Get on with it! Tell the story, tell it.</p>

<p>Nathan. Vor grauen Jahren lebt' ein Mann in Osten, Der einen Ring von unschätzbarem Wert Aus lieber Hand besaß. Der Stein war ein Opal, der hundert schöne Farben spielte, Und hatte die geheime Kraft, vor Gott Und Menschen angenehm zu machen, wer In dieser Zuversicht ihn trug.</p>	<p>Nathan: In ancient time a man lived in the East who owned a ring of inestimable value which a beloved woman had given him.</p> <p>The stone was an opal, which radiated a hundred beautiful colours and had the mysterious power to make beloved of God and man the person who wore it trusting in this power.</p>
<p>Was Wunder, Daß ihn der Mann in Osten darum nie Vom Finger ließ; und die Verfügung traf, Auf ewig ihn bei seinem Hause zu Erhalten? Nämlich so.</p>	<p>No wonder that the man in the East never took it off his finger and made arrangements to keep it for ever in his family? Like this.</p>
<p>Er ließ den Ring Von seinen Söhnen dem geliebtesten; Und setzte fest, daß dieser wiederum Den Ring von seinen Söhnen dem vermache, Der ihm der liebste sei; und stets der liebste, Ohn' Ansehn der Geburt, in Kraft allein Des Rings, das Haupt, der Fürst des Hauses werde. -</p>	<p>He left the ring to that of his sons whom he loved most and ordered that this son in turn had to leave the ring to that of his sons who was dearest to him; and that always the dearest son, regardless whether he was first-born, should, merely through the power of the ring, become the head, the prince, of the dynasty.</p>
<p>So kam nun dieser Ring, von Sohn zu Sohn, Auf einen Vater endlich von drei Söhnen; Die alle drei ihm gleich gehorsam waren, Die alle drei er folglich gleich zu lieben Sich nicht entbrechen konnte.</p> <p>Nur von Zeit Zu Zeit schien ihm bald der, bald dieser, bald Der dritte, - sowie jeder sich mit ihm Allein befand, und sein ergießend Herz Die andern zwei nicht teilten, - würdiger Des Ringes;</p> <p>den er denn auch einem jeden Die fromme Schwachheit hatte, zu versprechen.</p>	<p>So this ring passed from son to son, and in the end passed to a father of three sons, all of whom were equally obedient to him and whom he therefore could not help loving equally.</p> <p>Only from time to time sometimes one son, sometimes another, sometimes the third, appeared to him worthier of the ring - depending on which of them was alone with him so that he did not have to share out the love that flowed out of his heart.</p> <p>Therefore he had the sweet weakness to promise the ring to each of them.</p>
<p>Das ging nun so, solange es ging. - Allein Es kam zum Sterben, und der gute Vater Kömmt in Verlegenheit. Es schmerzt ihn, zwei Von seinen Söhnen, die sich auf sein Wort Verlassen, so zu kränken. - Was zu tun? -</p>	<p>That continued for a while. But the hour of his death approached, and the good father was on the spot. He could not hurt two of his sons who had relied on his promise. What was he to do?</p>
<p>Er sendet in geheim zu einem Künstler, Bei dem er, nach dem Muster seines Ringes, Zwei andere bestellt, und weder Kosten</p>	<p>He secretly calls a goldsmith and asks him to make two copies of the ring, and not to spare effort or expense to make them exactly the same.</p>

<p>Noch Mühe sparen heißt, sie jenem gleich, Vollkommen gleich zu machen.</p>	
<p>Das gelingt Dem Künstler. Da er ihm die Ringe bringt, Kann selbst der Vater seinen Musterring Nicht unterscheiden. Froh und freudig ruft Er seine Söhne, jeden insbesondere; Gibt jedem insbesondere seinen Segen, - Und seinen Ring, - und stirbt. - Du hörst doch, Sultan?</p>	<p>The goldsmith succeeds. When he brings the rings even the father can not longer pick out the original from the copies. Full of joy he calls his three sons, each of them on his own, gives each of them his blessing and his ring, - and dies. - Are you listening, Sultan?</p>
<p>Saladin (der sich betroffen von ihm gewandt). Ich hör, ich höre! - Komm mit deinem Märchen Nur bald zu Ende. - Wird's?</p>	<p>Saladan (who has turned away in consternation). I am listening. Finish your story. Make it snappy.</p>
<p>Nathan. Ich bin zu Ende. Denn was noch folgt, versteht sich ja von selbst. - Kaum war der Vater tot, so kömmt ein jeder Mit seinem Ring, und jeder will der Fürst Des Hauses sein. Man untersucht, man zankt, Man klagt. Umsonst; der rechte Ring war nicht Erweislich; - (nach einer Pause, in welcher er des Sultans Antwort erwartet) Fast so unerweislich, als Uns itzt - der rechte Glaube.</p>	<p>Nathan: I HAVE finished. For the rest is obvious. The moment the father was dead, each son comes with his ring and wants to be the prince of the dynasty. One investigates, one quarrels, one goes to court. In vain, it was impossible to prove which was the genuine ring; (after a pause, during which he is waiting for the Sultan's answer) almost as impossible to prove as now for us the true faith.</p>
<p>Saladin. Wie? das soll Die Antwort sein auf meine Frage? ...</p>	<p>Saladin: What? Is that meant to be the answer to my question?</p>
<p>Nathan. Soll Mich bloß entschuldigen, wenn ich die Ringe Mir nicht getrau zu unterscheiden, die Der Vater in der Absicht machen ließ, Damit sie nicht zu unterscheiden wären.</p>	<p>Nathan: It is merely meant to excuse the fact that I do not dare to distinguish between the rings which the father had made with the intention that they should be indistinguishable.</p>
<p>Saladin. Die Ringe! - Spiele nicht mit mir! - Ich dächte, Daß die Religionen, die ich dir Genannt, doch wohl zu unterscheiden wären. Bis auf die Kleidung, bis auf Speis' und Trank!</p>	<p>Saladin: That applies only to the rings. Do not play games with me! I should have thought that the religions which I have named could easily be distinguished, right down to dress, to food and drink!</p>
<p>Nathan. Und nur von seiten ihrer Gründe nicht. Denn gründen alle sich nicht auf Geschichte? Geschrieben oder überliefert! - Und Geschichte muß doch wohl allein auf Treu Und Glauben angenommen werden? - Nicht? - Nun, wessen Treu und Glauben zieht man denn</p>	<p>Nathan: But not in respect of their foundations (reasons). Are they not all founded on history? Written or handed down by word of mouth! And history has to be accepted on trust, doesn't it. And whom does one believe most? Of course one's own parents, who from childhood onwards have demonstrated their love to us; who have</p>


Am wenigsten in Zweifel? Doch der Seinen? Doch deren Blut wir sind? doch deren, die Von Kindheit an uns Proben ihrer Liebe Gegeben? die uns nie getäuscht, als wo Getäuscht zu werden uns heilsamer war? -	never deceived us except in situations where it was more beneficial to us to be deceived.
Wie kann ich meinen Vätern weniger Als du den deinen glauben? Oder umgekehrt. - Kann ich von dir verlangen, daß du deine Vorfahren Lügen strafst, um meinen nicht Zu widersprechen? Oder umgekehrt. Das nämliche gilt von den Christen. Nicht? -	How can I believe my ancestors less than you believe yours? Or the other way round. Can I demand that you call your ancestors liars in order to say nothing against mine? Or vice versa. The same applies to the Christians, doesn't it?
Saladin. (Bei dem Lebendigen! Der Mann hat recht. Ich muß verstummen.)	Saladin: (By the living God! The man is right. There is nothing I can say.)
Nathan. Laß auf unsre Ring' Uns wieder kommen. Wie gesagt: die Söhne Verklagten sich; und jeder schwur dem Richter, Unmittelbar aus seines Vaters Hand Den Ring zu haben. - Wie auch wahr! - Nachdem Er von ihm lange das Versprechen schon Gehabt, des Ringes Vorrecht einmal zu Genießen. - Wie nicht minder wahr! - Der Vater, Beteurt' jeder, könne gegen ihn Nicht falsch gewesen sein; und eh' er dieses Von ihm, von einem solchen lieben Vater, Argwohnen lass': eh' müß' er seine Brüder, So gern er sonst von ihnen nur das Beste Bereit zu glauben sei, des falschen Spiels Bezeihen; und er wolle die Verräter Schon auszufinden wissen; sich schon rächen.	Nathan: Let us return to our rings. As I said, the sons took each other to court, and each swore an oath that he had received the ring directly from his father's hand. Which was true! And after having received several years back the promise that he would one day have the privilege of the ring. Which was just as true. Each of them argued that the father could not have deceived him; and rather than suspect such a dear father of such trick: he would have to accuse his brothers of dishonesty, even though normally he would only expect good actions from them. But he would eventually find the traitors and take revenge.
Saladin. Und nun, der Richter? - Mich verlangt zu hören, Was du den Richter sagen lässest. Sprich!	Saladin: And now, the judge? I want to hear what you let the judge say. Speak.
Nathan. Der Richter sprach: Wenn ihr mir nun den Vater Nicht bald zur Stelle schafft, so weis ich euch Von meinem Stuhle. Denkt ihr, daß ich Rätsel Zu lösen da bin? Oder harret ihr, Bis daß der rechte Ring den Mund eröffne? - Doch halt! Ich höre ja, der rechte Ring Besitzt die Wunderkraft beliebt zu machen; Vor Gott und Menschen angenehm. Das muß Entscheiden! Denn die falschen Ringe werden Doch das nicht können! - Nun; wen lieben zwei Von Euch am meisten? - Macht, sagt an! Ihr	Nathan: The judge said: If you do not produce the father right now, I will throw you out of this court. Do you think it is my job to solve riddles? Or are you waiting for the right ring to speak up? But wait! You told me that the right ring has the miraculous power to make the bearer beloved of God and man. That will decide the issue! For the false rings will not be able to do that! All right: which of you is most loved by the two others? Come on, speak up! You are silent?

<p>schweigt? Die Ringe wirken nur zurück? und nicht Nach außen? Jeder liebt sich selber nur Am meisten? -</p> <p>Oh, so seid ihr alle drei Betrogene Betrüger! Eure Ringe Sind alle drei nicht echt. Der echte Ring Vermutlich ging verloren. Den Verlust Zu bergen, zu ersetzen, ließ der Vater Die drei für einen machen.</p>	<p>The rings only work on the bearer, and not on the outside world? Each of you loves only himself most.</p> <p>Ah, then the three of you are tricked tricksters. None of the rings is genuine. The genuine ring presumably was lost. To cover up the loss, the father had three rings made in place of the one.</p>
<p>Saladin. Herrlich! herrlich!</p>	<p>Saladin: Fantastic, fantastic!</p>
<p>Nathan. Und also, fuhr der Richter fort, wenn ihr Nicht meinen Rat, statt meines Spruches, wollt: Geht nur! -</p> <p>Mein Rat ist aber der: ihr nehmt Die Sache völlig wie sie liegt. Hat von Euch jeder seinen Ring von seinem Vater: So glaube jeder sicher seinen Ring Den echten. -</p> <p>Möglich; daß der Vater nun Die Tyrannei des einen Rings nicht länger In seinem Hause dulden wollen! - Und gewiß; Daß er euch alle drei geliebt, und gleich Geliebt: indem er zwei nicht drücken mögen, Um einen zu begünstigen. -</p> <p>Wohlan! Es eifre jeder seiner unbestochnen Von Vorurteilen freien Liebe nach! Es strebe von euch jeder um die Wette, Die Kraft des Steins in seinem Ring' an Tag Zu legen! komme dieser Kraft mit Sanftmut, Mit herzlicher Verträglichkeit, mit Wohltun, Mit innigster Ergebenheit in Gott Zu Hilf'!</p> <p>Und wenn sich dann der Steine Kräfte Bei euern Kindes-Kindeskindern äußern: So lad ich über tausend tausend Jahre Sie wiederum vor diesen Stuhl. Da wird Ein weiser Mann auf diesem Stuhle sitzen Als ich; und sprechen. Geht! - So sagte der Bescheidne Richter.</p>	<p>Nathan: And therefore, continued the judge, if you do not want to take my advice instead of a decision, go away.</p> <p>But my advice is this: take the matter exactly as you find it. If each of you has the ring from his father: each of you should firmly believe that his ring is genuine.</p> <p>Perhaps the father did not want to tolerate the tyranny of the ring any longer in his house. And certainly he loved the three of you and he loved you equally: so he did not want to oppress two of you in order to favour one of you.</p> <p>Well, let each of you give free reign to his love, free of prejudice! Let each of you compete with the others to prove the power of the ring and make it evident. Support this power with gentleness, profound peacefulness, with charitable acts and compassion, and with profound love of God.</p> <p>And then, when the powers of the gems become apparent in the children of your children's children, then, after many thousand years, I will call you back to this court. Then a man, wiser than me, will sit on this chair, and will make the judgement. Go! So said the modest judge.</p>
<p>Saladin. Gott! Gott!</p>	<p>Saladin: Allah! Allah!</p>
<p>Nathan. Saladin,</p>	<p>Nathan: Saladin, if you think you are this</p>

Wenn du dich fühlst, dieser weisere Versprochne Mann zu sein: ...	promised wiser man: ...
Saladin (der auf ihn zustürzt und seine Hand ergreift, die er bis zu Ende nicht wieder fahren läßt). Ich Staub? Ich Nichts? O Gott!	Saladin (runs towards Nathan, grasps his hand, and does not let go of it until the end of this scene): I who am dust? I who am nothing? Allah!
Nathan. Was ist dir, Sultan?	Nathan: What is wrong, Sultan?
Saladin. Nathan, lieber Nathan! - Die tausend tausend Jahre deines Richters Sind noch nicht um. - Sein Richterstuhl ist nicht Der meine. - Geh! - Geh! - Aber sei mein Freund.	Saladin: Nathan, dear Nathan! The many thousand years of your judge have not yet passed. His court is not mine. Go. Go. But be my friend.
Nathan. Und weiter hätte Saladin mir nichts Zu sagen?	Nathan: And there is nothing else that Saladin wants to say to me?
Saladin. Nichts.	Saladin: Nothing.
Nathan. Nichts?	Nathan: Nothing?
Saladin. Gar nichts. - Und warum?	Saladin: Nothing at all. Why are you asking?
Nathan. Ich hätte noch Gelegenheit gewünscht, Dir eine Bitte vorzutragen.	Nathan: I would have liked the opportunity to make a request.
Saladin. Braucht's Gelegenheit zu einer Bitte? - Rede!	Saladin: Does one need an opportunity to make a request? Speak.
Nathan. Ich komm von einer weiten Reis', auf welcher Ich Schulden eingetrieben. - Fast hab ich Des baren Gelds zuviel. - Die Zeit beginnt Bedenklich wiederum zu werden; - und Ich weiß nicht recht, wo sicher damit hin. - Da dacht' ich, ob nicht du vielleicht, - weil doch Ein naher Krieg des Geldes immer mehr Erfordert, - etwas brauchen könntest.	Nathan: I have just returned from a long trip during which I have collected outstanding debts. I almost have too much cash on my hands. Times are becoming risky again, and I do not know where I can safely invest it. So I thought whether could you use it, since an approaching war always demands more money.

FOOTNOTES

- (01) Lessing wrote his play "Nathan der Weise" (Wise Nathan) in 1779. A verse translation of the whole play by William Taylor is available online and in print. The German original is written in blank verse (Shakespeare). English prose translation by Klaus Bung
- (02) The historical Saladin (1137-1193), who is one of the protagonists in this fictitious story, lived at the time of the Third Crusade (1189-1192). He conquered Jerusalem in 1187. He was of Kurdish descent. In Lessing's play he has summoned a rich Jewish merchant, known as "Wise Nathan" for an interview. The interview occurs in Lessing's "Nathan der Weise", Act 3, Scene 7.
- (03) In developing the character of Nathan, Lessing was inspired by his close friendship with Jewish philosopher and theologian Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), who lived in Berlin and in his writings tried to modernise Judaism and make it compatible with the insights of rationalism and modern science.

	
Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781)	Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)

The friendship of Lessing and Mendelssohn is a real-life example of the beauty of friendship of people of different cultures and different religions and the irrelevance of "race" (as demonstrated by German-American anthropologist **Franz Boas**, 1858-1942), which is the subject of so many other texts in this collection.

(04) Ludwig Wüllner (1858-1938) as Nathan in Lessing's "Nathan
der Weise"
Source: [https://thue.museum-digital.de/object/1237?](https://thue.museum-digital.de/object/1237?navlang=de)
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eof

^(04) Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments

Impressum

Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments

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Compiled by Klaus Bung from ancient sources

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

In this contribution, Klaus Bung presents five eminently useful rules of life which he has compiled from ancient sources and carefully formulated and tabulated. They are not designed to make God happy but to help us avoid thoughts, words and deeds which, in the long run, lead to misery for ourselves and others, and a list of their positive counterparts which are conducive to happiness for the giver and the receiver. Provocatively, he calls them "The Five Commandments", analyses their underlying ethics, and compares them with the traditional Ten Commandments. Whereas the Ten Commandments are, as their name says, orders given by a god, his "Five Commandments" are not really commandments (orders given by someone) but resolutions which individuals or society can take if they want to have less troublesome and more contented (or happy) lives.

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Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments

1. THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS TABULATED, AND THEIR INTERACTIONS

THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS		
Prohibitions	Recommendations	Beneficiaries
1. No violence	Acts of kindness	Others
2. No theft	Generous giving	Others
3. No sexual misconduct	Treating the body of others with kindness	Others
4. No sins of speech	Helping others through good use of speech	Others
5. No mind-altering drugs (including alcohol and tobacco)	Consuming healthy foods and drinks as necessary for the welfare of the body	Self: Improves Self-control & Mindfulness

All these apply cogitatione, verbo et opere,
in thought, words and deeds.

Failing on #5 causes failure in #1, #3 and #4.

Most of the ills that befall individuals and society and are reported daily in the news can be traced back to offending against one of these five precepts. Heeding them and propagating them can help us to avoid such troubles.

2. THREE DANGEROUS EMOTIONS: DESIRE, FEAR AND ANGER

In addition, there are three dangerous emotions (traditionally known) of whose pernicious effects we should be aware and which we should try to subdue:

desire, fear and anger

- Desire causes us to offend against #2 and #3, above.
- Fear can cause us to offend against #1 and take unnecessary and counterproductive precautions.
- Anger causes us to offend against #1 and #4

3. PRECEPT #1: A BEAUTIFUL RENDERING

In Utting am Ammersee (Bavaria, Germany), I saw a hoarding (billboard) which says:

<p>In diesem Reiche gilt als oberstes Gesetz: 'Was lebt und atmet sollst du gütig schützen!' Drum schon' auch das Insekt Und pflück' die Blume nicht, die dich erfreut: Auch deinem Heil wird's nützen.'</p>	<p>In this reign there is a supreme law: 'Whatever lives and breathes thou shalt lovingly protect!' Thus you should even spare the insect's life, And do not pluck the flower which makes you smile: This will be good for your salvation too.</p> <p>(translated by Klaus Bung)</p>
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4. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE: WORK FOR THE BENEFIT NOT OF SELF BUT OF OTHERS

Measure your success and your happiness not in terms of

1. whether **you** have become more successful, gained more money, a better job, more recognition and fame, a better house, a greater salary, but in terms of
2. whether you have given **others** some relief, a moment of happiness, solved one of their problems, rescued them from a difficult situation.

Justification: Even the poorest, most unsuccessful, person will have many chances to do (2). There are always other people who have problems which you can easily solve, whereas "your own" problems may be insurmountable.

These other people can benefit from your help, however much of a failure you may be otherwise and however unhappy you may be because of your perceived "failure". Therefore (2) is a recipe for success and happiness: there are dozens of tasks which are easy for you. Chose those which you can manage.

But if you seek your happiness in terms of (1), you may be faced with so many obstacles (lack of skills or money or opportunities or connections) that you are bound to fail and therefore become unhappy (aka "mentally ill" in today's popular parlance) because you regard this as failure. It's your perception that matters!

5. WHO ARE OTHERS

When seeking to help "others", everybody should be keen to focus on people who are "most different" (who differ most) and who are traditionally least well treated, namely strangers, people of different origin, sex, race, colour, nationality, religion, political party, minorities (the smaller, the more deserving), people who in traditional notions of charity tend to be neglected. This could be called "goodwill to all".

If everybody tackled the problems of life in terms of (2), most conflicts between nations and individuals would disappear, war would disappear, social exploitation and comparative poverty (i.e. excessive riches vs excessive poverty) would disappear, and happiness of all would increase. Everybody would seek his happiness by helping others. It would not have to be imposed by campaigns of political correctness or by authoritarian governments.

6. JEWS, ISRAEL AND PALESTINE: A BUNDIST APPROACH

Specifically Jews, who have traditionally suffered most from racial prejudice, discrimination and genocide, and some of whom (the "Zionists") are at present vainly (and criminally) trying to create happiness for Jews, not all over the world, but in a state intended only for Jews, at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs, who have to be exterminated in order to create a safe haven "for Jews and only for Jews",

they, and all of us, should take to heart a principle enunciated by Bundist intellectual Dr Emanuel Scherer (1901-1971). This principle invalidates the genocidal objectives of the state of Israel (Jews seeking happiness by passing on to Muslims the genocide they have suffered in the past). Instead, we should seek

**"Rights and justice for Jews everywhere
without wrongs and injustice to other people anywhere."**

Emanuel Scherer, 1901-1971

The same principle could be usefully extended to cover people of all races and religions. It could be intensified by saying that we should seek "the well-being of people everywhere".

7. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PREVENT THE HOLOCAUST

If, in the popular conception of ethics (decent behaviour), #1 were the most important commandment (which in Judaism, Christianity and Islam it isn't), then despising, insulting, hurting or killing a single Jew for being a Jew would be a despicable behaviour. The Holocaust could not have happened: too many decent non-Jews would have been instinctively appalled and would have resisted.

If we were admonished (and trained) to be kind to animals (even to insects), how much more should we be kind and respectful to another human being!

8. THE CURRENT GROWTH OF ANTI-SEMITISM

Since the members of "The Jewish Workers' Bund" (aka "The Bund", members known as "Bundists") have, for over a century, opposed the plans and attempts of the Zionist Jews to remove the indigenous Palestinians (Arab Muslims and Christians) from their land (by expelling or killing them), it is extremely important that non-Jews (potential anti-Semites) should know about the Bund and its values and activities.

Such knowledge would reduce the current (2023-2025) global growth of anti-Semitism (in thoughts, words and physical attacks: "cogitatione, verbo et opere") which mistakenly targets all Jews whereas it should be focussed on, and confined to, the criminal activities and aims of Israeli politicians, settlers and army.

I therefore provide below, to the best of my ability, a sadly incomplete list of books on the Bund. If readers will send me additional titles, I will gladly add them.

9. COMPARISON: THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS VS THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

A comparison of "The Five Commandments" and the traditional "Ten Commandments" is not easy to make since, contrary to traditional belief, the Ten Commandments are not unchangeably cut into stone but there are several different groupings and numberings in existence. For a good summary of these, see Wikipedia. In the Bible they appear in Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21, and Exodus 34:11-26.

To make visible whether the Five Commandments contain any injunctions which are missing in the Ten, and which injunctions of the Ten are missing in the Five, I will display here only two typical numberings, the Heidelberg Catechism (Calvinist) of 1563 and the numbering which Luther (Little Catechism of 1529) and Roman Catholic catechisms (e.g. "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (1992) have in common.

I will use grossly simplified descriptions for each injunction. The interpretation in each catechism will greatly enrich each injunction.

Roman Catholic and Luther	Heidelberg Catechism	The Five Commandments
1 No other gods	1 No other gods	
	2 No images of God	
2 No swearing	3 No swearing	
3 Keep the Sabbath	4 Keep the Sabbath	
4 Honour your parents	5 Honour your parents	
5 Do not kill, do not harm other people in any way	6 Do not kill, do not harm other people in any way	1 No violence
6 Do not commit adultery	7 Do not commit adultery	3 No sexual misconduct
7 Do not steal	8 Do not steal	2 No theft
8 Do not give false witness	9 Do not give false witness	4 No sins of speech
9 Do not desire inanimate possessions of other people		2 No theft (in thought, words and deeds)
10 Do not desire animate possessions of other people	10 Do not desire other people's possessions	2 No theft (in thought, words and deeds)
		5. No mind-altering drugs (including alcohol and tobacco)

1. The Ten Commandments (henceforth TC) are believed to be valid because they are ordered by God.

The Five Commandments (FC) should be practised because they obviously benefit man and society.

2. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches (Question 5 and 114), we are unable to satisfy all TC with perfection, we are therefore all sinners and condemned to hell and depend for our salvation utterly on God's mercy and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As a result the bulk of Christian teaching and preaching is that Jesus loves us, helps us and saves us and that we should love Jesus, and turn to him in all our needs.
3. Because of the importance placed on (2), improving our behaviour is in Christian churches less important than the fact that our sins can be forgiven: God's justice is tempered by mercy. Eastern religions put more emphasis on the fact that we must, with infinite patience, learn to

improve our behaviour (and our ability and desire to behave well) so that we can, eventually, pass the examination in a "divine court of law", without the need for mercy.

In Christian churches, teaching how we should improve our behaviour is somewhat neglected. Significantly, Luther did not like the letter of James, which emphasises good behaviour ("works"), and called it "a letter of straw" ("eine stroherne Epistel").

4. TC then derive their power from belief in God, FC derive their power from their obvious usefulness in society.

Many people today do not believe that God exists and even if He existed cannot be sure that texts written or preached by humans actually are the word of God, are true or are infallible: there is always space for some doubt. Arguments and injunctions of this type are therefore comparatively weak.

5. Even though most of the ills of modern society are addressed by TC 5 to 10, they are weakened in their effectiveness because, by their position in the second half of the list and their neglect in teaching and preaching, they are considered relatively unimportant or "matters of course" (not requiring much preaching). It is really secular law which punishes offences against TC 5 to 10, therefore the churches have to be less concerned with them; they can take their validity for granted.
6. TC 4 or 5, Honour your parents, can obviously be expanded to "Respect your teachers and treat them with gratitude and affection and do everything in your power to be helpful to them" (as is emphasised in some Eastern traditions). It would be eminently useful in today's society and its schools if this were inculcated into all children from an early age. They owe their bodily life to their parents. To their teachers they owe their mental life, the attitudes and skills they need to be happy and content throughout life. This important injunction is missing in FC.
7. The omission of FC 5 (No drugs, no alcohol &c) in TC is a serious weakness of the TC list.
8. FC are anchored entirely in their obvious benefits for individuals and society. They do not require leaps of faith but merely observing life. They can therefore also benefit the many non-believers in our society.
9. All FC address issues which are daily in the news when usually an "important", famous and successful person, has offended against them (drugs and often resulting deaths, alcohol-based offences, sexual offences, road rage and

anger, knife crimes, theft and burglaries resulting from greed, suicides resulting from inability to deal with the problems of life resulting from not practising FC).

10. Teaching at home and in churches does **not systematically** address these issues. Especially FC #1 (non-violence) is not made the most basic issue and hammered in every week. FC #5 (no drugs) is not included in TC and is therefore not considered a religious issue and therefore not taught, even though it is the cause of so many (and perhaps most) other offences and troubles.

10. CONCLUSION

Churches (and mosques &c), parents and secular educators should hammer in the FC, from early childhood onward, so that these become second nature to society and are considered the standard rules of **decent behaviour**. Doing this would not conflict with respect for TC.

Precept #1, non-violence, must be the starting point, and Precept #5 must be of the highest importance (as it is for Muslims) because neglecting it leads to loss of self-control and stupid (or criminal) behaviour in respect of the other four commandments. If this were consistently and patiently practised, there would be less mental "illness", less crime and less unhappiness in our society.

11. FURTHER READING

- Jewish Socialists' Group (2023): The Jewish Workers' Bund: Past, Present and Future. 27 pp. BM 3725, London WC1N-3XX, jsg@jewishsocialist.org.uk, <https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/other>
- Han, Byung-Chul (2018): "The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today". Polity, Cambridge, UK, 100pp

12. MORE COMPREHENSIVE BOOKS ON THE BUNDISTS

Brossat, Alain, and Klingberg, Sylvia (2016): "Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism", 273 pp. Verso, London, GB

Goldstein, Bernard (2016): "Jewish Life, Struggle, and Politics in Interwar Poland: Twenty Years with the Jewish Labor Bund in Warsaw (1919-1939). A memoir of interwar Poland" (**Introduction by Dr Emanuel Sherer [Scherer]**), 486 pp. Purdue

University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA

Jacobs, Jack (2009): "Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland", 201 pp. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, USA

Katz, Daniel (2013): "All Together Different - Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism", 306 pp. New York University Press, New York, USA

Olson, Jess (2013): "Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy", 409 pp. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, USA

Slucki, David (2012): "The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History", 284 pp. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, USA

^(05) Klaus Bung: The Futility of Force

Impressum

Klaus Bung:
The Futility of Force: A Buddhist View of the Gaza Genocide

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Some of his essays and creative work can be found on:
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His work as an organist is documented on:
<https://www.rtc-organist.co.uk/>

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SYNOPSIS

This essay is divided into three parts.

Part 1 (4,000 words) deals with the grievances of the Palestinians. It emphasises the fact that the current conflict and its 100-year prelude is not a specifically Jewish project, but that the "Israelis" (Zionists) are members of White Western society and share its illusions of racial superiority, have historically helped to create them (Hebrew Bible) and that their attempt to take over Palestine is just the most recent of innumerable previous cases of settler colonialism since 1492 (Columbus). It highlights the traditional belief in creating security by force and violence, which drives Netanyahu and his supporters.

Part 2 (6,517 words) contains two traditional Buddhist stories, giving their full text: Story 1 (1,300 words) and Story 2 (2,500 words). These stories illustrate the doctrine "Hatred is not quenched by hatred, but by non-hatred". The implications of these stories are then analysed. Netanyahu's brutal attacks on the Palestinians can only help to perpetuate the cycle of violence but never end it. Since Netanyahu is enthusiastically supported by White governments with their White populations, many of whom instinctively believe in their right to rule "inferior races", by violence if necessary, they are not likely to take these Buddhist stories on board.

Part 3 (1,400 words) contains some stories which may give comfort to the oppressed Palestinians.

Further reading (9 titles; 170 words)

Notes (1,100 words)

Klaus Bung:

The Futility of Force: A Buddhist View of the Gaza Genocide

Contents

Part 1: The Background

Part 2: The stories and comments

The Five Silas

Story 1: The Story of Prince Dīghāvu

Story 2: The Barren Wife

Analysis

The ethics of the Buddhist stories

Injunctions from the Old Testament

Injunction from the New Testament (Bible, Mark 12:28-32)

Part 3: Comfort for the oppressed:

Comfort for the oppressed, alias: "Why should the devil have all the best tunes", alias: Use the weapons of the oppressor

A mighty stronghold is our God

Da pacem, Domine

O change of times! You hope of the people

People living in the spirit of reconciliation

Further reading

Part 1: The Background

On 7 October 2023, in consequence of "The Hundred Years' War on Palestine, 1917-2017" (Rashid Khalidi), Gaza exploded. It propelled the fighters and weapons of Hamas into the forcibly occupied areas of ancient Palestine. The personally innocent invaders who happened to be in their path got killed or badly injured. That's life. The explosion was only natural and to be expected, and if it were legal to do so, I would applaud them.

But most White governments (and their citizens) historically "know" that white (and therefore civilised) people are by "god" and nature entitled to take away the land of uncivilised "black" people, who don't use their land like civilised White people do, uneducated peasants in little Arab villages and nomadic Bedouins in even smaller settlements, who, in their innocence and ignorance, don't create nice farms with artificial irrigation, don't build nice high-rise buildings and factories, don't subdue and destroy the environment, don't exterminate wild-life, who walk instead of using cars, don't travel in planes all over the world, don't have holidays in exotic countries, don't emit CO2, don't create global warming, don't have militias, armies, machine guns, bombs, drones and rockets, don't manufacture high-tech weapons for export, and don't appreciate the many other blessings of civilisation and its lifestyle, and, above all, have not been told by their God that they are the master race, (a race of masters, the "chosen people"), destined (and obliged) to exterminate or expel the inferior inhabitants of some alien land which their God has "given" them (the "promised land"), even though it doesn't belong to him.

White governments have acted accordingly since 1492 (Columbus). They now support the White settlers (aka Zionists) who since 1917 have been trying to take over the Palestine lands, which eventually they hope to possess entirely ("Final Solution").

By the time the settler-army has finished its "special military operation" in Gaza, the General can report: "Mission accomplished: All quiet as a grave." The territory will be ready for the settlers to settle.

The presence of the Zionists in Palestine is not a specifically Jewish project. If it were, the enthusiastic support and supply of weapons by the USA, UK &c would make no sense. It is only the latest case of White society trying to solve one of its problems by taking away the land of an "inferior race".

As Ilan Pappé observes:

The problem with Israel was never its Jewishness - Judaism has many faces and many of them provide a solid basis for peace and cohabitation; it is its ethnic Zionist character. Zionism does not have the same margins of pluralism that Judaism offers, especially not for the Palestinians. They can never be part of the Zionist state and space, and will continue to fight - and hopefully their struggle will be peaceful and successful.

Previous such attempts were the colonisation of North America, of Mexico, of Australia, and the eventually failing bloody colonial enterprises in Africa:

- South West Africa (now Namibia), 1904-1907: Germans committing genocide of the Zulu and Herero tribes
- Kenya, "Mau Mau" rebellion 1953-1955: British trying to subdue the Kenyans
- Algeria, 1954-1962: French trying to subdue the Algerians, to name but a few
- It was a problem within White society which prompted the Zionists to work for the creation of a Jewish state on alien soil: antisemitism often fuelled by Christian sentiments, the suppression and pogroms committed against Jews in Christian countries since the middle ages, culminating in the Shoah (Holocaust) committed by the Nazis. So white society had to "export" this problem to Palestine.

Four quotes show the pattern:

(1) About the genocide of the Zulu: "This bold enterprise shows up in the most brilliant light the ruthless energy of the German command in pursuing their beaten enemy. No pains, no sacrifices were spared in eliminating the last remnants of enemy resistance. Like a wounded beast the enemy was tracked down from one water-hole to the next, until finally he became the victim of his own environment. The arid Omaheke [desert] was to complete what the German army had begun: the extermination of the Herero nation." (quote taken from Wikipedia, who quote this proud 1904 report from a historic German Army publication: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herero_and_Namaqua_genocide)

The similarities with the facts (and intentions?) of today's events in Gaza are striking: cutting off supplies of electricity, fuel, food and water to Gaza and driving the population of Northern Gaza to the Egyptian border.

(2) "As the campaign developed, Avro Lincoln heavy bombers were deployed, flying missions in Kenya from 18 November 1953 to 28 July 1955, dropping nearly 6 million bombs." (Wikipedia, Mau Mau rebellion)

(3) "The US, Israel's closest ally, has over the years given the Jewish state more than \$260bn in military and economic aid, and has promised additional equipment, air defence missiles, guided bombs and ammunition." (Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-44124396> - retrieved 2023-11-06)

(4) "The Nakba, or catastrophe, refers to the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians between 1947 and 1949, when Zionist paramilitaries and then Israel's newly formed army destroyed more than 500 Palestinian villages and towns. About 15,000 Palestinians were killed, and more than 750,000 were forcibly displaced from their land." (Source: Anealla Safdar (23 November 2023): "As Israel pounds Gaza, BBC journalists accuse broadcaster of bias." - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/23/as-israel-pounds-gaza-bbc-journalists-accuse-broadcaster-of-bias> - Downloaded: 2023-11-24

"... the 531 villages and eleven urban neighbourhoods and towns that were destroyed and their inhabitants expelled under the direct orders

the Consultancy put out in March 1948. By then, thirty villages were already gone" (Source: Ilan Pappé: "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine")

That's why the USA, Canada and Australia are now civilised (i.e. white majority) countries with the original inferior races largely exterminated.

These White successes are the consequence of an inherited ideology (faith) which holds that there is a superior race which is entitled to take away the lands of inferior races (the Israelites vs the Philistines in biblical times, white Christian Europeans in the age of "discoveries").

The same ideology motivated the White UK and the White USA to encourage Zionist immigration into lands which did not belong to them. Freedom Fighters which attacked and tried to repel the White invaders were designated as "terrorists", i.e. people who spread terror without justification and without good reason.

Commentators have pointed out that the Gaza explosions of 7 October had to be expected (i.e. had their reasons) and that for the Israelis they must have been as horrible and significant as the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York must have been for the Americans or for "the White World". The analogy is apt: not so much because of the suffering it **caused** to its white victims but because of the suffering inflicted **previously** on the non-white world.

The events of 9/11 were symbolic, an act of revenge by an impotent (= powerless) enemy, the many people throughout the world who see the Americans as the exponents (symbols) of what they regard as "the white devils". If you have an overpowering enemy and you have no army, then you strike him where and as best you can. The distinction between soldiers and civilians is trivial, especially if you feel that the "civilians" among the settler invaders benefit from, and approve of, the injustices perpetrated by the politicians and their armies, and are therefore complicit, and therefore guilty.

So on 9/11, the non-white world saw a chance of expressing its hatred of the white world and avenging the injustices they had suffered over centuries of white domination. The 7 October 2023 Gaza explosions can be seen in a similar light. It was bound to fail militarily, but it was a chance to take revenge for 100 years of injustice and hurt the white arch-enemy. No wonder that the other white powers (including a Coconut Prime Minister from the UK) rushed immediately to embrace their white brothers in occupied Palestine and offered unlimited support.

In the UK we have (or had till 13 November 2023) an ambitious Home Secretary (= Minister of the Interior), also a Coconut, who says that all pro-Palestine marches are "hate marches" and wants the police to ban them. The Coconuts proclaim loudly that "The Israelis have a right to defend themselves" but with eyes-wide-shut forget that the Israelis are invaders and aggressors and have been trying to wipe out the Palestinians since 1947 and have

made the lives of the surviving Palestinians a nightmare ever since then.

On 7 October 2023 Hamas did not attack. Israel had been attacking since 1947, and on 7 October Hamas was acting in self-defence.

It is the Palestinians who are still defending themselves, which they heroically did yet again when Gaza exploded on 7 October. If it were legal, I would think and say that Israel has no right to exist and therefore has no right to defend itself. But since I have been told that this is illegal, I neither think nor say so.

However, what I might say without breaking the law is that Palestine is not a safe environment for invaders, surrounded by hostile indigenous people. Almost any country in the world, e.g. the USA, the UK, and even modern Germany (deeply and rightly ashamed of the Holocaust), is safer than Palestine, and Jewish workers and families would be more welcome and less endangered there. Therefore trying to live in the hostile environment of Palestine is being culpably negligent.

The genocide now taking place in Gaza proves that civilised nations are at work. Only civilised nations have the necessary self-confidence and technical means. "The Nazis were similarly civilised, determined, confident and technically advanced," someone might say. But saying it would be illegal and antisemitic, and therefore, note well!, I do not say it.

I have always tended to mentally support freedom fighters. But it is now illegal to support people who are deemed to be "terrorists", and doing so can result in a long prison-sentence.

The moment this law came into force and the moment the Palestinian freedom fighters were proscribed as "terrorists", my thinking instantly changed. I am an upstanding citizen and will only think and say and do what my government decides. Obviously, like the Vicar of Bray, the moment the law changes, and the Hamas "terrorists" are reclassified as "freedom fighters" and our King, or his successor, apologise for the wrongs we have done to the Palestinians by arming the White settlers, I shall become an ardent supporter of Hamas.

But right now I hereby solemnly declare and swear by the Holy Bible and the Holy Qur'an that I do not support Hamas or any other terrorist organisation.

That brings me to an alternative approach to the current problems in Palestine.

Jews, Christians and Muslims are traditionally great believers in force and violence. In biblical times, Jews tried to drive the Philistines and other barbarian tribes forcefully out of Canaan. They never quite managed. Some still believe that their white god promised them these lands (even though they don't belong to him) and thereby are encouraged to continue these battles for "the

promised land" today. The Jewish bible also sometimes glorifies revenge, often extended over generations; e.g.

"... he [God] does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." (Bible, Exodus 34:7, NIV translation)

"(6) May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands,
(7) to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples,
(8) to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron,
(9) to carry out the sentence written against them - this is the glory of all his faithful people. Praise the LORD. (Bible, Psalm 149:6-9, NIV translation)"

Prophet of vengeance Netanyahu (like his spiritual predecessor in 1943) is determined to make sure, with the weapons of his white allies, that there is no fourth generation on which he has to, or can, wreak vengeance. "Do you want total war!", he screams threateningly at the Palestinians. "No, we want peace and the return of our stolen land and our liberty," they reply. "Who cares," roars the lion of Judah. "You'll get total war whether you want it or not and whether America wants it or not. It will be more total and more radical than you can even imagine." And so it was. And it was not a step towards peace but a step towards the perpetuation of hatred.

Christians and Muslims both often declare themselves to be advocates of peace, and both religions were peaceful when they were weak. But both have resorted to violence and oppression when they were strong.

GENOCIDE COMMANDED IN THE BIBLE

I shall now present six passages from the Jewish bible (Old Testament) which encourage (or command) racism and violent behaviour. Secular law of today would presumably regard this as criminal behaviour. Buddhist philosophy, as exposed below, would regard it as deluded and self-harming behaviour. The translation used for the following quotes is the "New International Version" (NIV) of the Bible.

1. 23 My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. ... 27 "I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. 28 I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. 29 But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. 31 "I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the

Mediterranean Sea, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. **I will give into your hands the people who live in the land, and you will drive them out before you.** 32 Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. 33 **Do not let them live in your land** or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you." (Bible, Exodus 24:23-33)

Comment: "Little by little...": That is the hidden agenda of the settlements on the West Bank. Whether the international community calls them illegal or not, Israel will never voluntarily abolish them. They are meant to remain, to grow, to multiply, and imperceptibly increase the stranglehold on the Palestinians, until there is not a single free Palestinian left. That is the will of the Jewish god. And even Christians pray every Sunday: "Thy will be done." Some will! Some god! Therefore, many Christians **instinctively** support whatever Israel does.

2. 1 When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess ... 2 and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and **show them no mercy.** ... 5 This is what you are to do to them: **Break down their altars,** smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. 6 For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Bible, Deuteronomy, 7:1-6)

Comment: The instruction "Break down their altars" &c is in keeping with the news reported on 2023-12-15 that Israeli soldiers entered and desecrated a mosque on the West Bank and broadcast Jewish prayers on its speaker system. The IDF said this was unacceptable behaviour, and the soldiers would be disciplined. But the Bible says it was obligatory behaviour. (Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67719820>)

3. Hear, Israel: You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. ... the Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you **like a devouring fire.** He will destroy them; ... And you will drive them out and **annihilate** them quickly, as the Lord has promised you. (Deuteronomy 9:1-5)
4. 8 Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 9 and so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them **and their descendants,** a land flowing with milk and honey.

(Deuteronomy 11: 8-9)

"and their descendants": No comment!

5. 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you. 24 Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. 25 No one will be able to stand against you. The Lord your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go. (Deuteronomy 11:23-25)

Comment: "from the river to the sea" (Euphrates to the sea!)

6. 10 When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. 11 If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. 12 If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. 13 When the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. 14 As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the Lord your God gives you from your enemies. 15 This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby. 16 However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. 17 Completely destroy them ... (Deuteronomy 20:10-17)

Comment: Netanyahu would fail in his religious duty if he allowed a single Palestinian to survive. It is naïve of friendly but concerned nations (like the USA) to demand that he should minimise civilian casualties. Netanyahu says he is trying but it is difficult to do so. In fact, he knows that he wants to maximise all casualties, not only Hamas. That is his true war aim. Hamas, on 7 October 2023, provided him with a welcome opportunity to demonstrate his Abrahamic obedience to God.

These biblical instructions will have inspired the Zionists when they "cleared the ground" for the establishment of a Jewish state on land which did not belong to them:

The master plan was as follows:

[On] 10 March 1948, a group of eleven men, veteran Zionist leaders together with young military Jewish officers, put the final touches to a plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

That same evening, military orders were dispatched to the units on the ground to prepare for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians from

vast areas of the country. The orders came with a detailed description of the methods to be employed to forcibly evict the people:

- large-scale intimidation;
- laying siege to and bombarding villages and population centres;
- setting fire to homes, properties and goods;
- expulsion;
- demolition;
- and, finally, planting mines among the rubble to prevent any of the expelled inhabitants from returning.

Each unit was issued with its own list of villages and neighbourhoods as the targets of this master plan. Codenamed Plan D (Dalet in Hebrew), this was the fourth and final version of less substantial plans that outlined the fate the Zionists had in store for Palestine and consequently for its native population. – (Source: Ilan Pappé (2006): "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine.")

The German Nazis (National Socialists) dreamt of an Arian state cleansed of Jews ("Juden-rein"). Similarly the Zionist Nazis dreamt of a Jewish state cleansed of Arabs and tried to drive and squeeze the Arabs out of Palestine, with great success but still limited success. An exasperated Israeli journalist, Kobi Niv, expressed his frustration in a Hebrew article (omitted from the English edition of the newspaper) in Haaretz, 2018-11-28, entitled "From Task to Action: From Regularisation to Extermination". (My quote comes from Bresheeth-Zabner.)

At the end, we will do it [remove every Arab from the Palestinian territory]. What alternative is left? What did we not try? We besieged, barred and blockaded, starved and darkened – this is it, we have reached the end of the scale. We ran out of ideas and they are still there. We won, but what kind of victory is this? A victory is not a "regularisation." A victory is not real if there are no heads rolling on sidewalks, no blood in the streets. Therefore, Gaza needs destroying, leaving not a single stone, expelling, then killing anyone left. (my emphasis) Source: Koby Niv, "From Talk to Action. From Regularisation to Extermination," Haaretz, November 28, 2018 (Hebrew). Taken from Bresheeth-Zabner.

This is an allusion to Cato the Elder's famous admonition "Caeterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam" (Apart from this, I believe that Carthage needs destroying.) In 146 BC, Carthage was razed by the Romans, and its entire remaining population was sold into slavery (Wikipedia). Today, in 2024, we witness Israel doing what Koby Niv demanded in 2018.

**INVESTMENT IN CORPSES:
RATE OF EXCHANGE: ISR-C 1 = PAL-C 14.3
A BARGAIN FOR THE ISRAELIS, USURY FOR THE PALESTINIANS**

The rate of killing in Gaza can be seen as an investment by the Zionist Nazis (Zionists acting in the spirit of the German National Socialists, the Nazis: "There exists a superior/supreme race, e.g. Arians or Jews, which is entitled to pursue its own interests at the expense of all other races, even if it means expelling or killing them").

Let us compute the rate of return. We assume the worst, namely that none of the hostages will survive.

In that case the investment (cost) for the Israelis in approximate figures would be:

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1,500 non-hostage Israelis killed
  250 Israeli hostages killed
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1,750 Israelis killed
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As of 2024-01-21, according to figures released by Hamas, approximately 25,000 Palestinians have been killed.

That means that, for every Israeli corpse invested, the Zionists get 14.3 Palestinian corpses, i.e. a return of **1,430%**, a stunning rate of return: makes your mouth water.

But that is 1,430% **per 3 months**, which has to be converted to the rate **per annum** to make it comparable to other investment opportunities for the Zionists. We then get 5,720% p.a., (let's call it **six thousand per cent** per annum), since the longer the "war" continues and the longer the white powers fail to stop it, the better the return: the investment in Israeli bodies hardly has to be increased but the benefits in terms of Palestinian bodies continue to flow as long as Netanyahu is allowed to continue his ethnic clean-up and, of course, as long as there are still any living Palestinians that can be turned into corpses. Living Palestinians are a finite resource.

As time goes by, there will be many more dead Palestinians but very few additional dead Israelis, unless the Israeli god intervenes and, Insha Allah, sends fire and brimstone on his godless "chosen people", as he did on Sodom and Gomorrah (Bible, Genesis 18-19).

Father Abraham, who out-haggled his god over Sodom and Gomorrah, would rub his hands in delight if he could see the rate of return his god allows his descendants to make. Unfriendly observers would call it **usury**, but I am sure saying that is illegal and therefore I will not say it but only think it.

The Israelis knew several months in advance that Hamas was preparing for a major attack. They did nothing to prevent it. They needed a casus belli, and Hamas provided it. In terms of investment, it was a bargain for the Israelis and usury for the Palestinians.

Since 1954, Dayan wanted war, and tried to prod the Arab states into military conflict so that Israel could conquer Sinai or the West Bank, not to mention destroy Egypt's army. This was what drove the IDF strikes in 1955 at Kuntilla and Sabha and against Syria in December 1955. (Ilan Pappé, (2006): "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine.")

The unshakable belief in the benefits of force inspires the actions of the Israeli government today: The harder you hit the Palestinians (all of them, including women and children) the more

likely the Israelis will have peace, "perpetual peace", in future - or so they believe.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his "Perpetual Peace" (1795) criticised the arrogance of White "civilised" nations:

Let us look now, for the sake of comparison, at the inhospitable behaviour of the civilised nations, especially the commercial states of our continent. The injustice which they exhibit on visiting foreign lands and races - this being equivalent in their eyes to conquest - is such as to fill us with horror.

America, the Negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape &c. were, on being discovered, looked upon as countries which belonged to nobody; for the native inhabitants were reckoned as nothing.

In Hindustan, under the pretext of intending to establish merely commercial depots, the Europeans introduced foreign troops; and, as a result, the different states of Hindustan were stirred up to far-spreading wars. Oppression of the natives followed, famine, insurrection, perfidy and all the rest of the litany of evils which can afflict mankind. (Kant, Perpetual Peace (1795), Dritter Definitivartikel (= Section Three), translated by Mary Campbell Smith. George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London 1903)

The traditions of the Abrahamic religions seem unable to shake off the faith in force, which is popularly and instinctively held by many ordinary people as well. These people elect their governments, and governments therefore also pander to these beliefs.

The texts and comments that follow are intended to show an alternative to these mistaken beliefs in the utility of violence.

After the horrors of World War II, Germany and France decided it was better to end their centuries-old murderous enmity and make a pact of friendship (as we will hear in the two Buddhist stories). This accord gradually developed into the European Union, an organisation devoted to material prosperity and peace among its members. The BBC's Jeremy Bowen writes, in the midst of Israel's murderous onslaught on Gaza:

War is a cruel furnace that puts humans through terrible agonies. But its heat can produce changes that seemed impossible.

It happened in western Europe after World War Two. Old enemies who had killed each other for centuries chose peace. Will the war in Gaza shock Israelis and Palestinians into ending their century of conflict over the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan river?

(Jeremy Bowen (BBC): "Israel-Gaza war: What is the price of peace?"
Downloaded on 2023-12-14 from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67701700>)

The stories at the core of this essay come from the Buddhist tradition.

They deal with Ahimsa (Non-violence), the problem of using force and violence. Ahimsa is the first and most important of the Five Silas (the five precepts of Buddhists). They can usefully be

compared to the Ten Commandments and are outstanding in the way they, unlike the Ten Commandments, concentrate on the essentials.

**DESIRE, FEAR AND ANGER,
OUR GREAT ENEMIES IN HINDUSM**

Hindus have similar lists of virtues and vices. But they have three "cardinal sins" against which they warn us again and again because they lead to other sins and to actions by which we destroy our happiness. They are "desire, fear and anger".

- The **Zionists** and the settlers should think about **desire** and the harm they do to themselves when they deprive the Palestinians of the land which rightfully belongs to the Palestinians.
- All **Israelis** should think about **fear** and the unreasonable attitudes it produces.
- And **Netanyahu** and the IDF should think about **anger** and the unreasonable behaviour it causes, e.g. when they are flattening Gaza and trying to exterminate the Palestinians.

Desire, fear and anger lead to unreasonable actions. Unreasonable actions fire back. If I act like this, I may be hoist by my own petard.

"The gateway of this hell leading to the ruin of the soul is threefold, **lust, anger and greed**. Therefore these three, one should abandon." (Bhagavad Gita 16:21, translated by S Radhakrishnan)

Part 2: The stories and comments

THE FIVE SILAS

Prohibitions	Recommendations	Beneficiaries
1. No violence	Acts of kindness	Others
2. No theft	Generous giving	Others
3. No sexual misconduct	Treating the body of others with kindness	Others
4. No sins of speech	Helping others through good use of speech	Others
5. No mind-altering drugs (including alcohol and tobacco)	Consuming healthy foods and drinks as necessary for the welfare of the body	Self-control, Mindfulness

STORY 1: THE STORY OF PRINCE DĪGHĀVU

Source: Paul Carus (ed): "The Gospel of the Buddha" (1915), chapter 37

This can serve as a Buddhist commentary on Luke 6:27 (Bible): "Do good to them which hate you."

Not by hatred is hatred appeased;
hatred is appeased by not-hatred

"In former times, there lived at Benares a powerful king whose name was Brahmadatta of Kāsi; and he went to war against Dīghīti, the Long-suffering, a king of Kosala, for he thought, 'The kingdom of Kosala is small and Dīghīti will not be able to resist my armies.' 037:14

"And Dīghīti, seeing that resistance was impossible against the great host of the king of Kāsi, fled, leaving his little kingdom in the hands of Brahmadatta; and having wandered from place to place, he came at last to Benares, and lived there with his consort in a potter's dwelling outside the town. 037:15

"And the queen bore him a son and they called him Dīghāvu. 037:16

"When Dīghāvu had grown up, the king thought to himself: 'King Brahmadatta has done us great harm, and he is fearing our revenge; he will seek to kill us. Should he find us he will slay all three of us.' And he sent his son away, and Dīghāvu having received a good education from his father, applied himself diligently to learn all arts, becoming very skilful and wise. 037:17

"At that time the barber of king Dīghīti dwelt at Benares, and he saw the king, his former master, and, being of an avaricious nature, betrayed him to King Brahmadatta. 037:18

"When Brahmadatta, the king of Kāsi, heard that the fugitive king of Kosala and his queen, unknown and in disguise, were living a quiet life in a potter's dwelling, he ordered them to be bound and executed; and the sheriff to whom the order was given seized king Dīghīti and led him to the place of execution. 037:19

"While the captive king was being led through the streets of Benares he saw his son who had returned to visit his parents, and, careful not to betray the presence of his son, yet anxious to communicate to him his last advice, he cried: 'O Dīghāvu, my son! Be not far-sighted, be not near-sighted, for not by hatred is hatred appeased; hatred is appeased by not-hatred only.' 037:20

"The king and queen of Kosala were executed, but Dīghāvu their son bought strong wine and made the guards drunk. When the night arrived he laid the bodies of his parents upon a funeral pyre and burned them with all honors and religious rites. 037:21

"When king Brahmadatta heard of it, he became afraid, for he thought, 'Dīghāvu, the son of king Dīghīti, is a wise youth and he will take revenge for the death of his parents. If he espies a favorable opportunity, he will assassinate me.' 037:22

"Young Dīghāvu went to the forest and wept to his heart's content. Then he wiped his tears and returned to Benares. Hearing that assistants were wanted in the royal elephants' stable, he offered his services and was engaged by the master of the elephants. 037:23

"And it happened that the king heard a sweet voice ringing through the night and singing to the lute a beautiful song that gladdened his heart. And having inquired among his attendants who the singer might be, was told that the master of the elephants had in his service a young man of great accomplishments, and beloved by all his comrades. They said, 'He is wont to sing to the lute, and he must have been the singer that gladdened the heart of the king.' 037:24

"And the king summoned the young man before him and, being much pleased with Dīghāvu, gave him employment in the royal castle. Observing how wisely the youth acted, how modest he was and yet punctilious in the performance of his work, the king very soon gave him a position of trust. 037:25

"Now it came to pass that the king went hunting and became separated from his retinue, young Dīghāvu alone remaining with him. And the king worn out from the hunt laid his head in the lap of young Dīghāvu and slept. 037:26

"And Dīghāvu thought: 'People will forgive great wrongs which they have suffered, but they will never be at ease about the wrongs which they themselves have done. They will persecute their victims to the bitter end.' This king Brahmadatta has done us

great injury, he robbed us of our kingdom and slew my father and my mother. He is now in my power.' Thinking thus he unsheathed his sword. 037:27

"Then Dīghāvu thought of the last words of his father. 'Be not far-sighted, be not near-sighted. For not by hatred is hatred appeased. Hatred is appeased by not-hatred alone.' Thinking thus, he put his sword back into the sheath. 037:28

"The king became restless in his sleep and he awoke, and when the youth asked, 'Why art thou frightened, O king?' he replied: 'My sleep is always restless because I often dream that young Dīghāvu is coming upon me with his sword. While I lay here with my head in thy lap I dreamed the dreadful dream again; and I awoke full of terror and alarm.' 037:29

"Then the youth, laying his left hand upon the defenceless king's head and with his right hand drawing his sword, said: 'I am Dīghāvu, the son of king Dīghīti, whom thou hast robbed of his kingdom and slain together with his queen, my mother. I know that men overcome the hatred entertained for wrongs which they have suffered much more easily than for the wrongs which they have done, and so I cannot expect that thou wilt take pity on me; but now a chance for revenge has come to me.' 037:30

"The king seeing that he was at the mercy of young Dīghāvu raised his hands and said: 'Grant me my life, my dear Dīghāvu, grant me my life. I shall be forever grateful to thee.' 037:31

"And Dīghāvu said without bitterness or ill-will: 'How can I grant thee thy life, O king, since my life is endangered by thee. I do not mean to take thy life. It is thou, O king, who must grant me my life.' 037:32

"And the king said: 'Well, my dear Dīghāvu, then grant me my life, and I will grant thee thine.' 037:33

"Thus, king Brahmadatta of Kāsi and young Dīghāvu granted each other's life and took each other's hand and swore an oath not to do any harm to each other. 037:34

"And king Brahmadatta of Kāsi said to young Dīghāvu: 'Why did thy father say to thee in the hour of his death: "Be not far-sighted, be not near-sighted, for hatred is not appeased by hatred. Hatred is appeased by not-hatred alone," - what did thy father mean by that?' 037:35

"The youth replied:

'When my father, O king, in the hour of his death said: "Be not far-sighted," he meant, Let not thy hatred go far.

And when my father said, "Be not near-sighted," he meant, Be not hasty to fall out with thy friends.

And when he said, "For not by hatred is hatred appeased; hatred is appeased by not-hatred," he meant this: Thou hast killed my father and mother, O king, and if I should deprive thee of thy life, then thy partisans in turn would take away my life; my partisans again would deprive thine of their lives. Thus by hatred, hatred would not be appeased.

But now, O king, thou hast granted me my life, and I have granted thee thine; thus by not-hatred hatred has been appeased.' 037:36

"Then king Brahmadatta of Kāsi thought: 'How wise is young Dīghāvu that he understands in its full extent the meaning of what his father spoke concisely.' And the king gave him back his father's kingdom and gave him his daughter in marriage." 037:37

COMMENT

The failure of the Oslo accords of 1993 between the Israelis and the Palestinians bear out what Dīghāvu explains:

The Oslo Accords were interim agreements, not a peace agreement. They deliberately left many matters undecided to be resolved within a period of five years. The most difficult issues, such as borders, Palestinian refugees, and East Jerusalem (claimed as the Palestinian capital), remained for the final agreement, to be reached after confidence-building measures provided greater trust between the two sides. Jewish and Arab opponents of peace sought to destroy the peace process through violence that often took the lives of civilians, including children. Each unfortunate case required revenge that in turn incited reprisals that continued the cycle of violence. However, "Oslo" had established a timetable, and after last-minute bickering, in 1994 the Israeli flag was lowered over Gaza and Jericho. – Source: Ilan Pappé – The Middle East and South Asia (56th edition, 2023–2024

STORY 2: THE BARREN WIFE

Source: Eugene Watson Burlingame: Buddhist Legends: Dhammapada Commentary, Vol 1 - Translated from the original Pāli text of the Dhammapada Commentary by Eugene Watson Burlingame. Harvard University Press, 1921, Book I. Pairs, Yamaka Vagga

Motto:

For not by hatred are hatreds ever quenched here in this world.
By love rather are they quenched. This is an eternal law.
(Dhammapada I:5)

This religious instruction was given by the Teacher [the Buddha] while he was in residence at Jetavana with reference to a certain barren woman. §-01

It appears that a certain householder's son, on the death of his father, did all the farm and household work by himself alone and took care of his mother to boot. Now his mother said to him, "Dear son, I will fetch you a young woman to wife." §-02

"Dear mother, speak not thus; my sole desire is to care for you so long as you shall live." §-03

"Dear son, you alone are doing all the farm and household work, and I am not satisfied to have it so; let me fetch you a young woman to wife." He protested time and again, and then held his peace. §-04

The mother left the house, intending to go to a certain family and fetch home the daughter of that family. Her son asked her, "To what family are you going?" §-05

"To such and such a family." He would not let her go to the family she had in mind, but told her of a family he liked better. So she went to the family he fancied, selected a wife for her son, and having set the day, installed her in her son's house.
The woman turned out to be barren. §-06

Then said the mother to the son, "Son, you had me fetch you a wife you yourself selected. Now she turns out to be barren. Without children a family dies out, and the line is not continued. Therefore let me fetch you another young woman to wife." §-07

"Enough said, dear mother," replied the son; but the mother repeated her request time and again. §-08

The barren wife heard the talk and thought to herself, "It is certain that sons cannot disobey the words of their mothers and fathers. Now if she fetches him a wife who is fruitful, they will

treat me like a slave. Suppose I were to fetch him a young woman of my own selection?" §-09

So the barren wife went to a certain family and selected a young woman for him. But she immediately encountered the opposition of the young woman's parents, who said to her, "Woman, what say you?" §-10

The barren wife replied, "I am a barren woman, and without children a family dies out. If your daughter gives birth to a son, she will be mistress of the family and the wealth thereof. Therefore give your daughter to me for my husband." She finally prevailed upon them to grant her request, and taking the young woman with her, installed her in her husband's house. §-11

Then this thought occurred to her, "If my rival gives birth to a son or a daughter, she alone will be mistress of the household. I must see to it that she shall not give birth to a child." §-12

So the barren wife said to her rival, "As soon as you have conceived a child in your womb, pray let me know." §-13

"Very well," replied her rival. In accordance with her promise, as soon as she had conceived, she told her fellow-wife. §-14

Now the barren wife was accustomed to give her rival a meal of rice-porridge regularly every day with her own hand. So along with the food she gave her a drug to cause abortion. The result was that her rival had a miscarriage. §-15

Again the second time the fruitful wife conceived a child and informed the barren wife. And again her fellow-wife did as before and brought about a miscarriage. §-16

The women who lived in the neighborhood asked the fruitful wife, "Is not your rival putting an obstacle in your way?" §-17

When she told them the facts, they said to her, "You foolish woman, why did you do this? This woman was afraid you would get the upper hand. So she mixed a preparation to bring about a miscarriage and gave it to you. Do not tell her again." §-18

Accordingly the third time the fruitful wife said nothing to her rival. But the barren wife, seeing her belly, said to her, "Why did you not tell me that you had conceived a child?" §-19

Said the fruitful wife, "It was you who brought me here, and twice you have caused me to suffer a miscarriage; why should I tell you?" §-20

"Now I am lost," thought the barren wife. From that time on she watched to catch her rival off her guard. When the babe in the womb was fully matured, she took advantage of an opportunity, mixed a drug, and gave it to her. But because the babe in her womb was fully mature, an abortion was out of the question, and

the result was that the child lodged across the neck of the womb.
§-21

Immediately the mother suffered acute pains and feared that her hour had come. §-22

"You have killed me!" she cried. "It was you alone that brought me here; it was you alone that killed my three children. Now I also am going to die. When I have passed out of this existence, may I be reborn as an ogress able to devour your children." §-23

And having made this Earnest Wish, she died, and was reborn in that very house as a cat. §-24

The husband seized the barren wife, and saying to her, "It was you who destroyed my family," beat her soundly with elbows, knees, and otherwise. As the result of the beating she received, she sickened and died, and was reborn in that very house as a hen. §-25

So the fruitful wife was reborn as a cat, and the barren wife was reborn as a hen. The hen laid eggs, and the cat came and ate them. This happened three times. Said the hen, "Three times have you eaten my eggs, and now you are seeking an opportunity to eat me too. When I have passed out of this existence, may I be able to eat you and your offspring." §-26

And having made this Earnest Wish, she passed out of that existence, and was reborn as a leopardess. The cat was reborn as a doe. §-27

So the barren wife, at the end of her existence as a hen, was reborn as a leopardess; and the fruitful wife, at the end of her existence as a cat, was reborn as a doe. Thrice the doe brought forth young, and thrice the leopardess went and devoured the doe's offspring. §-28

When the doe came to die, she said, "Thrice this beast has devoured my offspring, and now she purposes to devour me too. When I have passed out of this existence, may I be able to devour her and her offspring." §-29

And having made this Earnest Wish, she was reborn as an ogress. When the leopardess passed out of that existence, she was reborn at Sāvātthi as a young woman of station. §-30

So the fruitful wife, at the end of her existence as a doe, was reborn as an ogress; and the barren wife, at the end of her existence as a leopardess, was reborn at Sāvātthi as a young woman of station. §-31

When the latter grew up, she was married and went to live with her husband's family in a little settlement near the gate of the city. After a time she gave birth to a son. The ogress disguised

herself as a dear **friend** of the young woman and went to see her. §-32

"Where is my friend?" said the ogress. §-33

"In the inner room; she has just given birth to a child." §-34

"Did she give birth to a son or a daughter? I should like to see her." So saying, the ogress went in. While pretending to be looking at the child, she seized him, devoured him, and then went out. §-35

Again a second time she devoured a child of the young wife in the same way. §-36

The third time the young wife was great with child she addressed her husband, "Husband, in this place an ogress has devoured two sons of mine and escaped. This time I intend to go to the house of my parents to give birth to my child. §-37

Now at this time that ogress was away doing her turn at drawing water. (For Vessavaṇa's ogresses take their turn at drawing water from lake Anotatta, passing it along from the source. At the expiration of four or five months they are released; the others die of exhaustion.) §-38

The moment the ogress was released from her turn at drawing water she went quickly to the young wife's house and inquired, "Where is my friend?" §-39

"Where you will not see her. There is an ogress that devours every child she bears in this house, and therefore, she has gone to the house of her parents." §-40

"She may go wherever she likes, but she will not escape from me." Spurred on by an impulse of hatred, the ogress dashed towards the city. §-41

On the day appointed for the naming of the child the mother bathed him, gave him a name, and then said to her husband, "Husband, now we will go back to our own home." Accordingly she took the boy in her arms and set out with her husband along the path leading through the grounds of the monastery. §-42

When they reached the monastery pool, the young wife gave the boy to her husband and bathed in the pool. When she had finished her bath, her husband bathed in the pool. While the husband was bathing, the wife remained near, giving suck to her child. §-43

Just then the ogress drew near. The young wife saw her coming and recognized her. Immediately she screamed with a loud voice, "Husband! husband! come quickly! come quickly! here is that ogress!" Not daring to wait until her husband came, she turned and dashed into the monastery. §-44

Now at this time the Teacher was preaching the Law in the midst of the congregation. The young wife laid her boy at the feet of the Tathāgata and said, "I give you this child; spare the life of my son." §-45

The deity Sumana, who resided in the embattled chamber over the gate, prevented the ogress from entering. The Teacher addressed the Elder Ānanda, saying, "Go, Ānanda, summon that ogress within." The Elder summoned her within. §-46

The young wife said, "Here she comes, Reverend Sir." §-47

Said the Teacher, "Let her come; make no noise." §-48

When the ogress came and stood before him, the Teacher said, "Why have you so done? Had you not come face to face with a Buddha like me, you would have cherished hatred towards each other for an aeon, like the Snake and the Mongoos, who trembled and quaked with enmity, like the Crows and the Owls. **Why do you return hatred for hatred? Hatred is quenched by love, not by hatred.**" And when he had thus spoken, he pronounced the following Stanza, §-49

(5.) **For not by hatred are hatreds ever quenched**
 here in this world.
 By love rather are they quenched.
This is an eternal law. §-50

At the conclusion of the Stanza the ogress was established in the Fruit of Conversion. §-51

The Teacher said to the woman, "Give your child to this ogress." §-52

"I am afraid to, Reverend Sir." §-53

"Fear not. You have no reason to be alarmed because of her." §-54

The young wife gave her child to the ogress. The ogress kissed and caressed him, gave him back again to his mother, and began to weep. §-55

The Teacher asked her, "Why do you weep?" §-56

"Reverend Sir, in the past I have managed somehow or other to get a living, but I have never had enough to eat. Now how am I to live?" §-57

Then the Teacher comforted her, saying, "Do not worry." And turning to the mother, he said, "Take this ogress home with you, let her live in your own house, and feed her with the choicest rice-porridge." §-58

So the young wife took the ogress home with her, lodged her on the central rafter of the hut, and fed her with the choicest rice-porridge. §-59

Now when the rice was threshed and the flail was raised, she feared that it would strike her head. So she said to her friend, "I shall not be able to live here any longer; lodge me elsewhere." §-60

She was lodged successively in the flail-hut, the water-chatty, the bake-house, a storeroom, the dust-heap, and the village gate. But she refused to live in any of these places, saying, "Here the flail rises as if it would split my head in two; here boys empty out slops; here dogs lie down; here boys attend to nature's needs; here they throw away sweepings; here village boys practice fortune-telling." §-61

So they lodged her in a quiet place by herself outside of the village, and there they brought her the choicest rice-porridge. §-62

The ogress said to her friend, "This year there will be abundance of rain; therefore plant your crops in a dry place. This year there will be a drought; therefore plant your crops in a moist place." Other people's crops were destroyed either by excessive moisture or by drought, but the crops of the young wife flourished above measure. §-63

People asked the young wife, "Woman, your crops are destroyed neither by excessive moisture nor by drought. When you plant your crops, you seem to know in advance whether the season will be wet or dry. How is this?" §-64

The young wife replied, "I have a friend, an ogress, who tells me whether the season will be wet or dry; and I plant my crops according to her directions on high or low ground. Don't you see? Every day the choicest rice-porridge and other kinds of food are carried out of our house; to her are they carried. Do you also carry the choicest rice-porridge and other kinds of food to her, and she will look after your crops also." §-65

Straightway all the residents of the city rendered honor to her. On her part, from that time forth, she looked after the crops of all. And she received abundant gifts and a large retinue. Subsequently she established the Eight Ticket-foods, which are kept up even to this present day. §-66

ANALYSIS

Notation:

A > B = A attacks B

A < B = B attacks A

The arrow, < or > , points at the victim.

In each life, the other person becomes the victim.

Son chooses Barren woman (B).

Barren Wife (B) chooses Fertile wonan (F).

(1) B > F (Barren woman hurts Fertile woman: this starts the cycle of violence)

[Note: In Palestine, the cycle of violence was started by the White invaders, the foreign settlers. But in this story it does not matter who started it. The only question is "How to end it".]

(2) Hen < Cat (Hen is hurt by cat, who eats her eggs)

(3) Leopardess > Doe (Leopardess hurts Doe)

(4) Woman < Ogress (Woman is hurt by Ogress)

(5) Here the Buddha intervenes.

[Woman + Ogress] - together

(6) The two old enemies do their utmost to help each other: the violence ceases.

The trigger of the action is the fact that often a barren woman is treated with disdain, as, for instance, in the story of Hagar (Bible, Genesis 16:1-6), same as Hājar, ancestor of the Holy Prophet Mohammed, in the Muslim tradition.

THE ETHICS OF THE BUDDHIST STORIES

The Buddhist stories imply that it is beneficial to interpret the Biblical commandments "Love thy neighbour" and the injunctions to treat the stranger well as follows:

It is the present custom that each individual or each community looks first after its own interests ("Self before Other") - and after the interests of others only if it is not too inconvenient ("Other before Self"). It would be better for mankind if all (or most) of us developed an instinctive response of "Other before Self", the urge to be more concerned with the welfare of The Other and leave it to chance whether The Other deserves it or reciprocates and leave our own welfare to chance (i.e. to "God"). This is the instinct of a mother, who will put her children's welfare above her own.

In concrete terms: be more ready to be kind to people of a different race, a different country, a different sex, a different age (old vs young), a different religion, a different social class, of a different political party &c, than your own. This would have implications for our treatment of economic migrants, asylum seekers, "bogus asylum seekers", refugees, Gypsies, "bloody foreigners" &c. As a result, Christians would, by preference, feed Muslims and Jews (prior to their own members), whites would feed blacks and vice versa. Let Africans feed Caribbeans. Let Hindus feed Muslims (as Gandhi recommended) and Muslims feed Hindus, let Sunni Muslims feed Shia Muslims and vice versa, let Israelis (happily and generously and lovingly) feed Palestinians and vice versa. ("All humans become brothers", as it says in Schiller's "Ode to Joy".) That would speak in favour of the "one-state solution" proposed for Palestine many years ago.

The injunction "Love thy neighbour" can be interpreted in this way: "Neighbours" are those who belong to a different group, those who are not near but all those who are "distant."

The readiness to be kind can also find non-showy expression: When we recognise that somebody is a "stranger", i.e. belongs to a different group, e.g. in the street or on a bus, we can greet him in passing or give him a smile rather than ignore him or give him a cold stare; this way he knows he is not in a "hostile environment" (an unpleasant attitude the UK government tried to encourage recently) and the stranger will feel a little more secure. Our heart should be ready to make such gestures, and we should bring up our children to feel like this.

A saint called Geron (or something like it) once had a dream. Heaven and hell looked very similar. In hell, the "dead" people sat around a huge cauldron with the most delicious curry. They had iron ladles with long iron handles. They had been starved and looked like living skeletons and could not get at the delicious food in the cauldron. The iron handles of their ladles were red hot, and they could not get the food to their mouths.

By contrast, in heaven the souls were all well-fed. The cauldron was as big as that in hell, the iron handles of their ladles were also red hot, the curry was as delicious (all came from the same caterer, Heaven&Hell Supplies Unlimited). They fed each other.

Are we not really stupid, and deserve our misery and our wars, if we act otherwise!

In this spirit, there is a Buddhist recommendation that the primary aim of our lives should be to promote the welfare of others rather than the welfare of ourselves.

Then the Blessed One, perceiving that **death was near**, uttered these words:

"He who gives away shall have real gain.

He who subdues himself shall be free, he shall cease to be a slave of passions.

The righteous man casts off evil;

and by rooting out lust, bitterness, and illusion, do we reach Nirvāna."

(Source: Carus 095:25)

These then are, almost, the last words of the Buddha.

So, paradoxically, we benefit more if we give than if we take. That is the Buddhist doctrine. It is also expressed in a German proverb: "Geben ist seliger denn nehmen." (Giving is more blissful than taking.)

Much conflict in the world would disappear if this wisdom predominated in teaching, upbringing and practice.

Hinduism has a doctrine which is related to this attitude (and would eliminate the culture wars being conducted on social media): Focus on doing your duties instead of demanding your rights; for your duties are the rights of The Other. If everybody does his duty, nobody will have to fight for his rights. Focus on doing **your** duty rather than trying to force others to do theirs and punish them if they fail to do so.

About the treatment of The Other in today's world, see also: Byung-Chul Han (2018): "The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today".

The precept of Ahimsa, Non-violence, can be usefully applied not only to other human beings but also to the animal kingdom, the air, the soil, the mountains and the seas. This is beautifully summarised in the concluding verses of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

.

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
 To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
 He prayeth well, who loveth well
 Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
 All things both great and small;
 For the dear God who loveth us,
 He made and loveth all.

Applied to soil and mountains, it means that we should not destroy the sacred soil of Palestine or sacred mountains in Australia or the USA.

INJUNCTIONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT (BIBLE)

Now follow twenty injunctions from the Old Testament about the treatment of strangers, sadly, "more honour'd in the breach than the observance." (Hamlet 1:4).

The translation is based on the New International Version (NIV).

(1) But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the stranger who is within your gates. (Exodus 20:10)

(2) "You shall not wrong a traveller or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 22:21)

(3) "You shall not oppress a stranger. You know the heart of a traveller, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

(4) When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

(5) And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 23:22)

Comment: This is a wonderful idea. Ruth (in the Bible) benefited from it.

(6) If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a traveller (sojourner), and he shall live with you. Take no

interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. (Leviticus 25:35-38)

Comment: This instruction has remarkable implications in favour of the stranger. It is taken for granted that a stranger is treated well. And the treatment of the stranger is used as the measure of how well the brother should be treated. Nowadays a similar instruction would probably be formulated the other way round. It is taken for granted that we treat our brother well, and we would therefore be instructed: "Treat the stranger as if he were your brother."

(7) And if a stranger sojourns among you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its rule, so shall he do. You shall have one statute, both for the stranger and for the native." (Numbers 9:14)

Comment: i.e. the stranger has the same rights and duties as the native.

(8) He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Love the stranger, therefore, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:18-19)

(9) You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land. (Deuteronomy 23:7)

Comment: This prohibits racism, i.e. ill feelings on the grounds of race or nationality. Not only visible actions are prohibited but also the thoughts since thoughts are the source of all actions.

The remark about the Egyptian refers to an old story when the Israelites were guests of the Egyptians, i.e. benefited from them. By the same token, when "upstanding white people" complain about petty thieving of Gypsies, or benefits given to "non-white" "bogus asylum seekers", we should see it in the light of the grand thieving which the colonial powers have conducted for centuries in the past. History is not dead. It matters. Kant, in "Perpetual Peace", makes a similar observation.

(10) You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the strangers who are in your land within your towns. (Deuteronomy 24:14)

Comment: This prohibits exploitation of strangers, which so often happens, especially if their immigration status is in doubt and they are therefore afraid to lodge an official complaint. We find such cases in the press at regular intervals.

(11) When you reap your harvest in your field and **forget** a sheaf in the **field**, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the **stranger**, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your **olive trees**, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the **stranger**, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the **grapes** of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the **stranger**, the fatherless, and the widow. (Deuteronomy 24:19-21)

Comment: This is a beautiful rule, easily followed in an agricultural society. We have to consider how we could apply it in ours. Perhaps it corresponds to giving something to the foodbank when leaving the supermarket. The general implication is that we share with the strangers what we have instead of treating them with hostility (Creating "a hostile environment" as Christian Britain officially did.)

(12) When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the **stranger**, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled, then you shall say before the Lord your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I **forgotten them**. (Deuteronomy 26:12-13)

(13) '**Cursed** be anyone who perverts the justice due to the **stranger**, the fatherless, and the widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.' (Deuteronomy 27:19)

Comment: Dire punishment will hit the person who treats the stranger unfairly.

(14) The **stranger** has not lodged in the street; I have **opened my doors** to the stranger) (Job 31:32)

(15) The **Lord watches** over the **strangers**; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. (Psalm 146:9)

(16) For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you **do not oppress the stranger**, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. (Bible, Jeremiah 7:5-7)

Comment: This can be seen as a condemnation of the Home Office policy of creating a "**hostile environment**" for illegal immigrants.

(17) The people of the land have practised extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the stranger without justice. (Ezekiel 22:29)

(18) You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the strangers who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the stranger resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance, declares the Lord God. (Ezekiel 47:22-23)

(19) Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the stranger, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." (Zechariah 7:10)

(20) Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the stranger, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:5)

INJUNCTION FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT (BIBLE, MARK 12:28-32)

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Part 3: Comfort for the Oppressed

alias

"Why should the devil have all the best tunes"

alias

Use the weapons of the oppressor

"Why should the devil have all the best tunes" is a saying attributed to William Booth (1829–1912), founder of the Salvation Army, when he encouraged a drive to use popular tunes with secular texts and use them for songs with religious texts.

A MIGHTY STRONGHOLD IS OUR GOD

If the Palestinians knew German, or if great belligerent reformer Dr Martin Luther (1483–1546) were born in Palestine, the Palestinians could sing his battle hymn "Ein feste Burg" (A mighty stronghold is our God).

<p>(1) Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, ein gute Wehr und Waffen. Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not, die uns jetzt hat betroffen.</p> <p>Der alt böse Feind mit Ernst er's jetzt meint, groß Macht und viel List sein grausam Rüstung ist, auf Erd ist nicht seinsgleichen.</p>	<p>A mighty stronghold is our God, A good defence and weapon. He frees us from all misery Which now has overwhelmed us. [Comment: Not quite, it seems!]</p> <p>The ancient evil enemy [iblis] now means business: His cruel armour is Great power and great cunning: Nothing like it is on this earth. [Comment: So true!]</p>
<p>(3) Und wenn die Welt voll Teufel wär und wollt uns gar verschlingen, so fürchten wir uns nicht so sehr, es soll uns doch gelingen. Der Fürst dieser Welt, wie sau'r er sich stellt, tut er uns doch nicht; das macht, er ist gericht': ein Wörtlein kann ihn fällen.</p>	<p>And if the world were full of devils And wanted to devour all of us, We still are not afraid: In spite of all we shall succeed. The prince of this world, [iblis, the devil] However threatening his face, He cannot harm us; he has already been found guilty: One little word can destroy him.</p>

Comment: Verse 3 does not apply. The "inmates" of the concentration camp called Gaza will realise that. "Ein Wörtlein kann ihn fällen (One little word can destroy him)"? No, that requires more than one little word. It requires a downpour of rockets from Iran getting through to Jerusalem and leaving no stone upon the other - and wishing that is illegal, and inhuman, and therefore **I do not wish it**. But if retaliation should be "proportionate", as has so often been demanded in the media, then at the end of it all, Jerusalem should look like Gaza City. Therefore let us pray that retaliation be **not proportionate**.

Sadly, the god of Israel thinks otherwise; he commands that things should be proportionate: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Bible, Exodus 21:23–27), i.e. a bomb for a bomb, a ruin for a ruin, a corpse for a corpse, a child for a child, a flattened neighbourhood for a flattened neighbourhood. Some Palestinians, subhuman though they are, may be human enough to pray that this does not happen to Jerusalem, as even the Bible has so often warned!

"Take warning, Jerusalem, or I will turn away from you and make your land desolate so no one can live in it." (Bible, Jeremiah 6:8)

(4) Nehmen sie den Leib,
Gut, Ehr, Kind und Weib:
lass fahren dahin,

sie haben's kein' Gewinn,

If they take away our body,
Possessions, honour, children, wife:
Let them go,
[Comment: "So true!" the suffering
Palestinians will sigh.]

They will not benefit.
[Comment: No, not true. The invaders, the
occupiers, the settler-colonists **will win**,
because they are supported by White
governments, White media, White technology,
and their naïve white followers, an infinite
supply of weapons from White USA, and
because they all believe in the "one and only
true god", who, in biblical times, **promised**
them land which belongs to the Philistines
(Palestinians), making a present of somebody
else's property.

As we all know, since the destruction of the
island of Melos (416 BC) in a conflict between
force and justice, force will always win. The
powerful Athenians (inventors of Western
democracy!), when at last they managed to
crush the heroic resistance of the Melians,
killed all the men, sold the women and children
into slavery and settled their own citizens on

das Reich muß uns doch bleiben.	<p>the island. So this island was now "rightfully" Athenian, just as happened when White settlers took over the USA, Mexico, Australia, and many other lands, just as Palestine will (or will it?) one day be "rightfully" Israeli.]</p> <p>"the Kingdom must remain ours," [the deluded Palestinians will sigh as the last of them expire.]</p>
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[Comment: That is the "Final solution".

The rest is silence.

Now cracks a noble heart.
Good-night, sweet prince;
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. (Hamlet)]

ENTER HAMAS
(7 OCTOBER 2023)

GHOST OF DECEASED HAMAS FREEDOM FIGHTER:

Israel has no right to exist.

The Palestinians have the right to defend themselves.

<p>Nein, eine Grenze hat Tyrannenmacht, Wenn der Gedrückte nirgends Recht kann finden, Wenn unerträglich wird die Last – greift er Hinauf getrosten Mutes in den Himmel, Und holt herunter seine ew'gen Rechte, Die droben hangen unveräusserlich Und unzerbrechlich wie die Sterne selbst – Der alte Urstand der Natur kehrt wieder, Wo Mensch dem Menschen gegenübersteht – Zum letzten Mittel, wenn kein andres mehr Verfangen will, ist ihm das Schwert gegeben – Der Güter höchstes dürfen wir verteid'gen Gegen Gewalt – Wir stehn vor unser Land, Wir stehn vor unsre Weiber, unsre Kinder!</p> <p>(Friedrich Schiller: Wilhelm Tell)</p>	<p>The might of tyrants is not limitless: When the oppressed finds justice nowhere, When the burden becomes unbearable, his hand Confidently reaches up to heaven, And fetches down his eternal rights, Which reside there, unmoveable And unbreakable as the stars themselves. The original state of nature returns, When man faces man. When no other means works, Then he may take up the sword. We are entitled to defend the highest of goods Against oppression - We stand here to defend our country, To defend our women and our children.</p> <p>(Translated by Klaus Bung)</p>
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DA PACEM, DOMINE

Da pacem, Domine, in diebus nostris Quia non est alius Qui pugnet pro nobis Nisi tu Deus noster.	Give peace, o Lord, in our time, For there is nobody Who could fight for us, Except you, our God.
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This is a Latin prayer originating in the 7th century AD. In 1529, Martin Luther (1483-1546) translated it into German verse and provided it with a tune, and in various versions and translations it has been sung and prayed ever since in Christian churches. There is no reason why Arabs should not use it for their dua, in Arabic, of course.

O CHANGE OF TIMES! YOU HOPE OF THE PEOPLE

O Blindheit der Großen! Sie wandeln wie Ewige Groß auf gebeugten Nacken, sicher Der gemieteten Fäuste, vertrauend Der Gewalt, die so lang schon gedauert hat. Aber lang ist nicht ewig. O Wechsel der Zeiten! Du Hoffnung des Volks!	O blindness of the Great. They stride like eternal Gods Tall on bent necks, sure Of the hired fists, trusting In the force which has endured so long. But for long is not for ever. O change of times! You hope of the people"
Bertolt Brecht: "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" Translation by Klaus Bung	

- The British were driven out of Kenya by the Mau Mau (eight years: 1952-1960) and by history.
- The French were driven out of Algeria by the resistance fighters and by history (eight years: 1954-1962). (see Alistair Horne: "A Savage War of Peace - Algeria, 1954-1962")
- The "Thousand-Year Reich", of which Hitler and his followers dreamt and which was based on military might, survived a mere 12 years (1933-1945).
- Israel: Thy clock is running.

PEOPLE LIVING IN THE SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION

An Israeli charity that acts in the spirit commended in the Buddhist stories is called "Road to Recovery".

"Road to Recovery" (Derech Hachlama in Hebrew) is an Israeli charity that connects Israeli volunteers with Palestinians in need of transportation to doctor's appointments and other medical care within Israel. The group also assists in transporting Gazans to appointments in the West Bank. As of 2023, the group was serving about 2,700 Palestinian patients each year. In addition to providing logistical assistance, the organization also serves to develop connections between individual Israelis and Palestinians. In some cases, volunteers and patients will also meet to spend time together in recreational settings, attend memorial services for patients who have died, or support the families of deceased patients.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Road_to_Recovery_\(charity\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Road_to_Recovery_(charity))) "

In a similar spirit, German poet Johann Wolfgang von **Goethe** (1749–1832), in his poem cycle "West-östlicher Divan" (West-Eastern Divan) reached out to Persian poet Hafiz (1326–1390)

Among those poems are these verses:

Gottes ist der Orient! Gottes ist der Occident! Nord- und südliches Gelände Ruht im Frieden seiner Hände.	To God belongs the Orient! To God belongs the Occident! The Northern and the Southern lands Are protected by his hands.
Er, der einzige Gerechte, Will für jedermann das Rechte. Sey, von seinen hundert Namen, Dieser hochgelobet! Amen.	HE who alone can be called Just Desires Justice for everyone. May, of his one hundred names, This one be most highly praised! Amen
	Translation by Klaus Bung

In a similar spirit, Jewish international conductor Daniel Barenboim and Palestinian scholar Edward Said (1935–2003) brought young musicians from often hostile countries together in the **"West-Eastern Divan Orchestra"**. This is "based in Seville, Spain, consisting of musicians from countries in the Middle East, of Egyptian, Iranian, Israeli, Jordanian, Lebanese, Palestinian,

Syrian and Spanish background." (Wikipedia)

Ilan Pappé concludes his book on the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine as follows:

Not all the Jews in Israel are blind to the scenes of carnage that their army left behind in 1948, nor are they deaf to the cries of the expelled, the wounded, the tortured and the raped as they keep reaching us through those who survived, and through their children and grandchildren. In fact, growing numbers of Israelis are aware of the truth of what happened in 1948, and fully comprehend the moral implications of the ethnic cleansing that raged in the country. They also recognise the risk of Israel re-activating the cleansing programme in a desperate attempt to maintain its absolute Jewish majority.

It is among these people that we find the political wisdom that all past and present peace-brokers of the conflict appear to lack so totally: they are fully aware that the refugee problem stands at the heart of the conflict and that the fate of the refugees is pivotal for any solution to have a chance of succeeding.

True, these Israeli Jews who go against the grain are few and far between, but they are there, and given the overall desire of the Palestinians to seek restitution and not demand retribution, together they hold the key to reconciliation and peace in the torn land of Palestine. They are found standing alongside the 'internal' Palestinian refugees today, almost half a million people, in joint annual pilgrimages to the destroyed villages, a journey of Nakba commemoration that takes place each year on the day official Israel celebrates (according to the Jewish calendar) its 'Independence Day'. You can see them in action as members of NGOs such as Zochrot - 'remembering' in Hebrew - who stubbornly make it their mission to put up signs with the names of destroyed Palestinian villages in places where today there are Jewish settlements or a JNF forest. You can hear them speak at the Conferences for the Right of Return and Just Peace that began in 2004, where together with their Palestinian friends, from within and outside the country, they reaffirm their commitment to the refugees' Right of Return, and where they, like this writer, vow to continue the struggle to protect the memory of the Nakba against all attempts to dwarf the horror of its crimes or deny they ever happened, for the sake of a lasting and comprehensive peace to emerge one day in the land of Palestine. (my emphases)

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Bresheeth-Žabner, Haim (2020): "An Army Like No Other - How the Israel Defense Force Made a Nation." Verso Publishers, London and New York, 419 pp

Burlingame, Eugene Watson (1921): "Buddhist Legends: Dhammapada Commentary," Vol 1 - Translated from the original Pāli text of the Dhammapada Commentary. Harvard University Press, Book I. Pairs, Yamaka Vagga, 270 pp

Carus, Paul (ed) (1915): "The Gospel of the Buddha. Compiled from ancient sources." Open Court Publishing, 259 pp

Englert, Sai (2022): "Settler Colonialism - An Introduction." Pluto Press, London, 227 pp

Han, Byung-Chul (2018): "The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today." Polity, Cambridge, UK, 100pp

Masalha, Nur (2012): "The Palestine Nakba. Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory". Zed Books, London, 298 pp

Masalha, Nur (2014): "The Zionist Bible - Biblical Precedent, Colonialism and the Erasure of Memory." Routledge, London, 356 pp

Pappé, Ilan (2006): "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine." Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 384 pp

Said, Edward (1979): "The Question of Palestine." Times Books, New York, 292 pp

Shibli, Adania (2016) - Minor Detail (a novel set in occupied Palestine)

FOOTNOTES

1. 7 October 2023: Date on which Hamas fighters broke out of the confines of Gaza and managed to kill and kidnap Israeli citizens.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Israel%E2%80%93Hamas_war
2. 1917 - Date of the Balfour declaration, in which the British government promised to establish "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balfour_Declaration
3. 1492 (Columbus): In January 1492, Spanish King Ferdinand defeated the Muslim rulers in Spain. In August 1492, Columbus set out on the expedition which ended in the subjugation of the Americas.
4. Final solution (Endlösung): Term used by the Nazis for their aim of erasing the Jewish race from the face of the earth.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Final_Solution
5. "Special military operation": term Vladimir Putin used to describe his invasion of Ukraine which started on 24 February 2022.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_military_operation
6. Philistines : Palestinians - The names are etymologically closely related: compare:
P h i l i s t i n e s
P a l e s t i n i a n s
7. Discoveries: They were discoveries only from the European point of view. The natives didn't have to discover their territories. They knew them all along. About the implications of the term and the "discovery doctrine", see Wikipedia:

--- quote starts ---

The discovery doctrine, or doctrine of discovery, is a disputed interpretation of international law during the Age of Discovery, introduced into United States municipal law by the US Supreme Court Justice John Marshall in *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823). In Marshall's formulation of the doctrine, discovery of territory previously unknown to Europeans gave the discovering nation title to that territory against all other European nations, and this title could be perfected by possession. A number of legal scholars have criticized Marshall's interpretation of the relevant international law. In recent decades, advocates for Indigenous rights have campaigned against the doctrine. In 2023, the Vatican formally repudiated the

doctrine.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovery_doctrine -
downloaded 2023-11-14

--- quote ends ---

8. 9/11: Attacks by al-Qaeda on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001
9. Coconut: Black on the outside, white on the inside; a black person thinking and acting in the white way; especially a person not showing solidarity with races oppressed by white culture and instead trying to succeed by adopting white values.
10. The Home Secretary (= Minister of the Interior) of the UK at the time when this essay was started (7 November 2023) was Suella Braverman. She has since been forced to resign because of her use of undiplomatic (too aggressive) language in public utterances.
11. "Do you want total war?": 1943 speech by Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels in Berlin Sportpalast: "Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg? Wollt ihr ihn, wenn nötig, totaler und radikaler, als wir ihn uns heute überhaupt noch vorstellen können?" (Do you want total war? Do you want it, if needed, more total and more radical than we can even imagine today?) This speech was addressed to a crowd of his German supporters, the **aggressors** in this total war. When cheering this speech, they hoped for a quick victory by making their war total and merciless (as is Netanyahu's war against the Palestinians). Their hopes were disappointed: Two years later, in 1945, the Nazis had their **come-uppance**: many German cities were in ruins; they looked like Gaza City looks today. But the Nazis were the aggressors: therefore they deserved defeat.

The Palestinians do not. They are weak. They are victims of Israeli aggression. They are virtually defenceless by comparison with Israel. Hamas is nothing compared with the combined might of Israel, the USA and the UK. They have been deprived of their traditional lands by the Zionist invaders, and the "total war" war now conducted against them has the purpose of driving them out of their remaining land (Gaza) as well. The clearance of the "West Bank" has started and will be next. A **pause** in the fighting is meaningless. Only a **total end** of the fighting makes sense to the Palestinians. But to the Israelis it makes no sense, since their aim is to drive the Palestinians out of Gaza altogether. That's why I call Netanyahu's onslaught "total war". Its purpose is not defeat of the enemy but **annihilation** of the enemy. The Hamas operation gave Netanyahu the excuse, the

opportunity, for this military operation.

12. Melos (416 BC): Greek historian Thucydides describes this event in his "History of the Peloponnesian War", Book 5:17). This is how the story ends. The Melians would not yield to the superior power of the Athenians. The Athenians therefore besieged the island, cutting off all its supplies (just as all Gaza supplies have been cut off by the Israelis). A Melian traitor opened the harbour of Melos to the Athenians, and the Melians surrendered. "Athenians put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the place themselves."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Melos

The Athenians had their come-uppance soon after when they attacked the Sicilian city of Syracuse and suffered a devastating defeat. Will the Israeli army ever have their come-uppance?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicilian_Expedition

13. White politicians and media and naïve western and Christian-minded supporters have professed dutifully and ad nauseam: "but Israel has the right to defend itself". This platitude has been rejected by: "Israel has no right to exist; it is an intruder: an intruder does not have the right to defend himself."

By contrast, the Palestinians have the right to exist in their own country. They therefore have a right to defend themselves and try to eject the intruders, which is what Hamas is trying to do. "Civilians", women and children are also intruders and therefore have to be removed.

In their revenge campaign against the Palestinians, the Israelis pretend that their fight is only against Hamas and not against ordinary Palestinians. In fact, their ultimate objective is to remove all Palestinians (including "civilians", women and children), by killing them, letting them die or expelling them. This is their goal in Gaza as well as on the West Bank. The more Palestinians they kill, Hamas or not, the happier they will be.

14. The arrogance of the Western mindset is manifested in the following thoughts of Karl Marx (1818-1883):

"England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating - the annihilation of the Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia." (quoted in Edward Said, Orientalism)

This is what the USA with the help of their Israeli stormtroopers in the West Bank and the carpet-bombing of Gaza are thinking they are doing in Palestine. It "justifies" their genocide on Palestinian soil.

15. Evidence that the Israelis knew about the planned Hamas "attacks" but for good reasons did nothing to prevent them:

New York Times article of 2023-11-30:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/30/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-attack-intelligence.html>

and the BBC News article of 2024-01-15

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67958260> - Retrieved 2024-01-15

16. Afterthought: When the White governments and media, even after the killing of 40,000 Palestinians, feel it necessary to re-iterate, "the Israelis have the right to defend themselves", it is like a benevolent Prime Minister saying, with crocodile tears, during a shoot-out between armed burglars and the police: "... but, of course, we must never forget that the burglars have the right to defend their loot."
17. As of 2024-01-21, according to figures released by Hamas, approximately 25,000 Palestinians have been killed. This figure is used in the above calculations about "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", and they are shocking enough. That exchange rate for corpses is profitable enough for the Misraeli usurers. But by 2025-01-10 the Arab death toll had risen to 46,006, even more shocking and no need to re-calculate the exchange rate.
Source: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cqjvl4klzweo>
- Retrieved on 2025-02-23

^(06) Klaus Bung: Jews who support Palestinians

Impressum

Klaus Bung: Jews who support Palestinians:
Notes about "The Bund", a Jewish organisation that
wants the Palestinians to flourish in Palestine

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Anti-Semitism is growing worldwide (2025) because of the racist anti-Arab crimes committed by the Israeli government, politicians, settlers and the Israeli army.

The author tries to counteract this trend by making the reader aware of an organisation which has opposed the creation of a purely Jewish state from when it was first conceived. This organisation, "The Bund", wants Jews to be respected everywhere (not only in Israel) but forbids harming other communities anywhere: e.g. the Palestinians should not be harmed.

The author is not in a position to write an essay entirely about the Bund but has, in this file, simply brought together four extracts about the Bund (completely unedited) taken from his other publications, including a list of books about the Bund and remarks about some other Jewish groups which support the Palestinians.

This demonstrates that not all Jews are racists and war-criminals, and therefore that there is no justification for sentiments which blame all Jews for the bad deeds of some Jews.

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The Rape of Palestine in 18 Bullet Points

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Extract 4: Source: Klaus Bung: The Futility of Force:
A Buddhist View of the Gaza Genocide

Klaus Bung: Jews who support Palestinians:

Notes about "The Bund",
a Jewish organisation
that wants the Palestinians to flourish in Palestine

INTRODUCTION

Anti-Semitism is a sentiment of people who dislike (despise or hate) Jews because they are Jews and therefore try to harm and hurt them.

Such people cause harm and hurt by spreading negative stories about Jews, embarrassing them in public, or attacking them physically, to say nothing of murdering them as religious fanatics did during pogroms in the past and as the Nazis did in the mass murder of the Holocaust.

As a sentiment anti-Semitism is stupid, despicable and deplorable, and in action it is often criminal.

Since 1947, Jews in Palestine (the Zionists) have been planning and committing genocide and ethnic cleansing). Genocide is the attempt to exterminate a people or a race or a community and ethnic cleansing the attempt to remove a community from its land by expelling or killing them.

This happened to the Jews during the holocaust, when the Nazis tried to remove all Jews within their reach by murdering them with industrial methods and on an industrial scale.

The Jews in Palestine (Zionists, Jewish terrorist gangs, later the Israeli army) are doing, with different methods, to the Arabs in Palestine what Hitler did to the Jews in Europe. They are trying to remove all Arabs from the Arab homeland, Palestine, by expelling, terrorising and killing them. They are intent to continue until not a single Arab is left in Palestine.

As a result of these actions of some Jews, anti-Semitic feelings and actions against all Jews worldwide have greatly increased in recent (2025) months and years. Non-Jews (gentiles) have wrongly assumed that Jews, simply by the fact that they are Jews, share the racist anti-Arab sentiments of the Zionists, of the Israeli government, politicians, settlers and the Israeli army and are responsible for their actions.

It is therefore important that non-Jews (potential anti-Semites) are made aware that there are many Jews who strongly oppose the actions and plans of the Israeli government, politicians, settlers and the Israeli army and are even prepared to defend

Palestinians who are being harassed by racist Jewish settlers and soldiers in Palestine.

When exposing the crimes Israel commits in Palestine, it is desirable that one draws attention to the fact that not all Jews are responsible for these crimes or support them, and that there are Jewish organisations, groups and individuals who strongly oppose them and have profound ideals (ethics) from which all of us could learn in our dealings with other races and cultures.

I have been anxious, in several of my publications, to balance my criticism of the Israeli racists by referring my readers to "the Bund", an important organisation which opposes the creation of the state of Israel and wants the Arabs to continue to flourish in Palestine.

I am not in a position to write a book, or even an essay, entirely about the Bund, but hope to make my readers aware of the Bund, and some other Jewish groups which support the Palestinians, by bringing together in this file, extracts from my other publications in which I mentioned the Bund.

Each extract is preceded by a link to the full article from which the extract was taken and where the reader can study the argument in its proper context.

I also list a number of books which discuss the Bund in more detail.

^Extract 1: Source: **Klaus Bung: The Five Commandments**

https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2024_12_11_the_five_commandments.pdf

JEWS, ISRAEL AND PALESTINE: A BUNDIST APPROACH

Specifically Jews, who have traditionally suffered most from racial prejudice, discrimination and genocide, and some of whom (the "Zionists") are at present vainly (and criminally) trying to create happiness for Jews, not all over the world, but in a state intended only for Jews, at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs, who have to be exterminated in order to create a safe haven "for Jews and only for Jews", they, and all of us, should take to heart a principle enunciated by Bundist intellectual Dr Emanuel Scherer (1901-1971). This principle invalidates the genocidal objectives of the state of Israel (Jews seeking happiness by passing on to Muslims the genocide they have suffered in the past). Instead, we should seek

"Rights and justice for Jews everywhere

without wrongs and injustice to other people anywhere."
(Emanuel Scherer, 1901-1971)

The same principle could be usefully extended to cover people of all races and religions. It could be intensified by saying that we should seek "the well-being of people everywhere".

7. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PREVENT THE HOLOCAUST

If, in the popular conception of ethics (decent behaviour), #1 ["no violence"] were the most important commandment (which in Judaism, Christianity and Islam it isn't), then despising, insulting, hurting or killing a single Jew for being a Jew would be a despicable behaviour. The Holocaust could not have happened: too many decent non-Jews would have been instinctively appalled and would have resisted.

If we were admonished (and trained) to be kind to animals (even to insects), how much more should we be kind and respectful to another human being!

8. THE CURRENT GROWTH OF ANTI-SEMITISM

Since the members of "The Jewish Workers' Bund" (aka "The Bund", members known as "Bundists") have, for over a century, opposed the plans and attempts of the Zionist Jews to remove the indigenous Palestinians (Arab Muslims and Christians) from their land (by expelling or killing them), it is extremely important that non-Jews (potential anti-Semites) should know about the Bund and its values and activities.

Such knowledge would reduce the current (2023-2025) global growth of anti-Semitism (in thoughts, words and physical attacks: "cogitatione, verbo et opere") which mistakenly targets all Jews whereas it should be focussed on, and confined to, the criminal activities and aims of Israeli politicians, settlers and army.

I therefore provide below, to the best of my ability, a sadly incomplete list of books on the Bund. If readers will send me additional titles, I will gladly add them.

11. FURTHER READING

- Jewish Socialists' Group (2023): The Jewish Workers' Bund: Past, Present and Future. 27 pp. BM 3725, London WC1N-3XX, jsg@jewishsocialist.org.uk, <https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/other>
- Han, Byung-Chul (2018): "The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today". Polity, Cambridge, UK, 100pp

12. MORE COMPREHENSIVE BOOKS ON THE BUNDISTS

- Brossat, Alain, and Klingberg, Sylvia (2016): "Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism", 273 pp. Verso, London, GB
- Goldstein, Bernard (2016): "Jewish Life, Struggle, and Politics in Interwar Poland: Twenty Years with the Jewish Labor Bund in Warsaw (1919-1939). A memoir of interwar Poland" (**Introduction by Dr Emanuel Sherer [Scherer]**), 486 pp. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA
- Jacobs, Jack (2009): "Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland", 201 pp. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, USA
- Katz, Daniel (2013): "All Together Different - Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism", 306 pp. New York University Press, New York, USA
- Olson, Jess (2013): "Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy", 409 pp. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, USA
- Slucki, David (2012): "The International Jewish Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History", 284 pp. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, USA

^Extract 2: Source: Klaus Bung: The Rape of Palestine in 18 Bullet Points

https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2025_04_02_the_rape_of_palestine.pdf

(2) 1897: 29–31 August, 1897

First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland

Quote §02: "At the conclusion of the Basle Congress, Herzl wrote in his diary: "If I were to sum up the Basle Congress in one word - which I shall not do openly - it would be this: at Basle I founded the Jewish State." (Source: Fayez A. Sayegh (1965): Zionist Colonialism in Palestine)

1897: 7 October 1897:

KB: "General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia," aka "The Bund", founded in Vilna (Vilnius, Lithuania).

The ideology of the Bund is diametrically opposed to that of the Zionists. The Bund says: Jews should campaign for civil rights and respectful treatment in whichever country they now live as a minority rather than set up a purely Jewish state by depriving another race (the Arabs) of their inherited land.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Jewish_Labour_Bund

This file deals with the crimes committed by the Israelis against the Palestinians. **The existence of the Bund and its successor organisations shows:**

- Not all Jews are Zionists,
- not all Jews are genocidal,
- not all Jews approve of the actions of the Israeli government and the Israeli military,
- not all Jews approve of the existence of a purely Jewish state on Palestinian soil.
- A Jewish anti-Zionist movement exists.

For more information about the Bund, see:

- Jewish Socialists' Group (2025) (eds): The Jewish Workers' Bund, Past, present and Future. Downloaded from: <https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/other> (accessed February 2025), or print edition, only 27 pp

KB: Jewish left-wingers, socialists, like the Bund, tend to be more fair than the racist Zionists towards the Palestinians or towards any non-Jewish people. They opposed the creation of the

alien state of Israel on Palestinian soil long before it became a reality. They opposed it "in embryo". What they desire for Jews is not a racist state for Jews only, but:

**Rights and Justice
for Jews everywhere
without wrongs and injustice
to other people anywhere.**

(Emanuel Scherer, 1901-1977,
a Polish-born member of the Bund)

The infamous Balfour Declaration contained a similar condition (restriction) but it has been stubbornly (or smartly) ignored by Israel and its supporters:

The Balfour Declaration

His Majesty's Government view with favour
the establishment in Palestine
of a national home for the Jewish people,

and will use their best endeavours
to facilitate the achievement of this object,

it being clearly understood that

**nothing shall be done which may prejudice
the civil and religious rights
of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine,**

or the rights and political status
enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

Quote §03: Birnbaum ... was a legitimate founder of Zionism (and the man who literally coined the name of the movement - "Zionism") some thirteen years before Theodor Herzl appeared as a Jewish nationalist. (Source: Jess Olson (2013): Nathan Birnbaum and Jewish Modernity: Architect of Zionism, Yiddishism, and Orthodoxy)

BIRTH OF "THE BUND" IN VILNIUS IN 1897

Quote §04: The Bund (Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland) was founded in Vilnius in 1897. A diffuse agitation had developed since the 1870s among workers in the small workshops and early factories, essentially in Lithuania and Byelorussia. New forms of organization then made their appearance; radical intellectuals organized circles designed to promote socialist ideas among these workers. By the early 1890s, while anti-Semitism was steadily growing, and combining with the ambient misery to trigger an ever more massive emigration, the inspirers of these 'circles' active in the Jewish working-class milieu considered that conditions were ripe to pass to 'mass agitation'. The Yiddish language was adopted in this spirit as a privileged means of communication and propaganda. At the same time, the radical intellectuals who laid the foundations of this movement considered that the struggle of the Jewish proletariat had to be linked by 'indissoluble bonds' to that of the Russian workers' movement in general. The movement spread in the main industrial centres of the Pale of Settlement, notably marked by the rise of hundreds of kassy (mutual aid funds). (Source: Alain Brossat and Sylvia Klingberg (2016): Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism)

Quote §05: In 1897, several Jewish socialist groups gathered to form the Bund as a secret revolutionary organization of Jewish radical intellectuals and workers to struggle for socialism and promote civil rights for Jews within the territories controlled by the Russian czar. The political philosophies of its constituent groups varied widely. Some groups formed under a strictly pragmatic survival-oriented framework, arming for self-defense. Others argued for a form of international socialism and regarded the existence of so many different ethnic cultures in the Russian Empire as enfeebling resistance to the czar. /.../

From the beginnings of the Russian Bund in 1897 and the founding of the Workmen's Circle a few years later in the United States, advocates for competing ideological tendencies argued about perpetuating Yiddish as the cultural medium for working-class Jews. (Source: Daniel Katz (2013): All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism)

(3) 1917: 2 November 1917, the Balfour Declaration

KB: The British have a vested interest in inserting an alien body among the Arab states to protect their interest in the Suez Canal. The British (and the French) are the main sponsors of the Zionists and allow Palestine to be flooded by Jewish immigrants.

The Balfour Declaration

His Majesty's Government view with favour
the establishment in Palestine
of a national home for the Jewish people,

and will use their best endeavours
to facilitate the achievement of this object,

it being clearly understood that

**nothing shall be done which may prejudice
the civil and religious rights
of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine,**

or the rights and political status
enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

^Extract 3: Source: Klaus Bung: Eretz Israel - A satire

https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2025_07_28_eretz_israel.pdf

It may be worth pointing out that, while Simon's letter is fiercely pro-Israeli ..., there are some Jewish organisations which are, and were, opposed to the creation of the state of Israel and believe that we should not strive to make Jews safe and happy in one country (by killing and expelling its owners and original inhabitants) while allowing Jews to be persecuted and be unhappy everywhere else. Instead, we should seek ...

**"Rights and justice for Jews everywhere
without wrongs and injustice to other people anywhere."**

Emanuel Scherer, 1901-1971

Supporters of this organisation are called "the Bundists" and literature about them and their history can be found at the end of this letter.

Kimmerling (2003) also /.../ [Israelis who are not racist and are opposed to genocide. The dedication of his book reads:]:

This book is dedicated to:

- all the brave Israeli women who stand before Israel checkpoints in the early morning hours to prevent soldiers from harassing Palestinian laborers seeking work in Israel;
- the men and women from Israel and abroad who set up convoys bringing food and medicine to hungry Palestinian children in besieged towns, villages and refugee camps;
- and to the conscientious objectors who spent many months in military jail because they refused to participate in the criminal Lebanese War of 1982 or to commit war crimes in the recent Israel-Palestinian War.

All of them express the genuine nature of Judaism and the true spirit and soul of Israel.

Kimmerling, Baruch (2003): Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War Against the Palestinians. Verso, London, 260 pp

**^Extract 4:
Source:
Klaus Bung:
The Futility of Force:
A Buddhist View of the Gaza Genocide**

https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/bung_klaus/2023_11_15__the_futility_of_force.pdf

This extract deals not only with the Bund but also mentions other Jewish groups and individuals supporting the Palestinians.

PEOPLE LIVING IN THE SPIRIT OF RECONCILIATION

An Israeli charity that acts in the spirit commended in the Buddhist stories is called "Road to Recovery".

"Road to Recovery" (Derech Hachlama in Hebrew) is an Israeli charity that connects Israeli volunteers with Palestinians in need of transportation to doctor's appointments and other medical care within Israel. The group also assists in transporting Gazans to appointments in the West Bank. As of 2023, the group was serving about 2,700 Palestinian patients each year. In addition to providing logistical assistance, the organization also serves to develop connections between individual Israelis and Palestinians. In some cases, volunteers and patients will also meet to spend time together in recreational settings, attend memorial services for patients who have died, or support the families of deceased patients.
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Road_to_Recovery_\(charity\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Road_to_Recovery_(charity))) "

In a similar spirit, German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), in his poem cycle "West-östlicher Divan" (West-Eastern Divan) reached out to Persian poet Hafiz (1326–1390)

Among those poems are these verses:

Gottes ist der Orient! Gottes ist der Occident! Nord- und südliches Gelände Ruht im Frieden seiner Hände.	To God belongs the Orient! To God belongs the Occident! The Northern and the Southern lands Are protected by his hands.

Er, der einzige Gerechte, Will für jedermann das Rechte. Sey, von seinen hundert Namen, Dieser hochgelobet! Amen.	HE who alone can be called Just Desires Justice for everyone. May, of his one hundred names, This one be most highly praised! Amen
	Translation by Klaus Bung

In a similar spirit, Jewish international conductor Daniel Barenboim and Palestinian scholar Edward Said (1935–2003) brought young musicians from often hostile countries together in the **"West-Eastern Divan Orchestra"**. This is "based in Seville, Spain, consisting of musicians from countries in the Middle East, of Egyptian, Iranian, Israeli, Jordanian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian and Spanish background." (Wikipedia)

Ilan Pappé concludes his book on the Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine as follows:

Not all the Jews in Israel are blind to the scenes of carnage that their army left behind in 1948, nor are they deaf to the cries of the expelled, the wounded, the tortured and the raped as they keep reaching us through those who survived, and through their children and grandchildren. In fact, growing numbers of Israelis are aware of the truth of what happened in 1948, and fully comprehend the moral implications of the ethnic cleansing that raged in the country. They also recognise the risk of Israel re-activating the cleansing programme in a desperate attempt to maintain its absolute Jewish majority.

It is among these people that we find the political wisdom that all past and present peace-brokers of the conflict appear to lack so totally: they are fully aware that the refugee problem stands at the heart of the conflict and that the fate of the refugees is pivotal for any solution to have a chance of succeeding.

True, these Israeli Jews who go against the grain are few and far between, but they are there, and given the overall desire of the Palestinians to seek restitution and not demand retribution, together they hold the key to reconciliation and peace in the torn land of Palestine. They are found standing alongside the 'internal' Palestinian refugees today, almost half a million people, in joint annual pilgrimages to the destroyed villages, a journey of Nakba commemoration that takes place each year on the day official Israel celebrates (according to the Jewish calendar) its 'Independence Day'. You can see them in action as members of NGOs such as Zochrot – 'remembering' in Hebrew – who stubbornly make it their mission to put up signs with the names of destroyed Palestinian villages in places where today there are Jewish settlements or a JNF forest. You can hear them speak at the Conferences for the Right of Return and Just Peace that began in 2004, where together with their Palestinian friends, from within and outside the country, they reaffirm their commitment to the refugees' Right of Return, and where they, like this writer, vow to continue the struggle to protect the memory of the Nakba against all attempts to dwarf the horror of its crimes or deny they ever happened, for the sake of a

lasting and comprehensive peace to emerge one day in the land of
Palestine. (my emphases)

^(07) Ashutosh Vardhana: An impossible Dream

Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana:

An impossible dream:

What Pakistan and India can do with their independence

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

A reflection on India and Pakistan Independence Day,
14 and 15 August 2003

On 14 and 15 August 1947 Pakistan and India gained their independence from British colonial rule. Bloody conflicts and continued distrust between Hindu and Muslim communities followed. On the anniversary of this day, Ashutosh Vardhana, a Hindu writer living in England, proposes the creation of a common market for India, Pakistan, Afghanistan (&c) on the model of the European Community, which ended the centuries of war between Germany and France and brought prosperity and peace to Europe.

Ashutosh Vardhana:

An Impossible Dream: What Pakistan and India Can Do with their Independence

BLOODY REALITY

It is necessary to dream the impossible to make it come true. For almost 100 years Indian independence was such a dream. But some great people not only dreamt it but patiently worked for it. That's why on 14 and 15 July 1947 (for Pakistan and India respectively) it turned into reality.



Pakistani women protest
against threatening nuclear
war

Initially that reality was soiled by more hatred between Hindus and Muslims than they used to have for their British oppressors. Thousands murdered each other at the time of partition.

Religion and patriotism often lead to distrust, mutual contempt and violence. Muslims and Hindus will be happier if they do not act as if they were the sole bearers of universal truth.

My main worry should be how to become a better person in the eyes of god rather than why my neighbour has not yet adopted the 'true faith'. The same goes for my Muslim neighbour. Both of us will be happier as a result.

Religion is a private matter between god and man. Keeping it private will promote trust, peace and love between Hindus and Muslims. It is unhelpful if one community becomes more strident because the other is by nature more assertive. Insistence and assertiveness lead, as the events in Palestine show, only to a never ending cycle of violence.

How many Hindus have really close personal relationships with Muslims – and vice versa? We need more such relationships. Not all religious 'leaders' are saints, some are selfish criminals. These represent, in spite of their clamourings, neither their religion nor their community.



Indian and Pakistani soldiers exchanging sweets at the border on Independence Day 2003

I know that my Muslim friends are first and foremost human beings, and they know that I am a human being before I am a Hindu. The same things make us cry or rejoice. Therefore we can genuinely love each other, not only politely pretend to do so. It is unthinkable to me and my Muslim friends that we could ever raise a hand against each other. I will drive them to mosque and they will take me to my mandir if the car is broken down.

There is now a world-wide movement called 'random acts of kindness' (www.actsofkindness.org). Do not let a day pass without surprising a stranger by doing something nice to him (even if he is a woman): help him carry his bags, give him a lift, enquire about his children, lend him money, give him water, invite him into your house for a cup of tea, help him repair his house, his car or his computer, or at least, greet him with a smile in the street, even if he does not (yet) smile at you - and accept such gestures without hesitation!

Communal distrust and violence have soiled our life in independence. We must act wisely to remove them: not by more assertiveness but by more common-sense and generosity.

Look towards the future, not towards the past. It does not matter who tore down which temple two hundred years ago and built a mosque in its place. It mattered then, but it does not matter now. It will not happen in future: that matters. Restoration is not necessary. The temple or the mosque do not matter: peace does.

We know that God (by whatever name we call him) lives in the hearts of all creatures (Gita 10:20). He does not demand that we worship him in a particular spot. The best act of worship is not done in temple or mosque, but in the street and in our homes, by kindness towards all, especially by Hindus towards Muslims and vice versa. Such acts produce their own instant rewards by making us happy, even if the other person does not always respond kindly. In the long run, he will. Kindness is irresistible.

By doing our duty towards others (Hindus/Muslims) and supporting THE OTHER community before they have to insist on their rights, we worship God and allow him to live in our hearts.

An old shloka says:

A thousand Ramas born in Ayodhya will do
No good if he's not born in you.

Rama was born right here in Rochdale. We do not have to go to Ayodhya to find him. He will find us, at home. By acts of kindness we can force him to come here. Allah lives in Rochdale. He will reveal himself right here if, by being kind to everybody, we give him half a chance.

I HAVE A DREAM

Now to the dream which can come true if we want it. Consider the history of Germany and France, for centuries at war with each other, and how it led to the creation of the wealthy European Union.

Let us work for the same on the subcontinent, and the conflicts between India and Pakistan, and terrorism in Kashmir, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka will simply dissolve.

Create a common market of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Burma, devoting its energies not to religion or patriotism but whole-heartedly to the creation of wealth in the name of god. That will be a religious act.

American and European funds will flow into such a project, as did the Marshal Plan in the Europe of 1947 with such tremendous success. This is the most effective weapon against terrorism.

Do not tell me, as everybody does, that this is an impossible dream. If we want it, we can make it possible. Indians and Pakistanis are not more stupid than the Germans and the French.

Let us use our independence not to promote strife but to create a new union of independent states, pragmatic and devoted to prosperity. God and religion will take care of themselves. God will be grateful that he does not have to witness our squabbles and therefore will have time to give us his blessing.

NOTES

Pakistan and India became independent at midnight on 14 August 1947. Pakistan and India celebrate the event on 14 and 15 August respectively.

On 15 Aug 2003, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee said India and Pakistan should fight poverty instead of each other.

^(08) Ashutosh Vardhana: Devil worship in Ayodhya

Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana: Devil worship in Ayodhya

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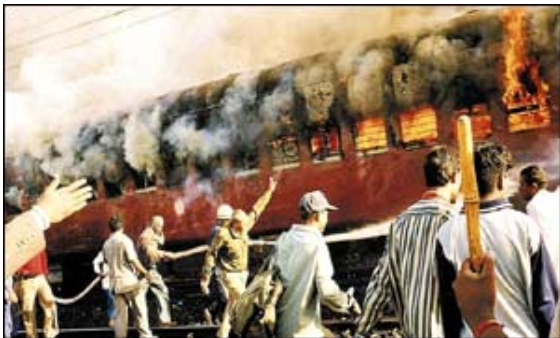
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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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Ancient Babri Mosque in Ayodhya destroyed by Hindu agitators in 1992. Thousands killed in subsequent religious rioting.

In 1992 religious riots in India and Bangladesh were sparked which left several thousand dead, when a group of politically motivated Hindus tried to right a wrong committed by Muslims 500 years earlier and demolished an ancient but unused mosque that had been erected by Muslim conquerors of the time in place of a temple which marked the birthplace of Lord Rama. The government imposed a stand-off and put the matter into the hands of a court which in ten years was unable to produce an equitable decision. The Hindu faction then announced that, on 15 March this year, they would go ahead with the building regardless of consequences.



© BBC News

60 Hindus burned alive on this train. 700 killed in subsequent reprisals.

On 28 February 2002 a train with Hindu devotees coming from the disputed site was set alight by a gang of Muslim youths. 58 Hindus were burnt alive. This sparked off Hindu reprisals against Muslims in which more than six hundred people died on both sides.

In this article, Ashutosh Vardhana, a Hindu writer from England, argues that the temple project offended against the spirit of Hinduism and is in fact blasphemy.

Ashutosh Vardhana:

Devil Worship in Ayodhya or: Mara Worship in Ayodhya

CARING FOR THE OTHERS

In Manchester in January 2002, a white youth (Gavin Hopley, 19) was attacked and beaten up by a gang of Asians. A young Muslim (Mohammed Umar, 23) heard his cries for help, chased away the attackers, took him into his house and called an ambulance.

On 14 December 2025, on Bondi Beach in Australia, a thousand Jews were celebrating their Hanukkah Festival. Two misguided Muslim gunmen, Sajid Akram, 50, and his son Naveed, 24, started shooting them down from a bridge. A Syrian Muslim shopkeeper, Mr Ahmed al-Ahmed, had the conscience and courage to tackle one of the gunmen. He managed to take the gun away from him thus saving the lives of many Jews. He got injured himself in the process. A Muslim saved Jewish lives in 2025! Who said that all Muslims are terrorists! [This paragraph was added to this article on 2025-12-16.]

On the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (Palestine) a Jewish traveller was mugged, beaten up and left for dead. Two high cast Jewish businessmen walked past him, ignored his cries for help for they had important appointments. Then a Samaritan (considered untouchable by high-class Jews) came, gave him first aid, put him up in a private hospital, paid for his treatment, and gave him money to continue his journey. That happened 1982 years ago, when Jesus had just turned 20. (Luke 10: 25-37)

Most of the reports about the atrocities committed in Gujarat on either side in the name of false gods forget to mention the many, and much more important, examples of Muslims giving shelter to Hindu friends and neighbours, and vice versa. These are the stories that should be searched out, told and emulated.

MY ISHTA DEVATA

Lord Rama is my Ishta Devata. I therefore do not speak lightly about him and his worship.

Ayodhya is raising its ugly head again. Hundreds of Hindus and Muslims have been killed in the name of God and of revenge, and worse, their blood weighs on the karma of the perpetrators. Does this Rama demand human sacrifice?

Not every priest, saint, guru or politician who claims to know the will of God and speak in his name does so.

Our brothers, Muslims and Hindus, have died because of an idle project pursued by impostors and ignoramuses in the name of their deadly dog Mara. Our rejection of their home-made god has to be disrespectful and unmistakable.

If the messenger of Rama, or my Guruji (PBUH) or even Rama himself were to appear to me and ordered me to kill a Muslim, or to demolish an ancient mosque, used or unused, I would curse him. That false Rama will not strike me dead as he has struck dead so many innocent Muslims and Hindus. The true Rama preaches ahimsa (non-violence) and compassion. He is Vishnu and (as the story of Holi and Nara-Simha reminds us) lives in every stone, in every pillar, in every mosque and in every mandir, and especially in every heart, Muslim or Hindu:

'aham atma gudakesha sarvabhutashayasthitah'

(I, O Arjuna, am the self, seated in the hearts of all creatures).

(Gita 10:20)

My curses are not aimed at the true Rama but at the satanic egos for whose glorification a sham temple is to be erected at Ayodhya. That project that has now cost nearly 3000 lives is devil worship. The prana pratishtha will fail. There will only be dead stone. We cannot force the spirit of Ishvara into an unholy place that is polluted by blood.

HIGHEST COMMANDMENT

Our highest commandment is not to 'honour God' (as for Jews, Christians and Muslims) but ahimsa (nonviolence), and we dishonour our religion and 'our' God if we disobey it, however great the provocation (if any) from another community.

It does not matter who started it all, be it now, 10 years ago or 500 years ago under the mughals. In working for peace we have to eliminate our own shortcomings and not those of other communities. They will work on theirs, provided they are not afraid of us and our criticism. We have to put them at ease. Each community is best qualified and has enough people of goodwill to combat its own faults. Such an attitude in itself reduces or eliminates intercommunal violence and killing.

There is no justification for Ashok killing innocent Yusuf only because Usama has killed innocent Dinesh.

ORDINARY MUSLIMS

Muslims and their turbulent priests have their faults, but so have Hindus and their leaders. Ordinary Muslims are lovable and kind, as pleasant to be with as ordinary Hindus. Unfortunately, most of us do not know it, for we have never tried to befriend one another. We have never had a meal together.

We must not confuse 'THE Muslim' and 'Muslims' (as such) with the specific human being next to us, who is like us in every respect and only happens to be a Muslim, and worship God in his particular way. That human being next to us may be as fearful and suspicious of us as we are of him. He may not be able to smile at us and respond to our smiles because he has never received any smiles from us.

The first thing we have to learn is to like, love one another and genuinely smile at one another, to see each other as individuals, not as members of a group. My neighbour is not 'a Muslim' but 'Aisha' or 'Shafiq'.

KNOW MUSLIMS PERSONALLY

My friend Dr Misra (66) prides himself, like all Hindus, on his tolerance: 'We respect all religions,' he recently pontificated at his family's dinner table. His daughter Aruna (26, accountant, born and bred in England) just laughed: 'You are so prejudiced and narrow-minded, Dad, and you don't even realise it' she said. 'You do not even have a single Muslim friend.'

'I do,' he said, 'several. Like Dr Zakria.'

'Dr Zakria,' she scoffed, 'that's not a friend, that's a colleague. You don't fight with him, you don't insult him, but that's not enough.'

'I play golf with him, he is my friend.'

'That does not make him a friend! Have you ever invited him to dinner? Have you ever gone out with him? Have you ever gone to see him when you needed to relax and just wanted to kill some time?! Have you ever asked him for help or advice when you were in trouble?'

Dr Misra was confused by his daughter's frontal attack and said nothing.

Most of us do not know Muslims, we only know the pronouncements of their leaders and what our newspapers write about them, and that tends to be negative. Therefore we fear Muslims (needlessly) while they, flattered by their comparatively simple religion, despise us. Most Hindus feel a shadow rush over their face when they hear the word 'Muslim'. That is sad, and bad for Muslims and

Hindus alike. Why can we not manage a smile? That is just as sad as physical violence. As the Buddhists teach us: thoughts are the causes of actions. Muslims are human beings (like us) before they are Muslims and (in India) they are (like us) Indians before they are Muslims. Their parents and grandparents loved India enough not to move to Pakistan at the time of partition (1948). We Hindus are human beings and Indians before we are Hindus.

Ordinary Muslims want peace as much as Hindus do. And that is all they want: they want to live in peace and worship God as sincerely as we do. Very few have political aspirations. They weep for their dead wives, husbands and children as much as we do. If uneducated emotional irrational Muslims are led astray by their priests and politicians, then we too have uneducated emotional irrational people who are led astray by our priests, gurus and politicians in the name of a man-made God.

If we are to enjoy peace, then we must greet and cherish every Muslim we meet as a fellow Indian and a fellow human being.

Unlike many Hindus, I have enjoyed the friendship, hospitality and extreme kindness of Muslims, and no Hindu could have met me with greater warmth and generosity.

My Gururji never said an unkind word about Muslims and he said many in warmest praise of their human qualities for he knew real Muslims and not only the speeches and political aspirations of some of their leaders. My personal and intimate experience has born out everything good he ever said about Muslims.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR LORD RAMA



© Asian Woman, London, Summer 2002, p 101

Modern Sitas? Do such faces LOVE Rama?

Vishnu and Rama are everywhere: Therefore why demolish the mosque in which Rama resides? If Rama was there, it wasn't 'unused'. Allah is everywhere and he is worshipped not only in mosques but also in every mandir, whatever its official name. 'As men approach me, so do I accept them. Men on all sides follow my path.' (Gita 4:11)

Does Lord Rama insist on being worshipped on the exact spot where he was born, even at the expense of 2500 Muslim and Hindu lives?

Will Lord Rama not be happy with us if we worship him half a mile down the road, where no Muslim will be offended, and no Muslim and no Hindu be killed?

There is an irony in the fact that most Hindus cannot go to Ayodhya anyway and therefore have to make do with second-best and, like Hanuman, worship him in their heart.



Hanuman showing Rama and Sita
residing in his heart

There is an ancient saying:

A thousand Ramas in Ayodhya will do
No good if he's not born in you.

Or as a famous Sufi saint one said:

You won't find Allah in Mecca,
Unless you smuggle him in.
Best method: hide him
in your heart,
where the mutaw'a
cannot find him.

(mutaw'a = religious police in Saudi Arabia)

Then carry him with you wherever you go. That is better than
going on pilgrimage or building temples of stone.

Do Vaishnavas reject animal sacrifice but promote human
sacrifice? Does sacrifice not mean dedicating all our ordinary
daily actions to God rather than doing something special in his
honour?

'Knowledge as a sacrifice
is greater than any material sacrifice, O Arjuna,
for all works without any exception
culminate in wisdom'
(Gita 4:33).

DON'T TOUCH MY MATE!

It is necessary for Hindus to speak up for Muslims, and for Muslims to speak up for Hindus: 'Don't touch my mate!' Criticism of the other community, however real its faults, is counter-productive, especially now. Let each community try hard to draw on its best traditions and set its own house in order. Let us make a start.

In 1992, Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin (novel: 'Lajja' ['Shame']) stood up for Hindus, condemning Muslim violence. No doubt now too, somewhere or other, a Muslim writer will reciprocate the peaceful and self-critical message of this article.

Each community must criticise and reduce its own shortcomings rather than those of the other. Such gestures can help to restore trust and ultimately create love and affection. Criticism that comes from the outside will not be accepted even if valid.

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."
(W B Yeats, The Second Coming)

Speak up forcefully for peace and against bigotry, do not mince your words, curse the gods of the bigots and show how powerless they and their lackeys are.

Let us not follow in the footsteps of those who respect no religion other than their own.

The prayers at the disputed site in Ayodhya are devil worship. People flatter their own egos by putting up a blasphemous structure which promotes nothing but bloodshed and hatred and of which every true Hindu will be ashamed. It will pollute those who enter it.

The purpose of this article is not primarily to condemn the violence which has just occurred: that goes without saying. What we have to condemn is the stubborn insistence of a group of narrow-minded people and their dumb followers on building an unholy temple on a specific site, in spite of the predictable and inevitable repercussions and violence. This insistence is wrong, even if the Muslim protests and violence were unnecessary and misguided.

CAETERUM CENSEO

For centuries Germany and France were at each other's throats in numerous wars. After the worst of these, World War II, wise politicians (specifically French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, 1950) suggested that the two countries should devote themselves to prosperity instead of patriotism and pioneered the European Economic Community. Germany and France are now friends within a prosperous united Europe. Both have benefited. When will our politicians start working towards a Subcontinental Economic Community leading to a union of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Shri Lanka? I am sure Lakshmi Devi (more powerful than Mara) and Uncle Sam will give their blessing, and even Muslims would not mind receiving it.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ishta Devata: one of the many manifestations of God. Hindus respect all forms and names of God but each Hindu is particularly devoted to one particular one, his 'Ishta Devata' (chosen deity). The choice of 'Ishta Devata' often is determined by family tradition or passes from Guru to disciple.
2. Mara: Valmiki, the Sanskrit author of the Ramayana (the story of Rama) used to be a highway man. Once he attacked Saint Narada. Narada asked him: 'Why are you committing these crimes?' Valmiki replied: 'To feed my wife and children.' Narada asked: 'And will they also share with you the punishment for your crimes (your karma)?' Narada went home and asked. Neither his wife nor his children were prepared to accept their share in the punishment; they wanted only the benefits. So Valmiki decided to turn to the life of meditation and asked Narada to teach him. Narada taught him to repeat incessantly the name of God, Rama. Then God would be with him and in him, for where God's name is, there is God. Valmiki, however, was at that time so thick, that he could not remember the name Rama, short though it is. He started repeating 'Mara', which means 'death'. This is the meaning of the alternative title 'Mara Worship in Ayodhya', worshipping the false Rama. As Rama can be inverted to Mara, so 'god' can be inverted to 'dog'.

Christopher Marlowe (Dr Faustus) refers to this practice in Satanic rituals or "racking the name of god" (i.e. reading it backwards as "dog"), when Mephastophilis says:

For, when we hear one rack the name of God,
Abjure the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ,
We fly, in hope to get his glorious soul;

3. PBUH: Peace be upon him

4. Prana Pratishtha: An installation ceremony in which the spirit of God is invoked to descend into the statue.
5. Ishvara: god in his personal form
6. Mughals: The Mughals were Muslims from central Asia who began to conquer Northern India under their leader Prince Babur (reigned 1526 to 1530). Policy towards Hindus varied under different Mughal rulers. Some were tolerant, but others (before and after his grandson Emperor Akbar, contemporary of Queen Elizabeth I of England) forcibly converted Hindus to Islam (the ancestors of the current Muslim population in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), demolished Hindu temples and excluded Hindus from public office. The disputed mosque in Ayodhya is called the 'Babri Mosque' after Prince Babur, himself a descendant of Tamburlaine (Tamerlane, Timur) and of Ghengis Khan. Of Emperor Akbar (1555-1606) we learn that he 'fully realised that the empire could only stand on the basis of complete toleration. All religious tests and disabilities were abolished, including the hated poll-tax on unbelievers. Rajput Princes and other Hindus were given high offices of state, without conversion to Islam, and inter-communal marriages were encouraged by the example of the Emperor himself. If the policy of the greatest of India's Muslim rulers had been continued by his successors, her history might have been very different.' (A L Basham: 'The wonder that was India'. Fontana Collins, London, 1971, p 482) The Mogul empire came to an end with the death of Aurangzeb (1707).
7. Aisha, Shafiq, Yusuf and Usama are Muslim names. Ashok and Dinesh are Hindu names.
8. mandir = Hindu temple
9. Vaishnavas: Worshipers of Lord Vishnu and his incarnations, e.g. of Rama and Krishna
10. Gita: A holy book of all Hindus (esteemed like the New Testament by Christians)
11. Caeterum censeo = Apart from this, I am of the opinion. The Roman Senator Cato the Elder (234-149 BC) for years ended every speech on whatever subject with the incessant repetition of 'Apart from this, I am of the opinion that Carthage ought to be zapped' (Caeterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam). Initially the Roman senate thought his proposal was absurd. But through incessant repetition of this point he eventually won them around: Carthage was attacked and destroyed in 146 BC. Carthage was to Rome what Moscow during the cold war was to Washington. The incessant talk of the need to destroy Carthage was similar to the incessant talk from the hawk-loft of the White House (USA) that Saddam Hussein ought to be killed

if the USA were to live: 'It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' (John 11:50).

12. Lakshmi Devi: The Hindu goddess of prosperity
13. Uncle Sam: The USA

Principles underlying 'Devil Worship in Ayodhya': A personal note written to Swami NN

In writing this article, I was guided by the following principles, not all of which may be revealed in the article itself:

1. Hindus or Muslims do not want to be lectured by Christians (or a secular-Christian press), as is often the case. Therefore, as a Hindu, I am addressing only fellow Hindus.
2. I am writing as a Hindu for my own community. I can therefore permit myself to be critical, even though I am liable to offend part of that community, namely those people whom I call 'devil worshippers'.
3. The harm that is being done by the fanatics is so great that I must be extreme (potentially blasphemous) and provocative in my rejection of their false god. (This is not a case of respecting all religions and all approaches to God: more than 3000 people have died, community relations have been soured, and many more people have been made permanently unhappy.) If the devil sets himself up as god, he has to be called dog. Hence the inversion Rama <> Mara in the alternative title.
4. I am fully and minutely aware of the awful role which the nature of Islam (identical to that of Christianity) plays in such conflicts because of Islam's eagerness and because Islam and Christianity hold all other religions in contempt. That's why I am not a Christian and not a Muslim. Christianity and Islam lend themselves to fanaticism and unfortunately gradually infect Hindus (who want to get even and see advantages in aggressive tactics), so that Hinduism is in danger of becoming somewhat like Christianity or Islam in this respect (touchy about blasphemy against Hindu deities, clamouring for its rights, &c). **However, it is not now politically opportune for me as a writer to say any of this, especially not in the present context.**
5. I have therefore tried to refrain from any criticism, however deserved, of the other side. Criticism which comes from an outsider will never be accepted by a community. On the contrary, it will harden the attitudes that are being

criticised. Therefore all I can do is to openly criticise my own side (self-criticism) and make suggestions for improvement, and hope that people on the other side will write analogous pieces addressed to their own community.

6. If I want to influence the behaviour of the other side, I must not batter them by pointing out their shortcomings (which will merely increase animosity, especially if the shortcomings are so serious, so fundamental as they are in the case of Islam). Instead, if I as an outsider want to contribute to 'improving' Muslim attitudes, I must search out all instances of 'desirable' Muslim behaviour (peacefulness, having helped non-Muslims, having respected another religion, **wise** fatwas, tolerance, &c.) and propagate and praise these and point out how very Islamic these are. If I do this, well-meaning Muslim readers may be proud of such behaviours and may follow the Muslim examples I am setting out for them.

That is the reason why I have criticised only Hindu failings and not Muslim failings.

7. I also think that it is **not** in the interest of peace that religious communities get to know each other by studying each other's scriptures (as the Archbishop of Canterbury uninspiredly suggested recently). Such an approach will not show the other community in a pleasant light. It will reveal the differences, and it has little bearing on the actual behaviour of individual Muslims, Christians &c. E.g. Christians do **not** love their neighbour, and Muslims do not do everything demanded by the Koran, &c &c. Instead I emphasise (and not only in this article) that most human beings are likeable and loveable provided you overlook anything that has to do with religion. **It is religion that makes them spiteful, unpleasant and causes trouble.**

Please read my article in the light of these unspoken intentions. I want to contribute to peace but can do so only if I do not say everything that I think.

^(09) Ashutosh Vardhana: Osama Bin Laden's Salvation

Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana:

Osama Bin Laden's Salvation, or: Why we celebrate Diwali

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

On 15 November 2001, Hindus all over the world celebrated the festival of Diwali, the festival of lights. It is not only one of the most popular Hindu festivals but also one of the few that non-Hindus are aware of. Ashutosh Vardhana, a Hindu writer living in England, writing on 11 October 2001, four weeks after "the 9/11 Manhattan attacks", puts the ancient festival into a topical context.

Ashutosh Vardhana: Osama Bin Laden's Salvation or: Why we celebrate Diwali

This year we celebrate Diwali (15 November 2001) in troubled times. Diwali is a celebration of victory, but we have not achieved victory yet, we do not know the enemy. The struggle, like the struggle between good and evil in our hearts, will continue forever. In the story there is victory: in reality, as long as we live there will always be battle.

All Hindus know the story of Lord Rama. Lord Vishnu, God, was born on this earth as Rama, son of a king, grew up as a prince, fought with demons as a young man, showed his valour, married Sita, the most beautiful and loyal woman on earth and was about to be made king when his father wanted to retire. Then because of an unwise unconditional promise the king had made to one of his wives, Rama's brother had to become king, and Rama and Sita,

without batting an eyelid, went into exile for fourteen years so that their father could keep his promise and his honour.

While in exile, Sita was abducted by the demon Ravana and hidden in a grove in Lanka. Rama formed alliances, pursued the monster, found Sita, fought a battle with Ravana and killed him. Rama and Sita returned to their capital Ayodhya.

On Diwali, the festival of lights, we, with the people of Ayodhya, celebrate that triumphant return and welcome Rama and Sita into our hearts.

These are the plain facts as written down (with many more details, adventures and teachings) a few thousand years ago and remembered from even long before that.

Now we can run through the story a second time since everything repeats itself.

On Diwali we celebrate the return of a beloved person from exile. In the olden days it was a king. A king who was also God: Lord Rama and his wife Sita, the Goddess, an incarnation of Lakshmi Devi, goddess of wealth.

Rama had proved his strength and military skill when, still a boy, he defeated the demons in the Dandaka forest. He proved his humility, obedience, love for his parents and unselfish sense of honour, when he, without a murmur of protest, went into a fourteen-year exile and gave his kingdom to his brother, so that a promise made unwisely by his father could be honoured.

This sense of honour is one which is more concerned with one's duties than one's rights. When we admire Rama's military prowess, it is an incentive for us today to be exemplary in the pursuit of our professions, be it as window cleaners and factory workers, or as engineers, computer programmers, doctors, lawyers, teachers &c.

Rama showed his love for his wife Sita when she had been abducted by the Ten-headed Monster Ravana. Some of our politicians are convinced that that's what Bin Laden looks like and it was him who took Sita away and hid her in a cave in Afghanistan. So that's how we will continue the modern version of the story.

'I'll smoke the bastard out,' said Rama, 'even if it's the last thing I do on earth.' He was fully human, so he not only sobbed about the loss of his beloved Sita, but he also had to show that he knew how to be angry. A good soldier swears, even if he is a former American president, a king or a god.

A skilled diplomat, Lord Rama knew the value of loyal friends, he made alliances with many nations including a tribe of monkeys and their Prime Minister Sugriva, who spoke English with a British accent and offered to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with Lord Rama in this conflict.

General Hanuman with his bears and monkeys (a.k.a. paratroopers, special forces, and SAS [shoot-assess-shoot] troops) set out to find the monster in jungles and caves. The pigeons (a.k.a. Stealth Bombers) and other birds (a.k.a. spy planes) supported him as well, especially the valiant king of the vultures, Jatayu, who died when trying to rescue Sita from Ravana.

Eventually Rama's secret agents (CIA and FBI) tracked her down to Lanka (a.k.a. Afghanistan). A terrible battle ensued, in which there were many civilian casualties, apart from the many soldiers who died.

When Hanuman was on a scouting mission in the holy city of Mazar-I-Sharif (a.k.a. Lanka), the demons arrested him as a spy (which he was), dipped his tail into tar and set it on fire. They thought that was a good joke. But it backfired on them. Hanuman freed himself and raced over the rooftops of the city vigorously wagging his tail, thus causing a firestorm (he was the son of the Windgod Vayu), which destroyed the beautiful city. This was called 'collateral damage'.

Well, we all have known the story from childhood. But today we can see it on our television screens, and it is not even called Ramayana as it used to be, it is called 'THE TEN O'CLOCK EVENING NEWS'. God is everywhere!

The story is ancient, and it is as modern as can be!

When Rama had had enough of fighting, he killed Ravana by shooting an Exocet Missile into his gigantic stomach because that is where, as in many of us, Ravana's soul resided.

But Ravana was a noble demon. He was obsessed with hatred of God (like some people are obsessed with hatred of America). He worshipped God as an enemy. Our scripture, the Shrimad Bhagavatam, says repeatedly that this is one of the accepted forms of worship.

We can worship God as our child (Bala Krishna), as our lover, as our friend, as our mother, as our father, and as our enemy: (S)HE is so great that (S)HE accepts us whichever way we approach him/her.

But worshipping God as an enemy is not for ordinary people. It is not the same as being lazy, selfish, greedy or criminal. So don't choose that road to God if you are nothing but a stupid lout! It'll get you straight to hell!

Worshipping God as an enemy is hard and implies a lot of effort and suffering for the person who takes it. The righteous and the self-righteous will punish him for what he does in his battle against God. That is **their** duty. The enemy of God has a duty of his own. He has to out-manoeuvre God. He has to put up with (and try to catch and counter, of course) the weapons God throws at

him. And they are awful, as can be seen right now over Afghanistan.

Therefore we normal people (we ain't all saints or heroes) had better chose a simpler way of worshipping God, e.g. as mother, father, lover, friend - by being 'good' rather than by being 'bad'.

However, Lord Rama respected Ravana's devotion to the battle. He considered Ravana a noble foe. As HE shot him in the stomach, Ravana's soul came out, Lord Rama breathed it in, Ravana was instantly united with God, he had obtained moksha, liberation. This is what Christians call 'salvation' or 'heaven' and Muslims call 'paradise'.

We celebrated the defeat of Ravana on the festival of Dashera (or Vijaya Dashmi; 26 October this year) on the day after the end of Navaratri.

Lord Rama needed nineteen days (in Afghanistan it will take much longer) to tidy up the battle field, bury the dead, pay compensation to widows and orphans, distribute humanitarian aid, and install a 'broadly based democratic government' in Lanka. Ravana's brother, a good demon, was made king.

Then Rama returned to his own capital, Ayodhya, where his people were eagerly waiting for him. His exile was over, after fourteen years the people were reunited with their beloved king.

This was the beginning of the golden age in the kingdom of Ayodhya, a reign of justice and freedom, of love and prosperity.

When we argue about politics, when we make our political decisions, even when we vote, which is as close to politics as most of us ever get, then these are some of the ideals we are trying to bring about. We never do it quite as perfectly as Lord Rama did in that golden age, but at least that is something to aim for.

When we see someone who is consumed with hatred for what we consider good, e.g. God (or 'God's Own Country'), then we can always think of Ravana and remember that **nobody** is purely bad, not even if he hurts us badly. On the contrary, all that hatred will have had a cause (nothing, except God, is without cause), and even extreme hatred may well be driven by a noble soul.

This does not mean that Ravana did not have to be killed. Sometimes even noble souls have to be killed, if they are too noble for this world. We may have to kill Ravana and his cohorts, dismantle his terrorist networks, but we can do so with compassion, and there is no need to be outraged or self-righteous when we do so.

NOTE

The story of Lord Rama was written down in Valmiki's Sanskrit epic 'Ramayana' and in the 15th century Hindi epic Ramayana by Tulsidas. Lengthy summaries (re-tellings) of these epics have been published in many western languages.

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Ashutosh Vardhana grew up in Europe and lives in Yorkshire, England. He studied at London University. He is a keen student of comparative religion and now writes fiction, poetry and essays. He has produced many academic publications. His 'creative' work has been published in Dipika (London), Writers' Forum (Bournemouth, UK), Scavenger (Osage City, Kansas, USA), The World of English (Peking) and Pphoo Magazine (Calcutta).

Four of his stories on Hindu festivals can at present be found on the Web:

https://www.rochdalewriters.org.uk/vardhana_ashutosh/2001_11_15_yamuna_year_the_hindu_calendar.pdf

^(10) Ashutosh Vardhana: These Evil Cowards

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Society has to defend itself against terrorists and to punish them. However, by calling them 'evil' we concede that we do not understand them and are not willing to consider the causes of their actions. Calling them 'cowards' is often plain silly. Western belief in the superiority of its civilisation (1), matched with Muslim belief in the superiority of its secular and religious values, must lead to contempt. Contempt breeds hatred, and hatred breeds violence, in both directions. We must stop calling our enemies evil and must try to understand them if we want to stop the cycle of violence. This article puts forward a specifically Hindu point of view.

Ashutosh Vardhana: These Evil Cowards, or: I love America

I LOVE AMERICA

I love America. I love its intellectuals and liberals, I love its artists, its wild spaces and its bustling cities, its optimism, its belief in hard work and rewarding it, the perfectionism of its scientists and engineers, its belief in the freedom of speech. I love its vulgarity and the courage with which it produces its kitsch. I love friendly people wherever I find them. I love life.



I love American optimism:
Engineering solutions for moral problems.

The text of the news report can be found (in a more readable font size) in Footnote (2).

I do not condone the Manhattan attacks. We have to defend ourselves against terrorists (and they have to defend themselves against us), and their actions are plainly wrong, especially in

the eyes of the victims. I am a vegetarian, and in my religion killing and violence of any kind are a greater sin than the first four or five of the Christian and Jewish commandments, which condemn sinning against God and one's parents. That, however, does not mean that all terrorists are evil or that they are cowards.

EVIL

'Evil' is a popular term of abuse which we heap on a person whose actions we do not understand and who acts without intelligible cause, a person who does something we would not do. People may be selfish, stupid, ill-informed or cruel, but they are hardly ever evil.

If we call a person evil, we admit that we do not understand him, do not want to understand him and will therefore never be able to do anything about the causes of his actions. All we want to do is to exterminate him - and let someone else take up his cause.

Osama Bin Laden acted wrongly when he sent his suicide bombers into the Manhattan Towers and killed 6,000 innocent people. So did Hitler when he bombed Coventry (in 1940: 450 dead) and Churchill when he bombed Dresden (in 1944: 41,000 dead) (3). That did not make Churchill evil, for he had a cause and a purpose (ill-conceived or not) for doing so.

Osama killed innocent civilians, we hear. The Manhattan victims are innocent; but so are the soldiers who get killed in a war. They are enemies, but not criminals. (4)

War and terrorism play by different rules. Those people who are not in power, do not control a state and an army, have to fight their battles as terrorists. Presidents do not need to be terrorists, that's why they aren't (except the Israeli government when it habitually assassinates its opponents) (5). The members of the French *résistance* were terrorists. Once terrorists have come to power, they become statesmen, e.g. in Israel (6) and in Northern Ireland (7).

It was Zionist terrorists who, prior to 1948, bombed the Palestinians out of their villages and thus paved the way for the establishment of the State of Israel on Palestinian territory. (8) The grievances (and the displacement of people) then created have never been resolved and lead through a chain of action and reaction to the Manhattan outrage and to the continuing incurable violence in Israel and Palestine. 'It is the curse of an evil deed that it continues to give birth to never ending generations of evil.' (Schiller) (9)

Osama Bin Laden needs no defenders. If I still speak out 'for' him, say anything other than calling him 'evil', it is in our interest as non-violent people to understand him and take note of his bloody message.

In fact we have done so already (a silly thing to do if he were merely evil). In grand politics we are very polite to Muslims and Muslim states. Only after 11 September did President Bush advocate a 'viable Palestinian State', i.e. a larger territory and sovereignty (15 Oct 2001) (10). Only after 11 September did so many western statesmen (except Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi) discover their respect, if not love, for Islam. Only Prince Charles has always been a genuine friend of Islam. (11)

On 27 September 2001, honest Joe Berlusconi declared at a press conference in Berlin

'that the attacks on New York and Washington are attacks not only on the United States but on our civilisation, of which we are proud bearers, conscious of the supremacy of our civilisation, (12) of its discoveries and inventions, which have brought us democratic institutions, respect for the human, civil, religious and political rights of our citizens, openness to diversity and tolerance of everything.'

Well, at least we can't call him a liar. But Manhattan has shown that a civilisation that is 'supreme' (how?) is not necessarily invulnerable.

COWARDS

Politicians routinely describe terrorists as cowards because they evade arrest and avoid being hurt.

This is a strange criticism. By the same token, soldiers are cowards because they wear steel helmets. American bomber pilots are cowards because they fly so high that the rusty Taliban anti-aircraft guns cannot reach them. They want to kill others without being killed themselves: that is cowardice, is it not?

Even the Manhattan pilots, who sacrificed their lives for their cause (however much we may disapprove of it) have been called cowards.

SUICIDE

Why do the media use the term 'suicide' for terrorists who face certain death when they undertake a mission. A true suicide kills himself because he cannot bear life any more, he is running away from a problem.

The bombers of Manhattan and the Palestinian 'terrorists' do therefore not commit suicide. They would gladly achieve their objective without sacrificing their lives. But the objective or their duty is more important to them than their life. Like Christians, but more sincerely!, they believe in immortality.

If they are suicides, then so were the soldiers in the trench warfare of the First World War who were mown down by grenades and machine guns when they came out of the trenches to attack the enemy. (13) But they weren't. They merely did their accursed duty for their mother cuntry. (Note for printer: This spelling is not a typing error.)

Westerners are so much wedded to this life, and only this, that they find it impossible to understand someone who can happily part with it. They gape like children at the incomprehensible spectacle.

By their incredulity they show how little empathy they have with any culture, religion or mode of thinking but their own and that, perhaps, there was no other way to wake them up from their self-centred complacency than the death of six-thousand tower workers who died for the West's sins of ignorance.

Ian Duncan Smith, the conservative leader, said a couple of months ago (10 Oct 2001): 'Bin Laden claims to speak for Islam, but he cannot. His is a cynical and suicidal cult dedicated to the destruction of civilisations and lives, irrespective of their faith.' (14)

Not so, Bin Laden is not dedicated to destroying Muslim states. When has he ever tried?

Ian Duncan Smith said: 'This is a man who sends young acolytes to die for his own pathological purpose, while he himself skulks in caves. This is a man who prefers martyrdom at a distance.'

Fools, like Ian Dunce Smith (sic), denigrate their enemies. Bin Laden may be a criminal: he has broken the law of the United States. But who is the greater man, law-abiding Ian Duncan Smith or outlaw Osama Bin Laden?

Bin Laden's acolytes went happily to their fate. No English general has ever yet exposed himself to death in the front line. That is not cowardice but common sense: the foot soldier is more easily replaceable than the general.

The US pilots in the Gulf War (1990–1991), the NATO pilots in the the Kosovo War in 1999 and now in Afghanistan (2001–) 'skulk' in the clouds because they are too cowardly to expose themselves to the guns of the enemy. The whole of American high-tech warfare (e.g. the widespread use of drones) is nothing but a big support system for cowards: our media and our mothers screech the moment one body bag comes home.

After twenty white casualties they will press on our governments to abandon their 'just war', and they ignore the thousands of brown-skinned people that are being killed by our war machine and whose only body bag is their skin. We go to war only if the enemy is incalculably inferior. Osama Bin Laden, by contrast, took on, rightly or wrongly, the strongest country in the world. That may be criminal, brave or foolhardy, but it is not cowardly.

HATE

Osama hates and despises the Americans, the Americans hate and despise Osama: neither sentiment is justified. There are wonderful Arabs and there are wonderful Americans. Noam Chomsky is an example, a wonderful American and a wonderful Jew (15).

Franz Boas (1858–1942) is a wonderful Jew and a wonderful German. He was a world renowned anthropologist and linguist. He spent his life in America, proud of his German heritage, suffering from anti-German sentiments during the two world wars, undermining the pseudo-scientific bases of racism and cultural superiority, defeating the Nazi "scholars" in debate at a Paris international conference. (Lévy Zumwalt, Rosemary (2022)). (16)

The Polish Bundists (17) (founded in 1895 and most strongly active in inter-war Poland, i.e. until Hitler's invasion of Poland) were wonderful Poles and wonderful Jews. They opposed the plans of Zionist fellow-Jews to create a racist Jews-only state in Palestine and to expel or exterminate its rightful owners, the Arab-Muslim and Arab-Christian Palestinians, i.e. they opposed the creation of a "state of Israel". Instead, they advocated the principle:

**"Rights and justice for Jews everywhere
without wrongs and injustice to other people anywhere"**
(Emanuel Scherer, 1901–1971) (18)

All countries produce good people and bad people. Hatred and contempt lead to violence: Westerners, because of their 'superior civilisation', are particularly prone to contempt. Contempt provokes hatred.

The Manhattan attacks were not the cause without cause of everything. Society has to punish Osama, but we do not have to hate and despise him.

If anyone is a coward, it is us, for none of us is ready to die for any f***ing cause.

That may be a good thing though, for I distrust causes that are worth dying for. Perhaps they aren't.

Note: For Westerners, evil has no right to exist. For Hindus both good and evil have a right to exist. We have to live with evil. Good and evil are engaged in a never ending battle. There is no reason to be outraged.

Notes

((01))

White superiority: Since 1492 (Columbus), white people have nurtured the illusion that land that was inhabited by "black people" (non-white people) was terra nullius, uninhabited and therefore for the white arrivals to take possession of, to rule, to settle in. That superior attitude was the basis of settler colonialism. Immanuel Kant criticised it severely, as early as 1795, in his essay: "Zum Ewigen Frieden" (Eternal Peace).

Kant wrote:

Let us look now, for the sake of comparison, at the inhospitable behaviour of the civilised nations, especially the commercial states of our continent. The injustice which they exhibit on visiting foreign lands and races – this being equivalent in their eyes to conquest – is such as to fill us with horror.

America, the Negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape &c. were, on being discovered, looked upon as countries which belonged to nobody; for the native inhabitants were reckoned as nothing.

In Hindustan, under the pretext of intending to establish merely commercial depots, the Europeans introduced foreign troops; and, as a result, the different states of Hindustan were stirred up to far-spreading wars. Oppression of the natives followed, famine, insurrection, perfidy and all the rest of the litany of evils which can afflict mankind. (Kant, 1795)

The white invaders had better tools and better weapons and could therefore not be defeated by force. This strengthened their illusion that they were the superior race, and all cultures with different customs were inferior to them. There is now an academic discipline called "Critical Whiteness" which studies these delusions.

The white superiority complex is discussed by Englert (2022), Pappé (no year): Zionism as Colonialism, Applebaum (2016)

Jewish people normally consider themselves "White", i.e. superior. While, in Europe, they were a persecuted minority, stigmatised for not being Aryan and not being Christian, when

they arrived in Palestine in greater numbers, from, say, 1919 onwards, encouraged by the white British (Balfour Declaration), they regarded the millions of "black" Palestinians as infinitely inferior, massacred them, flattened their villages and planted parks and woodland over the sites to prevent Palestinian refugees from ever returning. In 1948 they proclaimed the creation of a "State of Israel" and declared the remnants of Palestinians who continued to resist and wanted to drive the white Jewish invaders out of their country to be terrorists. The aim of Israel still is to remove the remaining Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank entirely from the inherited Palestinian land. Since Israel represents White culture, White mentality (the superiority complex), White technology, it is not surprising that they are supported in their colonist crimes by the white USA, Europe and the UK. Israel is a bridgehead for White USA in an "uncivilised" "black" world.

For full details, see Bresheeth-Žabner (2020), Pappé (2006), Chomsky:(2016), Chomsky and Vltchek (2013), Masalha (2014)

((02))

The report entitled "Mexican Architect to re-build WTC" about the new design of the Twin Towers reads as follows:

CNN.com
Mexican architect to rebuild WTC
Washington, D.C.

President Bush met this morning with Benjamin Félix, well known architect in México, in order to review his proposal to rebuild the Twin Towers of what used to be the World Trade Center. President Bush's staff contacted Mr Félix yesterday afternoon, as indicated by the vast majority of congress. The towers will have a similar look although more round shaped. The most controversial attribute of the new towers are the "big holes" located on top of each tower, to allow air traffic and prevent future catastrophes that could take place as a result of another terrorist attack of this nature.

((03))

In the "Coventry Blitz", on 14-15 November 1940, approx 568 people were killed by Hitler's bombers (Wikipedia, referring to John Ray (1996): "The Night Blitz").

On 13 February 1945, when Churchill bombed Dresden, 35,000 people were killed (according to Richard J Evans, The Third Reich at War. The Penguin Press, New York).

The proportion of corpses on both sides is similar to that during the Gaza war which started on 7 October 2023. Coventry: 568

corpses, Dresden: 35,000 corpses, Rate: 61 Dresden corpses for each Coventry corpse. Disproportionate.

The Israelis may have learnt from the Coventry/Dresden exchange. The approximate number of people killed in Palestine between 7 October 2023 and 3 December 2024 is: 1,500 Israeli corpses, 43,500 Palestinian corpses, Rate: 29 Palestinian corpses for each Israeli corpse. Disproportionate.

Surprisingly, Churchill did better than Netanyahu.

((04))

Their innocence is irrelevant. Some of them may in fact have been criminals: arms dealers, atheists, corrupt bankers, corrupt drug dealers, fraudsters, husband beaters, lawyers, paedophiles, politicians, racists, rapists, shoplifters, smugglers, wife beaters, - and even murderers - not capital crimes these, of course, but they were not saints. They presumably were simply human. I am sure there were at least ten racists among them.

((05))

Israeli government when it assassinates its opponents:

"The combined effect isolates Israel from criticism and censure, allowing IDF and Mossad free rein across the globe. Many assassinations attributed to Israel, such as those of Iranian military figures and scientists and Palestinian functionaries around the world, have gone unhindered and unpunished. Israeli officers and politicians are in the habit of taking credit for such criminal operations in the knowledge that no country is likely to confront Israel." (Bresheeth-Žabner, 2020)

In May 2003, two leading Israeli civil rights attorneys provided "a detailed list of all of the liquidations and all of the attempted assassinations that Israel's security forces carried out" during the al-Aqsa Intifada, from November 2000 through April 2003. Using official and semiofficial records, they found that "Israel carried out no less than 175 liquidation attempts"-one attempt every five days-killing 235 people, of whom 156 were suspected of crimes. "It greatly pains us to say the following," the lawyers wrote, but "the consistent, widespread policy of targeted liquidations bounds on a crime against humanity." (Aryeh Dayan, Ha'aretz, 21 May 2003.) (Chomsky (2003)

Israel's established policy of assassinations and massacres is further documented by Bergman (2018), Bresheeth-Žabner (2020), Masalha (2012), Pappé (2006), Said (2004) and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Targeted_killing_by_Israel

((06))

Notorious Jewish terrorist organisations (aka "paramilitary forces" and "militias") destroyed a multitude of Arab villages in Palestine, conducted a string of well-documented massacres and

drove millions of Palestinians out of their country thus clearing the land for the foreign Jewish settlers.

The best known of these organisations are:
Haganah, Irgun, Lehi (aka "the Stern Gang") and Palmach.

Moshe Dayan, who held many ministerial offices, was previously a commander of Palmach.

Five of the first eight Israeli prime ministers previously belonged to one of these terror organisations:

1. Levi Eshkol, Prime Minister 1963 to 1969:
previously member of Haganah
2. Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister 1974-1977 and 1992-1995):
previously commander of Palmach
Received Nobel Peace Prize in 1994
3. Menachem Begin, Prime Minister 1977-1983:
previously a leader of Irgun
Received Nobel Peace Prize in 1978
4. Yitzhak Shamir, Prime Minister 1983-1984 and 1986-1992:
previously a leader of Lehi
5. Shimon Peres, Prime Minister 1923-2016
previously member of Haganah
Received Nobel Peace Prize in 1994

One of the massacres conducted by Jewish terrorists (militias) was that of Deir Yassin (9 April 1948): "Most of the Jewish forces that attacked Deir Yassin belonged to two extremist, underground, militias, the Irgun (Etzel, abbreviated IZL) (National Military Organization), led by Menachem Begin" (Wikipedia). Read about Menachem Begin and the assassinations and massacres of which he approved in Pappé (2006). His style as an orator must have been modelled on Hitler, as this picture of 1948 shows.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deir_Yassin_massacre

Israel's Prime Minister from Menachem 1977 to 1982) was leader of the Jewish terrorist organisation Irgun.

See Pappé for the activities of the terrorist Irgun organisation and its offspring, the Stern gang.



Image: Terrorist Menachem Begin, prospective Prime Minister of Israel, in the Hitler pose that was natural to him. About Begin's terrorist activities before he became a politician, see Pappé, (2006) and Bresheeth-Žabner (2020)

((07))

Northern Ireland , terrorists who became leaders:

Martin McGuinness, a notorious member of the "terrorist" IRA, the Irish Republican Army, later Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland from 2007–2017. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

((08))

Destruction of Palestinian villages prior to 1948:

"In 1948 Israel took over what was historical or Mandatory Palestine (destroying and depopulating 531 Arab villages in the process. Two-thirds of the population were driven out: they are the 4 million refugees of today)." (Said, 2005)

((09))

Das eben ist der Fluch der bösen Tat, Daß sie, fortzeugend, immer Böses muß gebären.	It is the curse of an evil deed that it continues to give birth to never ending generations of evil.'
Friedrich von Schiller: Wallenstein, Die Piccolomini, Act 5:1	

((10))

Julian Borger (2001): US backs state for Palestine. The Guardian, 2001-10-03
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/03/afghanistan.israel>
Accessed: 2025-05-09

((11))

Prince Charles, genuine friend of Islam (Ahmed, 2023)

((12))

(12) Berlusconi, press conference in Berlin on 26 September 2001: "supremacy of our civilisation"
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/27/afghanistan.terrorism7> -- Accessed 2025-05-05

((13))

Trenches warfare in World War I: Erich Maria Remarque: All Quiet on the Western Front

((14))

Ian Duncan Smith speech on 10 Oct 2001: Full text of the speech:
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/oct/10/conservatives2001.conservatives4>

((15))

Chomsky (2002); Chomsky and Vltchek (2013)

((16))

Boas (1934), Lévy Zumwalt (2022), Montagu (1945)

((17))

About the Bundists, see:
Jewish Socialists' Group (2024):
The Jewish Workers' Bund, Past, Present and Future
jsg@jewishsocialist.org.uk
<https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/other>

Goldstein (2016)

((18))

Information about Emanuel Scherer (sometimes also spelt **Sherer**) is comparatively hard to come by. Apart from providing the Wikipedia link:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emanuel_Scherer

I therefore give here one of his brief obituaries in full:

JEWISH TELEGRAPHIC AGENCY
 Emanuel Scherer Dead at 75
 Date: 6 May 1977

Funeral services will be held tomorrow for Dr. Emanuel Scherer, secretary of the General Jewish Labor Bund. He died yesterday at the age of 75. A native of Cracow, Poland, Scherer joined the Jewish Labor Bund at the age of 17. He took part in the Jewish Socialist movement at Jagiellonian University in Cracow from which he earned a doctor of law degree.

In 1930, Scherer moved to Warsaw and became the youngest member of the Bund's central committee. He was elected to the Warsaw City Council in 1938. After the German attack on Poland, Scherer, his wife Bronka and several other members of the Bund central committee moved their headquarters to the then as yet unoccupied part of the country. But after the Red Army moved into Poland and most Bundists were arrested, Scherer succeeded in making his way to Lithuania, then Sweden and finally coming to the United States in 1941.

Scherer became a leading member of the American representation of the Jewish Labor Bund in Poland. In 1943 after Szmul Zygielbojm, the Bund representative on the Polish National Council in London, committed suicide in order to shock the Western world into action against the massacre of Jews by Nazis, Scherer succeeded him on the Council and remained in London until the end of World War II.

Scherer returned to the U.S. in 1946 and became secretary of the coordinating committee for the Bund. He was also editor of the Bund monthly, "Unser Tsait," and its representative in the Socialist International. He was also vice-president of the Jewish Labor Committee.

Source: <https://www.jta.org/archive/emanuel-scherer-dead-at-75>
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^(11) Ashutosh Vardhana: When Yasin Scorned

Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana:
When Yasin scorned, Naresh asked silly questions

Length: 155 lines - 4 pp A4 single-spaced

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Two friends, a Hindu and a Muslim, try to define idolatry and reach a friendly conclusion.

	<p>Ashutosh Vardhana:</p> <p>When Yasin Scorned, Naresh Asked Silly Questions</p> <p>A Didactic Poem</p>
Yasin:	<p>Idolater, you pray to lifeless statues, to elephants and monkeys, have you no better sense? Why do you follow this primitive religion? Is not God greater than your animals and artefacts, is not God greater than all human beings, is He not spirit as our Holy Scripture says, and that of Jesus and of Abraham?</p>
Naresh:	<p>Forgive</p>

my simple-minded loving ignorance,
 which I have inherited from
 my mother. I've always felt very close
 to God. I like
 to see her, touch him, pamper him
 and love her that way.
 But you say,
 all this is sinful aberration and idolatry,
 and I'll be punished
 on the day of doom? You make me
 much afraid.

Now you tell me, I should
 no longer worship
 Ganésh and Hánuman, beloved friends,
 no longer keep close company
 of Ráma and of Krishna,
 of Shíva and of Dévi, our mother,
 of Ámba Máta, of Síta and of Sāti,
 of Úma, Lákshmi and Saráswati,
 who accompany me everywhere,
 in spirit,
 and give me strength
 in all my enterprises.
 I should forsake them all?
 You tell me, righteousness requires
 that I miss all these comforts?

Will I not be lonely if
 I must pray only to Allah,
 who is spirit, who is infinitely great and who is
 so far away.
 I'll find it hard to bear.

I find it hard to give up MY god
 if you do not help me
 to find YOURS.
 Therefore, Friend, tell me
 where is Allah?
 Is he above me
 in the sky, below me
 in the earth, does he stand
 on my right hand?
 Or on my left hand (which God forbid)?
 Does he float behind me (which God forbid),
 or do I search for Him in front of me?

Yasin:	Allah is everywhere, my Friend.
Naresh:	But where is Allah, outside me or inside me?
Yasin:	Allah is everywhere, my Friend.
Naresh:	Look at the dustbin there across the road. I know now Allah is outside it. Surely he is not inside that thing, that vessel of wrath and filth.
Yasin:	Oh no, my Friend, Allah is everywhere, even in that filthy bin, and He will sanctify it, as He sanctifies all things.
Naresh:	Friend, now you perplex me. Your omnipresent Allah causes me unease. I have another question. Forgive me if it seems offensive. But I have to ask it, to be sure and really get your meaning. The matter is important. As you say eternal bliss or infinite damnation of my soul depends on it. I must get it right. So please forgive and answer. Surely there are three places where Allah is not found, firstly not in this bowl of excrement and second not in all that is contained within the covers of The Satanic Verses and thirdly not in Salman Rushdie's heart. Admit that Allah is not there.
Yasin:	You press me hard, my Friend. We do not really like to think and talk about extreme examples, constructed and displeasing as they are. But since you press me thus, I must admit, Allah is everywhere, even

	<p>in all those places, which you named. They are disgusting only for our simple human minds, but Allah far transcends such petty feelings of disgust and does not truly like a petty tyrant care if his subjects indulge in pretty poetic mockery, provided they mock well and with esprit. He likes a good laugh, and he more than we is capable of laughing at himself. If He is angry, He's not really angry, He only pretends to be and plays with us.</p>
Naresh:	<p>Thank you, my Friend, for being honest. I think you are close to converting me. I like this Illat or Allah of yours. Take off your shoes, Allah is in the room we are about to enter, and in the carpet we will step upon. Here is my Ganesh, my dearest loving friend. We are agreed, Allah is in this room. But surely He is not within this statue, to which I pray and which I worship and which you have so often mocked.</p> <p>Surely not.</p>
Yasin:	<p>You're a tease, my Friend, but I'm at ease with you - and Allah is everywhere.</p>
Naresh:	<p>I rest my case. Let's go and worship Him together.</p>

^(12) Ashutosh Vardhana: A call to doubt

Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana: A call to doubt

(Dedication accepted by Taslima Nasrin)

Length: 7,074 words = 42,328 characters
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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The author, a British Hindu, discusses the current campaign (1) against terrorism in religious terms. Christian and Muslim ethics alike (unlike Hindu ethics) put man's duties towards God and authority (commandments 1 to 5: only one God, no images, no blasphemy, sabbath; honour your parents) above his duties towards men (commandment 6: no killing). This can be used to legitimise terrorists.

Fanaticism can be undermined by sowing doubt in the infallibility of scriptures and gurus, and there are traditional ways for doing so. This approach is more subtle and effective in the long run and less dangerous than brute force, or political correctness and legislation.

Ashutosh Vardhana:
A call to doubt:
A British Hindu reflects on the campaign against terrorism

This essay is dedicated to Taslima Nasrin (2),
the secular-Muslim writer who,
in her novel 'Lajja' (Shame),
defended Hindus against Muslim violence.

I am a Hindu. Single. My closest friends are Muslims. So close that we are practically one family. We support each other in every possible way. I have rejoiced with them when their children were born and have mourned when their mother died, who was like a mother to me.

My friends, or 'my family' as I call them, take their religion seriously. They try to do the will of Allah as they understand it and as they have been taught it. Their beliefs and practices are different from Christian and secularist ones and they insist on following them with the same earnestness with which well brought-up English people insist on their arbitrary table manners or on sending Christmas cards. That earnestness does not mean that English people or practising Muslims are fanatics or fundamentalists.

We are very fond of each other, even though they eat meat whereas I am a strict vegetarian and will not even eat fish and eggs (for religious reasons), but I too am not a fundamentalist.

The first and highest commandments of the Jew and the Christian, and therefore by and large of the Muslim, specify his duties towards God and authority:

- 1 Worship only one God.
- 2 Do not make images.
- 3 Do not blaspheme.
- 4 Keep the Sabbath.
- 5 Honour your parents

The commandment 'Do not kill', against which the Manhattan terrorists (1) offended, comes only as number 6, halfway through the set.

By contrast, my highest precept (which makes me, like Gandhi, into a vegetarian) is 'ahimsa' (3): do your best not to harm any living creature, human or subhuman, including chicken, fish, cows, the environment, and, a fortiori, human beings, be they Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, women, outcasts, dark or white races, adherents of other religions, heretics, atheists, intellectuals,

or Americans, to give just some examples of groups which have been persecuted or treated as sub-humans from time to time.

I am therefore unhappy about the murder of six million Jews in German concentration camps (4) and the million who died in the communal violence in Rwanda in 1994 (5). I am unhappy about the thousands of Muslims and Hindus who died in the rioting after the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 (6) (God does not give a damn by what name she is called and whether she is worshipped in a mandir (7) or a mosque.) I am unhappy about the millions of animals that are slaughtered in the stockyards of Chicago every year or the 7,000 people killed in the attacks on Manhattan and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001.

My religion gives me hardly any precepts of my duties towards God. I owe her nothing.(8) My ultimate aim is to gain first-hand knowledge of, and eventually be entirely united with, her. The best way of getting closer to this goal is for me to do generously my duty towards my fellow men (and regard my duties as more important than my rights). Knowledge of God will come to me in due course as a bonus (aka 'grace')(9).

As Hindus we learn expressly: your parents are God, your wife is God, your husband is God, your teacher is God, and your guest is God. We worship God by worshipping men. This, at least, is the duty which my guru taught me as the ideal.

Of course none of us ever fully lives up to that ideal. Hindus, too, have perpetrated unpardonable violence. Hindus, too, have been fanatics and offended against the spirit of their religion. But the ideal has been formulated and continues to exist as something to aim at. It is definitely good for people: and if God exists, it is good for her as well.

In the Yoga Sutras (10) we have ten traditional precepts (yamas and niyamas)(11). They can be adjusted to meet the changing needs of society (our religion develops like a living organism)(12), just as we have not only one incarnation of God: God continues to appear on earth again and again when she is needed.(13) However, she is not easy to recognise.

The idea of a last prophet, a prophet for all times, is inconceivable to us. We continue, forever, to need teachers, prophets and gods on earth. We meet them with respect and with doubt.

My guru (peace be upon him) taught me the three highest precepts as follows (and any religion and society would do well to adopt and propagate them):

- 1) Do not harm any living creature (a fortiori: kill neither human beings nor animals).
- 2) Doubt everything said or ordered by a religious teacher, especially if he speaks in the name of God. Your doubt must extend even to the Holy Scriptures and to the pronouncements of your own guru. The consequence of doubt is rejection, acceptance or waiting.
- 3) Disseminate doubt, for doubt is a virtue.

Maxime (2) is encouraged by some respectable authorities:

- Bhagavad Gita: 'Learn by reverence, by inquiry and by serving your teacher' (i.e. by observing him living closely together with him). (14)
- St Paul: 'Do not despise prophetic speech. But check everything, and accept what is good.' (15)
- Qur'an: 'Do not uphold what you have no knowledge of. For the hearing, eyesight, and mind, all these are held responsible for that.' (i.e. do not accept information on faith; critically evaluate it with your reason and senses.) (16)
- Brecht: 'Check the invoice, it's you who has to pay it.' (Prüfe die Rechnung: Du mußt sie bezahlen.) (17)

Observing precepts (2) and (3) will make it easier for society to avoid gross offences against precept (1).

It is the absence of doubt that permits people to commit acts of mass cruelty in the name of an ideal or idol, e.g. the God of whose existence they cannot be sure and whose voice they cannot physically hear or verify.

It is the absence of doubt which enabled the Nazis to run their killing apparatus. It is the absence of doubt which enabled the Inquisition to function. It is the absence of doubt which enabled the French paratroopers to torture their Muslim victims during the Algerian war of 1954 to 1962. (18)

It is the absence of doubt which made the countless massacres and punitive expeditions of the colonial powers (including America) possible. They are still well remembered in the third world. And are we now to add another punitive expedition to the list -- to show that we, the West, are stronger?

The terrorists who destroyed Manhattan, and their guru, had no doubt that they were the forces of good fighting the forces of evil. That conviction made them different from criminals and made them, in effect, saints, people who sacrificed their lives in a good cause. Beware of saints!

Jews, Christians and Muslims are taught to admire Abraham's readiness to commit child-murder in the name of God, as a sign of total obedience, in a situation where God's command conflicted with common sense, natural compassion and parental love: God orders Abraham to sacrifice (kill) his son Isaac. Abraham unquestioningly agrees to do so, the count-down starts, the knife is raised over Isaac's chest, until God (a Deus ex machina), satisfied with Abraham's obedience, grants a last-second reprieve.

Jews and Christians have this story in Genesis 22:1-19, Muslims in Surah 37:99-111, and an important Muslim festival, Id-al-Adha, is devoted to it. The story is recited to Christians during the Easter Night service every year as a good example and a precedent for God's willingness to sacrifice his son Jesus and Jesus's obedience to his father. These are roots of all three faiths, and they have borne fruit (by which we shall know them) (19) in Manhattan. We Westerners are part of the plot.

The terror pilots and their Master were neither suicides nor cowards. They believed that they were doing the will of God: we can doubt that but we cannot refute it! They were willing, like Jesus, to sacrifice their own lives in God's cause, and regrettably God did not, at the last minute, reprieve them and their six thousand victims. I am reliably informed that the victims had only one thing in common: at some time in their lives they all had thoroughly enjoyed watching the film 'Towering Inferno', imagining it to be real. Their dream had come true and they had joined the cast.

Saints put God's will above everything else. God can break and override human laws, feelings and intuitions. He who acts in the name of God can do the same. Therefore we should never act in the name of God! We should never do what we cannot defend by our own, merely human, standards.

People acting in the name of God, even if they defend animal rights or the right to life for unborn humans, fuel my instinctive dislike of saints. We are better off without saints. I prefer sinners. They do less harm and are more fun.

The worst thing about saints is their first sin: they have eaten from the tree of knowledge (20) and therefore they know so clearly what is good and what is evil.

It was certainly not good to crash those planes into the World Trade Center. But the correspondingly evil face of America showed itself in the immediate (ill-considered) verbal response to the catastrophe.

It showed itself in the voice of the provincial American woman, shown outraged on television, who said: 'This is America. How dare they!' Her national pride had been hurt.

It showed itself in the voice of the President when he declared that America would continue the fight of good against evil until evil had been eradicated. (21) Even Jesus has not managed that, to say nothing of God.

It showed itself in the disgraceful name given to the big revenge operation: 'Operation Infinite Justice'. (22) After all, the terrorists believed that they were carrying out 'infinite justice': that's why they felt justified to sacrifice so many human lives. Both sides do not doubt that justice (infinite justice!) is on their side and justifies any sacrifice.

The President implied that America knows and decides what is good and what is evil, that America is incapable of doing evil. ('He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her.') (23)

That horrendous strength of conviction, that certainty (and the resulting policies and actions over the years) combined with military and economic power is evil. It is the reason for the hatred of those who are powerless against America's gentle stranglehold, powerless against being suffocated by its love and its smiles, powerless except by the devious methods of terrorism.

Reasserting that power, proving yet again to the world that America is invincible (for invulnerable it is no longer!), that America decides what is right and what is wrong, will never eradicate terrorism. Terrorism is resistance, and there will be resistance as long as there are human beings who do not accept America's (or anybody else's) ideology. Terrorism is the weapon of the weak against the strong.

Neither evil nor terrorism can ever be eradicated from this world.

However, they can be weakened by the spreading of doubt. That is not a campaign of limited duration, e.g. 20 years or 100 years, but a never-ending task -- like trying to keep one's body clean, that inherently self-soiling organism.

If the President thinks that religion as such is too sure of itself, too sure of the will of God, then he can start with his own religion and ask (with Max Müller, 1901) (24): What makes you so sure that the Bible is God's word? You are not infallible: therefore how can you claim, with absolute certainty, that the Bible is infallible? The human authors of the Bible may be deceived or lying if they claim infallibility for themselves. Your parents, your priest or the Pope are not infallible. Their testimony that the Bible is God's word (i.e. infallible) is therefore not worth much, certainly not if the Bible tells you to stone to death homosexuals, adulterers and heretics. (25) We can rely on the infallibility of the Bible only if the person who claims it to be infallible is himself infallible. Nobody is infallible. Therefore nobody can know whether the Bible is infallible (even if perhaps this is actually the case).

Each time we convert a person to that kind of doubt it is a tiny step on the road towards tolerance and reduces the danger of terrorism.

There is an ancient story (26) from the life of the Holy Prophet. Muslims believe that the Holy Qur'an is literally God's word as dictated to the Holy Prophet by the Archangel Gabriel. The merchants of Mecca were reluctant to give up the worship of their pre-Islamic deities, especially three very popular goddesses, al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat.

The Holy Prophet, in the name of Allah, wanted them removed entirely. The merchants of Mecca tried to achieve a compromise. If such a compromise could be found, they would embrace Islam.

The proposed compromise was that the goddesses should no longer be worshipped (like God) but that they may be invoked for intercession (much like saints in the Roman Catholic church).

One day, in front of the assembled merchants, the Archangel Gabriel (as it appeared to the Holy Prophet) put the following words on his tongue, and the Holy Prophet uttered them:

'Have ye considered al-Lat and al-'Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other? These are the swans exalted, whose intercession is to be hoped for'.

Thereupon the Holy Prophet and all the men assembled prostrated themselves.

Then the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Holy Prophet and said: 'You have to retract the verse you uttered. It was not me who gave that verse to you but Satan, who had assumed my form in order to deceive you. The correct continuation of the verse is as follows:

"Have ye seen Lat and 'Uzza and another, the third goddess, Manat? What! For you the male sex and for Him, the female? Behold, such would be indeed a division most unfair! These are nothing but names which ye have devised, -- ye and your fathers, -- for which God has sent down no authority whatever... (19-23) ... How many-so-ever be the angels in the heavens, their intercession will avail nothing.(26)" '

This is how it appears in the Holy Qur'an, Surah 53:19-26, to this day.

The false verse coming from Satan was dubbed 'the Satanic verse'.

Ordinary Muslims do not know the story and are not meant to know it because even to contemplate its possibility, and even its falsity, inevitably leads to doubt.

Muslim scholars know the story. Many of them declare that it is not historical and a malicious invention of non-Muslims bent on spoiling the reputation of the Holy Prophet.

This objection, however, may well be a form of wishful thinking, for the earliest books in which the story is found are Qur'an commentaries written by devout Muslims.

However, the story is so pernicious, so corrosive in the way in which it spreads doubt, that no-one who has ever heard and understood it can ever again be completely untainted (free of doubt). Like baptism, this story creates a character indelebilis (27), an indelible impression.

If the story is true, then it means that the Holy Prophet was, at least once, deceived. If deceived on one occasion, in one verse, how can we know that he was not deceived in some other verses? If he could not tell the Archangel from Satan during the first utterance, how could he tell them apart during the second. Perhaps the first was authentic and the second was not? Which was the Satanic verse?

If the Holy Prophet could be temporarily deceived, the Holy Qur'an is no longer the literal word of Allah to be believed and followed without question. We must decide for each verse whether we accept it or not, and what it means. We have to put ourselves above the 'word of Allah', for we do not know for sure what is the word of Allah and what is not.

Someone could always ask about another verse: could this possibly be the result of a deception, a Satanic verse?

You may argue that Allah, all-powerful as HE is, prevented any deception except for the first one. If so, why did he not prevent the first deception, which, after all, diminishes faith and certainty? Why did he not prevent the creation of this allegedly anti-Islamic 'legend'? He did want his word believed, did he not? Why then did he allow unconditional belief to be undermined at the beginning?

However, even if the story were demonstrably untrue and if every narrator grants this before telling it: it is a possible story, and thinking of the mere possibility is a potent seed of doubt. The question will always arise: how did the Holy Prophet know that the 'person' speaking to him, or the voice in his mind, was the Archangel Gabriel and not some malevolent spirit, or that he did not imagine his revelations.

No Muslim claims (and I do not claim) that he imagined them. We cannot know for sure. But even believers will sometimes ask themselves whether he did. That is the trouble. It creates restlessness and uncertainty in our hearts.

With 1% or 5% doubt in my mind, I will happily respond to God's command by supporting widows and orphans, refraining from rape,

murder and theft, praying and fasting and going on the Haj, but I will not blow 7000 Americans (not even Americans!), however materialist, sky-high: if I doubt in the slightest, the risk of my being mistaken about the will of God is too great for that.

Therefore the best (even though quite unspectacular) and entirely non-violent means of combating terrorism (including a US state terrorism, if there were to be such a thing) is the spreading of doubt, e.g. the propagation of this story (or of Max Müller's questions about the infallibility of scriptures).

The results are not measurable (like the number of terrorists killed or arrested), but they will be there, they are unfailing and they spread like a virus. Spreading doubt does not require an army, and we all can participate in the campaign of doubt and reason.

It would be well, of course, if the campaign were not only one of spreading doubt but if it were accompanied by a campaign of spreading love, especially towards people who, right now, are unjustly under suspicion or attack.

Ordinary Muslims are the most warm and kind-hearted people you can imagine. Television does not show that. But I know: from years of living happily in an English town with a huge Muslim population. Muslims are hospitable, generous and honest. (So, of course, are the Americans, so are the British, the Christians, so are we all, all honourable men.) (28). But Muslims are no less kind than any of them. They are human beings, they are not a priori stupid, cruel or inferior. They, having been much provoked and persecuted over the centuries, can say, like Shylock:

He hath ... laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Muslim. Hath not a Muslim eyes? hath not a Muslim hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? (29)

Some years before the Gulf War, I worked in Iraq. I was scared when I arrived, thinking that I was entering a nest of terrorists, as was the general fear at that time. In fact I was received, by ordinary people, with more warmth than is customary anywhere in Western culture.

Muslims will show that warmth to us if we non-Muslims show it to them. In the USA and in Britain they are in the minority. It is therefore our duty to make the first move, just as the Iraqis reassuringly did when I was a lone stranger in their country.

Especially at this terribly difficult time for them, Muslims in non-Islamic countries need our support and encouragement. They are innocent of the deeds of the terrorists and are deeply hurt by the unfair suspicion that falls upon them.

It is not enough for us to tolerate them, to refrain from attacking them: we should go out of our way to be friendly towards them in the street, greet them with a smile, a 'Hello' or an 'Assalamu aleikum' (Peace be with you!) (30), invite them to our homes, to demonstrate to them that we do not wish them any harm. Friendliness towards strangers ('bloody foreigners' (31), 'bogus asylum seekers' (32), as abusive British parlance has it), smiling in the street, is not something that comes easily in English or European culture (there is something we can learn from other, more temperamental cultures!), but it would be good for all of us if we at least tried to overcome our cultural inhibitions and prejudices. I know from my time in Iraq how good it feels, and how necessary it is, for the foreigner.

That is even a biblical injunction: 'And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.' (33)

And what about inviting Afghan refugees or asylum seekers into our homes, no matter whether their refugee status has been confirmed or not? They did not leave their country for fun, and they must feel terrible when they see that their country is about to be destroyed by the people whose guests they are, and that they are living in the midst of people who regard them as fraudsters and enemies. They must be given the reassurance that ordinary English people respect them and like them. If we cannot like them, it is our fault, our narrow-mindedness, and we must learn to overcome it.

I practise my religion (but do not ask me whether I 'believe in God', for I do not understand the question). I believe that all of us need religion (if only the minimalist religion of atheism, but a religion all the same).

Religions or their assertions are not true or false. Rather they reflect and influence the attitudes of the cultural communities in which they grow, give them a coherent approach to the problems of life, hold them together, provide us with tools for gaining an understanding of God (whatever she may be) and comfort us in our afflictions better than the cleverest secular alternatives.

Like the European economic community I am against monopolies! I am therefore glad that there are many religions in this world and would not like to make converts to mine or see any religion die out, if only because the existence of alternatives needles the followers of some religions, kindles doubt in them (or should do so) and ensures that they do not become too overbearing. American Christianity and secularism in its isolation and in combination with economic and military power tends to be so.

Isolation combined with power makes it unnecessary for people to listen. That provokes terrorism. The Manhattan terrorists broke

through America's shell and forced it, and the western world, to listen. They demonstrated, even to the deaf, that there are alternative points of view in the world, and they want to be heard.

All of a sudden (speeches on 2 October 2001) the American president wants to give the Palestinians their own state. All of a sudden Tony Blair wants to transform Africa into a blossoming continent and is convinced he can do it. All of a sudden Afghanistan is to be converted into green paradise. Suddenly world idealism blossoms: bread for everyone. Yet again a turning point in world history (Blair).(34)

My incitement to doubt and to the spreading of doubt is therefore not part of a programme to undermine or destroy any religion or religion as such but merely a way to induce followers of any religion to practise theirs with common sense and moderation (35) and to put the interests of human beings above the interests of God. God can look after herself: vulnerable human beings cannot. We do not exist for God, she exists for us.

Christians and atheists know what is good and what is bad. We ignorant Hindus must be more humble: we merely know what is better and what is worse. For us nothing is purely good and purely bad.

The aim of the war against terrorism is not to destroy evil, for we can never be quite sure what it is: the aim is to eradicate certainty.

^ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashutosh Vardhana is a Hindu. He grew up in Europe and lives in Yorkshire, England. He studied at London University. He is a keen student of comparative religion and now writes fiction, poetry and essays. He has produced many academic publications. His 'creative' work has been published in Dipika (London), Writers' Forum (Bournemouth, UK), Scavenger (Osage City, Kansas, USA), The World of English (Peking), Asian Image (Blackburn, UK), Gujarat-Samachar (London) and Pphoo Magazine (Calcutta).

^FOOTNOTES

- (01) Campaigns against terrorism in response to the Manhattan attacks of 11 September 2001
- (02) Taslima Nasrin. Born: 25 August 1962. Her novel 'Lajja' (Shame) was written and first published in Bengali. Translated into over 19 languages, including English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Arabic. The German translation, 'Scham', was published by Hoffmann und Campe Verlag. A fatwa (death sentence) was pronounced on her by Islamic fundamentalists, for her modernist and liberal writings on many issues. (see more under Ayodhya, Footnote (6), below)
- (03) ahimsa (Sanskrit) = non-violence
- (04) the Holocaust, the Shoah
- (05) Rwanda is a country in South East Africa. Genocide against the Tutsi tribe took place there during the Civil War in 1994. See: Paul Rusesabagina (2006): "An Ordinary Man - The True Story Behind Hotel Rwanda", Viking Penguin, New York, USA (autobiography, Rwanda genocide)
- (06) Ayodhya: town in India; believed by Hindus to be the birthplace of God Rama, a Hindu Bethlehem, so to speak. In 1992, a derelict mosque (built by the Muslim Moghul conquerors in 1528) on the site believed to be the site of that birth was demolished by Hindu fundamentalists who insisted on erecting a temple there and sparked communal riots between Hindus and Muslims all over India and Bangladesh, in which many people were killed. Taslima Nasrin wrote her novel Lajja to castigate the Muslim participants of the violence in Bangladesh, where Hindus were attacked and killed, who, obviously, had nothing to do with the events in Ayodhya. After many years of legal hussles and delays, in 2019, the Supreme Court of India gave permission for a new incomparably splendid temple to be erected on the site of the demolished mosque and over the exact spot where traditional belief said that Lord Rama was born before time immemorial. On 22 January 2024 the new, partially built, temple was inaugurated.
- (07) mandir = Hindu temple
- (08) God, she, her: reference to God is made in the feminine, in defiance of current linguistic conventions, to shake up an irrelevant ancient prejudice, which helps to suppress doubt.
- (09) aka = also known as

- (10) Yoga Sutras: a summary of Hindu practice written by Patanjali (perhaps several authors) sometime between 2 cent. BC and 5 cent. AD)
- (11) yamas and niyamas: positive precepts (things to do) and prohibitions (things to abstain from)
- (12) Our religion develops like a living organism: Goethe (in "Urworte, orphisch: Dämon") describes this as "geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt": a shape which starts like a minted coin but is alive and develops.
- (13)

Whenever there is a decline of righteousness
and rise of unrighteousness, O Arjuna,
then I send forth (incarnate) Myself. (4:7)

For the protection of the good,
for the destruction of the wicked
and for the establishment of righteousness,
I come into being from age to age. (4:8)

(Bhagavad Gita, chapter 4)

The Bhagavad Gita is the Holy Scripture of Hinduism, here translated by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), Indian philosopher and second president of India (1952-1962).

- (14) Bhagavad Gita: 'Learn by reverence, by inquiry and by serving your teacher' (i.e. by observing him living closely together with him), i.e. keep asking questions ("inquiry") but remain polite. Bhagavad Gita 4:34
- (15) St Paul: 'Do not despise prophetic speech. But check everything, and accept what is good.' (Bible, New Testament, 1. Thessalonians, 5:20-21)
- (16) Qur'an: "Do not accept information on faith; critically evaluate it with your reason and senses."
Source: Edip Yüksel (et al) (eds) (2007): "Quran: A Reformist Translation". Brainbow Press, London, 521 pp: The exact text of Yüksel is 'Do not uphold what you have no knowledge of. For the hearing, eyesight, and mind, all these are held responsible for that.' (Qur'an 17:36)
- (17) Bertolt Brecht: 'Check the invoice, you have to pay it.'
(Prüfe die Rechnung, du mußt sie bezahlen). From: 'Lob des Lernens' (In Praise of learning).
- (18) About the French, ultimately unsuccessful, attempts to impose their will on the Algerians and the brutal methods they used, read

- Henry Alleg (2006): "The Question", translated by John Calder, University of Nebraska Press. 70 pp (originally: Henri Alleg: "La question" (The Question: Torture; preface by Jean-Paul Sartre; 1958)
- Frantz Fanon (1995): "A Dying Colonialism" (originally published in France in 1959 as "L'An Cinq, de la Revolution Algerienne" (The Fifth Year of the Algerian Revolution)

Fanon said: "Having a gun, being a member of the National Army of Liberation, is the only chance the Algerian still has of giving a meaning to his death. Life under the domination has long been devoid of meaning." A similar situation exists in Jewish-occupied Palestine.

- (19) fruit (by which we shall know them): 'Ye shall know them by their fruits.' (Bible, New Testament, Matthew 7:16)
- (20) Adam and Eve in paradise ate from the 'tree of knowledge'. That was their first sin: Bible, Genesis, chapter 2.
- (21) I have not yet been able to recover that exact quote. For the record, here are some of the well-preserved things President Bush did say after the 9/11 attack. George W Bush was US president from 2001 from 2009.

See Bush and Bin Laden speeches side by side:

- George W. Bush, Address to the Nation, October 7, 2001, taken from the New York Times, Monday, October 8, 2001, p. B6
- Osama bin Laden, Videotaped Address, October 7, 2001

Source: <https://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/481921texts.html>

"Our military has put the terror training camps of Afghanistan out of business, yet camps still exist in at least a dozen countries. A terrorist underworld -- including groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed -- operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities."

State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002

Source: Link: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>

- (22) The code name "Infinite Justice" was soon changed to "Operation Enduring Freedom" because Muslims objected that "such finality is considered something provided only by God". Source: BBC NEWS, 2001-09-25:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1563722.stm>

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- (23) He that is without sin ... cast the first stone....: Bible, New Testament, John 8:7
- (24) Max Müller (1823-1900), born in Germany, Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, edited and first published the Vedas. His autobiography was published posthumously in 1901. Max Müller (1901): "My Autobiography". Charles Scribner's Sons, New York
- (25) homosexuals, adulterers, heretics: Biblical fatwas: death penalty
- for adulterers: Bible, Leviticus 20:10,
 - for homosexuals: Leviticus 20:13,
 - for blasphemers: Leviticus 24:14
- (26) The Satanic Verses: The incident of the Satanic Verses is discussed in detail in: W Montgomery Watt: "Muhammad at Mecca", Oxford 1953.

This verse is not the only verse in the Qur'an which was changed ("on second thoughts," as malevolent people say).

These verses are said to have been "abrogated". The Qur'an itself provides for this possibility, a verse first having been uttered and then superseded by another. "Any revelation We cause to be superseded or forgotten, We replace with something better or similar. Do you [Prophet] not know that God has power over everything?" (Sura 2:106) (Translation: "Qur'an: A new translation by M A S Abdel Haleem". Oxford University Press, 2004)

Abrogated verses are listed in the following article:
https://wikiislam.net/wiki/List_of_Abrogations_in_the_Qur%27an

Here is a list of books which discuss the Satanic Verses either on their own merits or in connection with the violence following the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel, "The Satanic Verses", in 1988

**THE FOLLOWING BOOKS DISCUSS THE SATANIC VERSES
IN THEIR OWN RIGHT, I.E.
WITHOUT MENTIONING RUSHDIE'S NOVEL:**

- Ahmed, Shahab: Before Orthodoxy - The Satanic Verses in Early Islam
(Ahmed argues that the early Muslims accepted the Satanic Verses incident as truth.)
- Ibn Ishaq (1955): "The Life of Muhammad", translated by A Guillaume, Oxford University Press, Karachi and Oxford, England. 860 pp. (This is the oldest record of the Satanic Verses episode. Ibn Ishaq lived c. 704–767 CE.)
- Mattson, Ingrid (2013): "The story of the Qur'an: its history and place in Muslim life". Second Edition. John Wiley & Sons, Oxford, GB. 355 pp
- Qureshi, Nabeel (2016): "Allah or Jesus? A former Muslim investigates the evidence for Islam and Christianity". Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. 346 pp
- Rodinson, Maxime (1971): "Mohammed". Transl from the French by Anne Carter. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middx, GB. 381 pp (classical Biography).pdf
- Spencer, Robert (2012) - "Did Muhammad Exist: An Inquiry into Islam's Obscure Origins." ISI Books, Wilmington, Delaware, USA. 264 pp
- Warraq, Ibn (1995): "Why I Am Not a Muslim." Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, USA. 673 pp
- Warraq, Ibn (ed)(2000): The Quest for the Historical Muhammad. Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, USA. 554 pp
- Warraq, Ibn (ed)(2013): "Koranic Allusions: The Biblical, Qumranian, and Pre-Islamic Background". Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, USA, 380 pp.
(The references to the Satanic Verses episode are very technical.)

**THE FOLLOWING BOOKS DISCUSS THE SATANIC VERSES
IN CONNECTION WITH
SALMAN RUSHDIE'S NOVEL**

- Brooks, Geraldine (1995): "Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women". Anchor Books, Random House, New York, USA, 233 pp
- Caldwell, Christopher (2009): "Reflections on the Revolution In Europe: immigration, Islam, and the West". Doubleday, New York, USA, 328 pp
- Erickson, John D. (1998): "The view from underneath: Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses". Islam and Postcolonial Narrative. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press
- Ghattas, Kim (2020): "Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry That Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East". Henry Holt and Co, New York, USA. 444 pp. (Detailed discussion of the Rushdie affair.)
- Hazleton, Lesley (2009): "After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam". Doubleday, New York, USA, 329 pp
- Husain, Ed (2018): "The House of Islam: A Global History". Bloomsbury Publishing, New York, USA. 325 pp
- Klausen, Jytte (2009): "The Cartoons That Shook the World." Yale University Press, New Haven and London. 263 pp
(This book discusses the Rushdie affair in the context of other "blasphemy" incidents, but does not mention the original Satanic Verses episode in the history of the Holy Qur'an)
- Murray, Douglas (2017): "The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam". Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 286 pp (Much discussion of the Rushdie affair)
- Nickel, Gordon D (2020): "The Quran with Christian Commentary: A Guide to Understanding the Scripture of Islam" (Quran translation by A J Droge). Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. 1159 pp
- Spencer, Robert (2002): "Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest-Growing Faith". Encounter Books, San Francisco, California, USA, 228 pp (fiercely anti-Islamic)
- Spencer, Robert (2006): "The Truth About Muhammad." Regnery Publishing, Washington, DC, USA. 244 pp (This is a virulent attack of Islam.)
- Spencer, Robert (2015): "The Complete Infidel's Guide to ISIS". Regnery Publishing, Washington, USA, 323 pp
- Warraq, Ibn (ed) (2003): "Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out". Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, USA. 599 pp
(This book contains articles from 37 contributors from various countries, starting in the Middle Ages. One of them is entitled: "The Poet of Doubt: Umar Khayyam: Medieval and Modern Iranian Freethought"). For a striking example for the absence of doubt, see immediately after the next book title.
- Yüksel, Edip (et al)(eds)(2007): "Quran: A Reformist Translation". Brainbow Press, London, 521 pp

THE ABSENCE OF DOUBT: AN EXAMPLE

Warraq quotes a conversation a traveller to Turkey had at the end of the nineteenth century.

"A high official once told me that Turkey gives to all her subjects the widest religious liberty. He said, "There is the fullest liberty for the Armenian to become Catholic, for the Greek to become an Armenian, for the Catholic and the Armenian to become Greeks, for any one of them to become Protestants, or for all to become Muhammadans. There is the fullest and completest religious liberty for all the subjects of this empire."

In response to the question, "How about liberty for the Muhammadan to become a Christian'?" he replied, "That [is an] impossibility in the nature of the case. When one has once accepted Islam and become a follower of the Prophet, he cannot change. There is no power on earth that can change him. Whatever he may say or claim cannot alter the fact that he is a Muslim still and must always be such. It is, therefore, an absurdity to say that a Muslim has the privilege of changing his religion, for to do so is beyond his power." (Warraq (ed), 2003)"

- (27) character indelebilis: Latin: technical term in Christian theology. Baptism is said to impress an indelible mark on the person who has been baptised, a mark which can never be erased; one cannot renounce baptism. A person once baptised is baptised forever.
- (28) so are we all, all honourable men: Shakespeare: Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 2
- (29) Shakespeare: Merchant of Venice: Act 3, Scene 1
- (30) Assalamu aleikum (Peace be with you): Arabic: normal greeting among Muslims in all countries
- (31) 'bloody foreigner' = accursed foreigner, so frequently used in English that it has become a standard phrase and is used both in earnest and as a joke to characterise British xenophobia
- (32) 'bogus asylum seeker': This phrase has become very common during the past five years or so and is used by the popular press in their xenophobic campaign against people who claim that they are politically persecuted and need asylum whereas in fact they are merely 'economic migrants', i.e. people who come to England because they want to improve their economic conditions. The press campaign reached such a pitch that readers often wrongly assume that all asylum seekers are fraudulent, do not want to work, and want to exploit the provisions of the British social security system.
- (33) 'And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land ..' (Leviticus 19:33-34)

(34) Speech of President Bush on 24 June 2002:

"For too long, the citizens of the Middle East have lived in the midst of death and fear. The hatred of a few holds the hopes of many hostage. The forces of extremism and terror are attempting to kill progress and peace by killing the innocent. And this casts a dark shadow over an entire region. For the sake of all humanity, things must change in the Middle East. /.../

In the situation the Palestinian people will grow more and more miserable. ****My vision is two states****, living side by side in peace and security. There is simply no way to achieve that peace until all parties fight terror. Yet, at this critical moment, if all parties will break with the past and set out on a new path, we can overcome the darkness with the light of hope."

Source: Speech: "President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership".
<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020624-3.html>

Tony Blair: "turning point in world history"

"In retrospect, the Millennium marked only a moment in time. It was the events of September 11 that marked a ****turning point in history****, where we confront the dangers of the future and assess the choices facing humankind.

It was a tragedy. An act of evil. From this nation, goes our deepest sympathy and prayers for the victims and our profound solidarity with the American people."

Tony Blair's Labour Conference Speech on 2 October 2001

Source:
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/oct/02/labourconference.labour6>

(35) James Hilton, in his novel "Lost Horizons" (1933), describes a fictitious village ruled by a community of monks for whom moderation is a guiding principle. Illuminating quotes from that book will be given in the **next chapter**.

Moderation is also one of the Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance (= moderation). See Josef Pieper: "The Four Cardinal Virtues", chapter 4 on "Temperance".

Wikipedia summarises: "Temperance (σωφροσύνη, sōphrosýnē; Latin: temperantia): also known as restraint, the practice of self-control, abstention, discretion, and **moderation** tempering the appetite. Plato considered sōphrosynē, which may also be translated as sound-mindedness, to be **the most important virtue**. σωφροσύνη was often used in reference to drinking and "knowing the right amount" to **avoid belligerence**."

^(13) James Hilton: The Virtue of Moderation

Impressum

James Hilton: The Virtue of Moderation

Length: 3,771 words = 21,212 characters
= 11 pp A4 single-spaced

e: info@rochdalewriters.org.uk

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Date: 2024-12-14, Mk1.3

Source: James Hilton (1933): "Lost Horizons" (a novel)
Quotes selected by Klaus Bung, 2024
Additional notes by Klaus Bung

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

In 1933, James Hilton described an imaginary community of villagers in a remote country, ruled by an order of monks, who by nature did not believe in any form of excess. The rulers were moderately strict, their subjects moderately obedient, the men moderately lecherous, and the women moderately chaste. If somebody is stupid, then it is good if he is only moderately active, and laziness is even beneficial, because his stupidity is less likely to lead him to actions by which he harms himself or others. Nobody thought there was any point in publicising or enforcing political correctness. Politically they were "moderately correct", and often "moderately incorrect". This belief in the virtue of moderation seemed to them a recipe for human happiness. But will God be happy? See below.

The pages that follow contain eight verbatim quotes from Hilton's novel about the principle of moderation - and culminate in a non-Hilton modern application: "Thy will be done (in moderation, of course)."

Doing the will of God literally (i.e. without moderation), as it is written in the "Holy Scriptures" of assorted religions, is a particularly pernicious occupation and can lead to reprehensible activities:

- the well-known atrocities of ISIS ("Islamic State") in the Middle East and in Nigeria
- the theft of Palestinian land and the systematic murder (genocide) of its indigenous inhabitants (aka "Philistines") by the so-called "Israelis", which is explicitly demanded by their god in their bible. (Footnote 1)
- the stoning of adulterers, blasphemers and homosexuals, which is ordered in the Bible (Footnote 2)
- the stoning of alleged blasphemers in Pakistan
- and other stupid and unlawful acts from time to time committed, with naïve enthusiasm, by members of religious sects, in the conviction that it is the will of God, e.g. beating their children to drive out a demon
- the crime of preparing for, and attempting, infanticide. Abraham was praised for this in the Jewish Bible, and his crime was commended as an ideal for Jews, Christians and Muslims (Footnote 3)

James Hilton: The virtue of moderation

QUOTES FROM HIS NOVEL "LOST HORIZON" (1933)

1. Chang answered rather slowly and in scarcely more than a whisper: "If I were to put it into a very few words, my dear sir, I should say that our prevalent belief is in moderation. We inculcate the virtue of avoiding excess of all kinds - even including, if you will pardon the paradox, excess of virtue itself. In the valley which you have seen, and in which there are several thousand inhabitants living under the control of our order, we have found that the principle makes for a considerable degree of happiness. We rule with moderate strictness, and in return we are satisfied with moderate obedience. And I think I can claim that our people are moderately sober, moderately chaste, and moderately honest."

2. ... our community has various faiths and usages, but we are most of us moderately heretical about them.

3. There were also, it appeared, a Taoist and a Confucian temple further along the valley. "The jewel has facets," said the Chinese, "and it is possible that many religions are moderately true."

"I agree with that," said Barnard heartily. "I never did believe in sectarian jealousies. Chang, you're a philosopher, I must remember that remark of yours. 'Many religions are moderately true.' You fellows up on the mountain must be a lot of wise guys to have thought that out. You're right, too, I'm dead certain of it."

"But we," responded Chang dreamily, "are only moderately certain."

4. Chang, I believe, explained to you our principle of moderation, and one of the things in which we are always moderate is activity. I myself, for instance, have been able to learn ten languages; the ten might have been twenty had I worked immoderately. But I did not. And it is the same in other directions; you will find us neither profligate nor ascetic. Until we reach an age when care is advisable, we gladly accept the pleasures of the table, while - for the benefit of our younger colleagues - the women of the valley have happily applied the principle of moderation to their own chastity.

5. ... even the fixed rules of our community are only moderately fixed.

6. [A foreign visitor to this happy country, immoderate, of course, objects:]
I'm strongly opposed to that idea of moderation that we hear so much about. You can call it broad-mindedness if you like, but in my opinion it leads to the worst kind of laxity. The whole trouble with the people here is their so-called broad-mindedness, and I intend to fight it with all my powers."
7. ... it is our custom at Shangri-La to be moderately truthful, and I can assure you that my statements about the porters were almost correct.
8. "You find it easy to separate the two? Is it possible that you are falling in love with Lo-Tsen?"

Conway was somewhat taken aback, though he hoped he did not show it. "What makes you ask that?"

"Because, my dear sir, it would be quite suitable if you were to do so - always, of course, in moderation. Lo-Tsen would not respond with any degree of passion - that is more than you could expect - but the experience would be very delightful, I assure you. And I speak with some authority, for I was in love with her myself when I was much younger."

"Were you indeed? And did she respond then?"

"Only by the most charming appreciation of the compliment I paid her, and by a friendship which has grown more precious with the years."

The following precept is not by James Hilton:

I pray every Sunday: "Thy will be done
(in moderation, of course)".
God is satisfied with that:
He has a sense of humour, aka "grace and mercy".

In the German chorale "Was mein Gott will, das g'scheh allzeit" (used in Bach's St Matthew Passion), we find the line "und züchtigt mit Maßen" (he punishes with moderation).

Was mein Gott will, gescheh allzeit, sein Will, der ist der beste. Zu helfen dem er ist bereit, der an ihn glaubet feste. Er hilft aus Not, der treue Gott, und züchtigt mit Maßen Wer Gott vertraut, fest auf ihn baut, den will er nicht verlassen.	I should always do what my God wishes, what he wills is best for me. He is ready to help those who firmly believe in him. He is sure to rescue us when we are in trouble, and when he punishes, he punishes with moderation. If you trust in God, and firmly rely on him, he will not let you down.
	English prose translation by Klaus Bung

FOOTNOTES

Footnote 1. Relevant literature:

Amnesty International (2024) - Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza - 296 pp. Published by Amnesty International Ltd, Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X-0DW, UK. Index: MDE 15/8668/2024. Retrieved in December 2024 from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/>

Masalha, Nur (2014): "The Zionist Bible - Biblical Precedent, Colonialism and the Erasure of Memory." Routledge, London, 356 pp

Pappé, Ilan (2006): "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine." Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 384 pp

Ethnic cleansing recommended in the Bible

1. 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you. 24 **Every place where you set your foot will be yours**: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. 25 No one will be able to stand against you. The Lord your God, as he promised you, will put the **terror and fear of you** on the whole land, wherever you go. (Deuteronomy 11:23-25)

Comment: "from the river to the sea" (Euphrates to the sea!)

2. 10 When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. 11 If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to **forced labor** and shall work for you. 12 If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. 13 When the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, **put to the sword all the men** in it. 14 As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the Lord your God gives you from your enemies. 15 This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby. 16 However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, **do not leave alive anything that breathes**. 17 **Completely destroy them** ... (Deuteronomy 20:10-17)

Footnote 2

The stoning of adulterers, blasphemers and homosexuals is ordered in the Bible, but, mercifully, no longer applied in Judaism and Christianity. The virtue of moderation has prevailed.

The following quotes are taken from the NIV translation of the Bible (New International Version).

Adultery:
stoning

23 If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, 24 you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and **stone them to death** - the young woman because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you.
(Deuteronomy 22:23-24)

Adultery:
Jesus demonstrates the virtue of moderation

3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group, 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."
(John 8:3-11)

Heretics
(Worshipping "false gods"):

2 If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the Lord gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your

God in violation of his covenant, 3 and contrary to my command has **worshiped other gods**, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars in the sky, 4 and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and **stone that person to death**.

(Deuteronomy 17:2-5)

Blasphemers

10 Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went out among the Israelites, and a fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite. 11 The son of the Israelite woman **blasphemed the Name with a curse**; so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.) 12 They put him in custody until the will of the Lord should be made clear to them.

13 Then the Lord said to Moses: 14 "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and **the entire assembly is to stone him**. 15 Say to the Israelites: 'Anyone who curses their God will be held responsible; 16 anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord is to be put to death. The entire assembly must stone them. Whether foreigner or native-born, when they blaspheme the Name they are to be put to death.

(Leviticus 24:10-16)

Homosexuals

13 If **a man has sexual relations with a man** as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be **put to death**; their blood will be on their own heads.

(Leviticus chapter 20:13)

Footnote 3

Abraham's intended infanticide (readiness to commit child-abuse because he thought it was ordered by God) is praised in the Holy Bible and in the Holy Qur'an. If a general orders a soldier to commit a crime, the soldier is obliged (by law) to disobey. If he carries out the order, he commits a crime. If God gives an order, then, according to Jewish, Christian and Muslim teaching, a human being must carry out the order, even if it is a crime in terms of secular law. Abraham is therefore praised and celebrated for his readiness to become a child-abuser.

THE STORY CAN BE FOUND IN THE BIBLE (GENESIS 22)

1 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love - Isaac - and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you." 3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." 6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." 13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. (NIV translation)

AND IN THE QUR'AN, SURAH AS-SAAFFAT 37

99 He [Abraham] said, 'I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me. 100 Lord, grant me a righteous son,' 101 so We gave him the good news that he would have a patient son. 102 When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Abraham said, 'My son, I have seen myself sacrificing you in a dream. What do you think?' He said, 'Father, do as you are commanded and, God willing, you will find me steadfast.' 103 When they had both submitted to God, and he had laid his son down on the side of his face, 104 We called out to him, 'Abraham, 105 you have fulfilled the dream.' This is how We reward those who do good -- 106 it was a test to prove [their true characters] -- 107 We ransomed his son with a momentous sacrifice, 108 and We let him be praised by succeeding generations: 109 'Peace be upon Abraham!' 110 This is how We reward those who do good: 111 truly he was one of Our faithful servants. (Surah As-Saaffat 37:99-110. Translation: Abel Haleem: Qur'an: A new translation by M A S Abdel Haleem (Oxford University Press))

**THE SAME PASSAGE AS TRANSLATED BY EDIP YÜKSEL,
SURAH 37:99-110**

He said, "I am going to my Lord; He will guide me." "My Lord, grant me from among the righteous." So We gave him good news of a compassionate child. When he grew enough to work with him, he said, "My son, I am seeing in a dream that I am sacrificing you. What do you think?" He said, "O my father, do what you are commanded to do. You will find me, God willing, patient." So when they both had peacefully surrendered, and he put his forehead down. We called him: "O Abraham," "You have acknowledged the vision." It was such that We rewarded the righteous.* Surely, this was an exacting test. We ransomed him with a great animal sacrifice. We kept his history for those who came later. Peace be upon Abraham. It is thus that We reward the righteous.

COMMENTARY BY EDIP YÜKSEL

037:105-107 Killing a human being without justification is a sin for humans, not for God. God creates, kills and revives without justification. Angels of God are not subject to the test like us; and they carry out God commandments, including taking the lives of children.

In verses 37:101-113, Abraham told his son that he saw in his sleep (manam) that he was sacrificing him. The Quran does not state that God ordered him to do that. He fulfills his dream (not his literal interpretation of it though) by intending and attempting to sacrifice his son. So, God stops him from going further all the way. Though it was not God who ordered him to sacrifice his son, Abraham's perfect submission to his literal interpretation of his vision proved his sincerity. God saved Abraham from completing his misinterpretation of his dream. Abraham was wrong in literally interpreting his dream since the dream was a metaphor, a dramatic metaphor reminding him to make God his only priority by mentally giving up from being preoccupied with his dearest possession. Though his literal understanding was wrong, he demonstrated his perfect submission to God. He fulfilled the real meaning of the dream. God rewarded his intention, not his knowledge of interpretation. (For sleep and dream, see: See 25:47; 8:43; 12:6; 30:23; 39:42; 78:9).

The ethical issue involving this dream has been extensively discussed since Socrates. In Plato's Euthyphro, Socrates asked a profound question, "is it right because God says so, or does God say so because it is right?" Because or therefore? The question assumes that God is different from the concept of goodness, while according to the Quran God is the Truth, the Wise, the Noble, and the Justice. The correct answer might be affirmative for both parts of the question. Sartre pulled our attention to a different epistemological problem with the story. He questioned the authenticity or reliability of the source. How could Abraham be sure that the voice was of divine origin, rather than of the devil? That is a legitimate question. If there is an Omnipotent and Omniscient God, and if that God wishes to communicate His will to humans without any doubt, He should be able to do so. Society will and should judge a person based on the principle of justice. Had Abraham lived today and had he managed to sacrifice his son, according to God's law, as a society we should hold him responsible for the murder. However, we should remember that the ultimate judge is God on the Day of Judgment. See 7:28.

Genesis 21:1-24; 22:1-19 tell the story of the sacrifice. Though the Quran does not give the identity of the child, Muslim scholars, perhaps because of a bias for the ancestor of the Arabs, to that coveted position have assigned Ishmael, Abraham's son from Hagar. The Old Testament, though, spells out Isaac, Abraham's son from Sara, the

ancestor of the Children of Israel. However, the story contains some problems. According to the Bible, when Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son, his only son was Ishmael who was 13, while his second son Isaac was not even born yet (Genesis 16:16; 17:24; 21:5). This information contradicts the anonymous author of the Hebrews 11:17. How can Abraham sacrifice his "only son" Isaac, when the younger Isaac was never Abraham's "only son"? Biblical scholars try to get around this problem by claiming that Ishmael was an illegitimate child. Though Genesis 16:3 specifically considers Hagar to be Abraham's wife, the following verses refer to her as a mistress (Genesis 16:4-9). While Genesis 22:2 does not even consider the older Ishmael to be Abraham's son, New Testament's Galatians 4:22 writes about Abraham's two sons. Regardless of the relationship between Abraham and Hagar, blaming or demeaning a child because of his being born from a slave is an unjust discrimination. Even if the Biblical slander on Abraham's extramarital affair was true, holding an innocent child responsible for the sins of his parents is unjust both according to the Old Testament, Ezekiel 18:20, and the Quran 6:64.

(Source: Yüksel, Edip (et al) (eds) (2007): "Quran: A Reformist Translation". Brainbow Press, London, 521 pp)

Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his beloved son is commemorated every year during the Christian Easter Night service.

His unquestioning obedience (submission to the will of God) is celebrated by Muslims every year at Eid al-Adha.

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