

IMMIGRATION TO ISLAM

JAWDAT SAID

ANSWERS TO:

FOURTEEN QUESTIONS POSED BY:

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Foreword

By: Jawdat Said

Praise be to Allah. Peace be to His servants whom He has favored, and those who command what is fair.

Esteemed Ibrahim Mahmoud,

Peace be to you; and the blessings and grace of Allah.

Here is my attempt to answer your fourteen questions.

Let me assert, at the outset, that to assume or to assert that I am going to answer your questions in full, or nearly in full, would be vain on my part.

At the same time, to assume or to assert that it is not possible for my answers to reveal important things, and to help us move some steps ahead, would be contradicting the law of history and existence.

With this in mind, I welcome your questions, and proceed to answer them, not worried about imperfection: I work by the advice of a certain poet who said: "To do your humble share is better than not trying at all."

And when you speak of a debate between you and me, I wish that, when we debate, it is not with the intention that I bring you to my side, or that you pull me to your side: I hope it is conducted on the understanding that we help each other

issue from the catastrophe that afflicts all of us; it is to seek together to find the way out. It is as they say: Catastrophes have the merit of bringing the sufferers together.

In other words, I may say that our problems are of the kind that we are all agreed about, but it is our duty to work together to reach a higher horizon.

And when I criticize something, I hope I do not do it in the negative attitude of wishing to point out the errors of the other side; but in the positive spirit of arriving at a better solution, in the hope of developing our understanding.

When something is abrogated for good reason, it is to have something better or nearer to truth to replace what exists. We may refer in this to the Verse of the Qur'an: "None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar;" (2:106).

I hope that, in this debate, we help each other to get over the hurdles along the way of the progress of humankind; in a way that we cooperate with the whole world towards realizing what is better and more enduring - not to be an impediment to the progress of the world; for we sometimes seem to tempt the world to heap harm upon our heads.

I do like your idea of the common mistake of assigning ideas to slots: deeming some as sacred and faultless, and some as despicable and foul. The real problem here is in assuming that what we take to be foul and worthless may not be tolerated: this is a mistake, for we should really give the despised ideas the same right as the sacred ones; not trying to eliminate other people's idea: let us give it a breathing space, until it dies its natural death, not turn it into a martyr.

The above approach is based on a particular worldview, as represented in a Verse of the Qur'an: "the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth;" (13:17). It is a law, stated in the Verse, a law that permeates existence from the first creation until today; and it applies in the world of ideas, too. And, with human intervention, the vanishing of froth and the settling of the more beneficial can be accelerated.

I used to say: You may have your say, and I may have my say, and then let people use their minds to have their choice. But it later dawned on me that above the minds of people, there is history: it is history which sifts events, discards what is of no worth. I do not imply that it is I who is of worth, or that your ideas are froth (as in the above Verse, 13:17); it might be me who am the froth, and history will get rid of me, unregretted. I do believe that what is for the good of mankind will remain, though this process may take time. And history has its unmistakable examples: Galileo was exonerated from heresy about four centuries after his being charged of it, and it is froth that disappeared. I do not insist that my writing should stay, for what stays is what is of more good to people - and that is the teleology of existence.

Let me assure you, Dear Ibrahim, that the law of the 'froth and what is for the good of mankind' was of great help to me in getting over many old and modern crises: philosophies like sophistry, nihilism, and absurdism.

In the past, the reference used to be God, but people did not know then that what they believed about God, or Allah, was just one of the constructs that were human production.

God was to people represented in their mental image of Him - which is referred to in Verses of the Qur'an like, "But this thought of yours which you entertained concerning your Lord;" (41:23) and, "while another band was stirred to anxiety by their own feelings, moved by wrong suspicions of Allah - suspicions duet to Ignorance;" (3:154). This God, the mental image of God, died, as they say, at the hand of Nietzsche, or after it was revealed that the Reality was not the mental reality. But even the mental reality has died, for the human mind is not reliable, and so man died. The relative world introduced by Einstein's law shook the reality ... We speak of God, Who has nothing like Him, but what we think of Him is relative, for all our existence is relative. But there is a way out - if we have no way of understanding God and the mystery of existence, and if we despair since we have no way, with our abilities, to get at reality ... Yes, we do have all these restrictions, but we have a way out.

I imagine that there is a law, in existence before the human, and outside the human, in existence before the human was conscious of it, and after the human was conscious of it ... and there is no clash between consciousness and that law: consciousness is in constant interaction and interplay with this law. I imagine that the reason for the cessation of the humans' receiving revelation from God is that it has become possible for the human to learn about the law of existence from existence itself. This is an immense idea, but I do not claim credit for it, but a wise idea must be the believer's quest, from whatever source it might proceed.

What I am discussing here is not so abstruse, not so far-fetched: it is in harmony with revelation, as I understand it, and in harmony with the human consciousness as I see it.

So far, I have given only allusions and glimpses, but let me now say that you have fathomed some of my depths in a way that I did not imagine to see in black and white. I imagine one's revelation of things reflects his/her own ability - I have in mind what Skinner said about the kind of book one can read: not one below his/her level, and not far above his/her level: it is rather a book which handles topics that we just had in embryonic form, but could not express coherently, and that is what we read to acquire.

I mean that Ibrahim has given my thought more than is my due. And that is one thing about one's thought, that when it is represented by another, it either increases in brightness or loses part of its luster. I tell you honestly that when I read Iqbal's idea about the 'seal of prophethood' I felt it must be mine, admitting of course that it came to life at his hands and not at mine. It remains for us to develop it and built on it.

Let me add that what Ibrahim has said about me gave such a boost to my morale. This reminds me of what the Qur'an says about prophets in general: "when the messengers give up hope of their people and come to think that they were treated as liars, there reaches them Our help, and those whom We will are delivered into safety. But never will be warded off Our punishment from those who are in sin;" (12:110). And the Messenger's, peace be upon him, saying: "A prophet may come on the Day of Resurrection with not one follower; some

with only one follower, some with two - and there will be a prophet whose followers are as wide as the horizon."

It cannot be that Ibrahim sees all this in me, unless he himself has touched upon those depths: this is what a poet has said in a couplet: that no one can really get to the depth of your adoration except that who has experienced some similar adoration.

So, let me conclude by saying what Ibrahim is representing is not me, but the intellectual that he dreams of. Let me then work with you in hope that we reach that horizon.

Let me now proceed to the fourteen questions.

- 1 -

Q: *Ustadh* (i.e. Respected Scholar) Jawdat: How would you represent yourself to others?

A. So much a priori stuff goes into this question - in a way that, could I have answered it fully, I would feel that there is no need for replying to any of the other questions.

Let me begin with wondering what it involves when any of us opens his/her mouth to utter some words? What a priori things are there for the utterance to go ahead? And what does uttering something result in? I am not trying to complicate your question, which some may take to be a straightforward one, requiring a straightforward and simple answer. Many would think like that, but what processes and a priori issues

lie behind this question? How can I be of help in getting to some depth there?

It is truly an iceberg, this question, and only the tip is readily available to the cursory look. So, should we try to get to the hidden part? I say yes.

One can of course make do with the surface of things, the crust only. But no, we must not be satisfied with this: we need to dig in for the what lies beyond, and what was before, right to the earliest stage we can reach.

You already know something about me, so should I say: "You know enough"? Let us say you have shown that the tip of the iceberg is already known to you, and I am sure you wish to know something in addition. At least you wish to know how I got to be what I am, and I ask myself if it is possible for me to say something significant there.

Let me start with this curious story which my father used to recount. It is the story of a man who wrote charms which people wore around their necks to deter evil and bring over good luck. Someone came, and asked for a charm which may remove from his heart his fear of predators. The charm-writer did write, but then added: "Look here, brother, I have written what you ask for, but please do not go where predators might be prowling, depending on this charm!"

What drives us to ask? It is in our nature to be curious, but how far should we sustain this inquisitive spirit? To the time nothing was there but hydrogen? to the Big Bang? It is in our nature to know more, and the Qur'an encourages us to know more, as when it says: "Say: 'O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge;" (20:114).

Well, we have something before discussing questions and answers: We need to reflect on knowledge. What is understanding? Is this cosmos open to understanding, or is it all an absurd thing? A man from the Soviet Union, when there was a Soviet Union, visited me, on purpose. And we had a long chat. During our debate, I mentioned my favorite principle: What is froth (i.e. of no value) will disappear, but what is for the good of people will remain in the earth. He asked here: "How do you know that the whole cosmos is not froth?" And I replied: "If it were so, you would not have come to my visit! Why should you take the trouble?"

I may say that the eagerness for acquiring knowledge is a kind of sacred fire, ablaze inside the human. No matter how weak it gets, it may rise vigorously again; I link this to the Verse: "Their intention is to extinguish Allah's Light by blowing with their mouths: but Allah will complete the revelation of His Light, even though the unbelievers may detest it;" (61:8). This burning inside is the capital referred to by those who strive to enter Paradise.

So, again we need to learn something more about uttering words; we need to unveil the significance of uttering words. We have the words of the Almighty in the Qur'an: "this is the very Truth, as much as the fact that you can speak intelligently to each other;" (51:23) We have here a description of truth with reference to uttering words, and this cannot be unless we know utterances in order to know truth. Let me suggest this rule: There is a dialectic relation between sense and utterance, between truth and utterance. The purport of what we say can

be true or false, but utterance is there to bear whatever load we make it bear.

We know in the physical aspect of utterance that it is oscillation in the waves of air, that the ear and the brain receive these waves and give them significance. So, waves have no meaning in themselves, but they are capable of bearing meaning, after decoding the physical message. There is the incident, and there is the utterance, and there are two persons in contact about the incident through utterances; and they must be in accord about the code, which is transferred in waves.

Without the code, the symbol, we have no way of exchanging the sense, the idea; and without the meaning, the code, or symbols, bear nothing. But the symbol is not reliable in bearing the sense; hence the need for referring to the sense, to check how well the symbol represents it. The symbol cannot be a substitute for the sense or meaning, although there is no way of transmitting the sense without a symbol. To make up for the loss in sense through its representation by a symbol, we need to keep referring to the sense, to the incident, to the actual fact, to put meaning right. By keeping in constant touch with the tangible facts, to the events, the meaning is enriched. When things are understood in this way, we get rid of the confusion of text and meaning. I feel it is solved for me, both in relation to this life and in relation to religion. I am aware that much disputation and hubbub are still around concerning text and meaning - and it is so since we base our questions and answers on a priori matters which we know nothing about. Was this not the case when germs caused diseases, and

we knew nothing about their laws (or *sunan* in Qur'anic terms): we saw only the scary diseases when they happened because of the germs.

I have not really ignored the issue in hand - what I am saying here has a direct bearing on it. Nor is it the philosophy of persons in their 'ivory towers': no, it is actually something that every thinking person must comprehend, so that the debate is not that of deaf-mutes.

Let me return to that visitor from the Soviet Union. I said to him: "Ten thousand years ago, the human did not know agriculture, nor the domestication of animals; there was a time when all the living beings were beneath water." He said: "How can you be sure of that?" "Well," I replied, "I don't say I know the details of all that, but there are major events which we may not challenge - for, otherwise, there cannot be a debate between us, and I did have an experience of a meaningless debate." Then I recounted to him how I had been in an Arab country in the mid-fifties, and I had a friend who was a judge. He said to me once, while we sat in an intimate meeting: "Don't you wonder, brother, how those unbelievers say 'the earth orbits the sun'? Don't they see how it is the sun that goes round us?" "Yes, you are right," I said. "They have no understanding." It was not possible to enter into debate with him about that, so we moved on to other topics.

I told this incident to my visitor. I really take the story of the earth and sun, and which orbits which, as an inexhaustible event, and I link it to the Qur'anic Verse: "Then do We make the sun its guide;" (25:45): I know the Verse means 'indication of movement' but it also means 'an indication of the delusion

of sensations'. It is such a vital thing, to notice that: It alerts us to notice that, as people, all people, were in error concerning the reality of this phenomenon, which orbits which, and many were ready to sacrifice their own lives in defense of their view of it, and were ready to send others, in cold blood, to death for it ... and it is an events that people see day after day: if people have been proved wrong concerning something of this size, should anyone of us be sure of his/her ideas and interpretations after that - to a point of saying he/she cannot be mistaken? Is there something more self-evident that the sun, and we were wrong about it?

Therefore, I view the sun not only as the source of this physical light, that it illuminates our life; but I view it as a source of light to our minds: to notice the possibility of being mistaken about the most obvious things. And hence, when we think of the Verse: "Let there be no compulsion in religion;" (2:256) as the basis for not compelling others to accept our interpretations and mental images, there comes in the other Verse, "Then do We make the sun its guide;" (25:45) as the compelling evidence of the principle in the former Verse: I take "Then do We make the sun its guide;" as the primary reminder of the necessity of acting on, "Let there be no compulsion in religion;" (2:256) for, in the same way as one can be wrong in relation to the sun, he/she can be wrong in relation to religion. And, if it is so, there must be no compulsion in sensations or interpretations. One may go on after "Let there be no compulsion in religion;" (2:256) in the same Verse, to "Right guidance stands out clear from misguidance", which is saying that 'right guidance,' is

embodied in 'Let there be no compulsion in religion', that to exercise compulsion in religion is 'misguidance'. We may also understand it in the sense that the freedom of choice is more vital than the correctness of choice - that to hold tightly to this is grasping the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks, as the same Verse goes on to affirm.

I may now return to your question, "How would you introduce yourself to others?" How can I give an answer to this question without unveiling the a priori notions behind the question and answer? If I may be given a death sentence if I say: "It is the earth which goes round the sun;" or if I say: "The relation between a text and its sense is a tangible fact outside it;" then there is no harm in my saying, "It is the sun that rises, and it is the sun that sets: the sun that orbits the earth." But when we take up the issue of our notions versus the actual reality out in the world, we must not keep stuck with the apparent wording of the text. Whatever disputes may arise concerning the texts, our severing of links between the text and the actual reality will usher us into endless bickering. What really brought the dispute about the orbiting of sun and earth to an end was not the texts but the actual reality. Even so, there remains dense darkness concerning the relation of text to sense - in a way that people are likely to have blood shed in the Name of Allah! I say this to shed some light on what happens when we utter something, and to know what occurs when we direct a question. This means that our question must not be given more value than it merits, and, in the same way, when an answer is given, it must not be taken to cover all that is there to say.

I remember when I read Toynbee's *Study of History* that he mentioned an idea, and then added that that idea was based on, if I remember right, about thirty a priori notions.

Well, my brother, here you see us, you and I, meet, yes, to reach the same destination, but on two different roads; I hope it will not be long before you feel it is not a problem that we go together, despite the difference in our backgrounds.

You seem to wish to enter my intellectual world: this cannot happen if you are not driven by your own intellectual world. So, with your intellectual ability, you will keep meeting others, and then you will not feel lonely, even if you walk alone.

I like something that Burhan Ghalioun once wrote in his discussion of the social problem, especially of the conflict of modernity and originality. He compared the situation to a bilingual, so that if such a person meets either of the two trends, he/she can communicate with them, and he/she does not feel any kind of contradiction in his/her character. He showed his skill when he discussed how there are some who manipulate their knowledge of one party to drive them to war; or to have one party be the winner and the other party be the loser. As for those who know nothing of this, they may be precipitated towards a battle without having the chance to avoid it.

Jalal-ul-Din al-Rumi mentions a parable in which four blind paupers were together - one was Persian, one Arab, one Roman, and one a Turk. A good man gave them a dinar, and they decided to buy with it something that they could all divide among themselves. The Arab said, in his tongue: "Let's

buy some *'inab*: (grapes);" the Persian refused and said, in his own tongue: "No, I accept nothing but *rustafil*, (also grapes);" the Turk spoke vehemently, "No, I don't accept that; let's get *uzum* (also meaning grapes); " but the fourth, the Roman, was not less self-assertive, so he said: "By God, I accept nothing but *blankore* (which means grapes, of course)." There was much bickering and wrangling among them, until a man who knew all their tongues happened to pass by. "Well, I have a solution," he said, "I can get for each what he demanded." He went, bought grapes, and came back, put in the hand of each his share of the grapes; and they were all satisfied.

To my mind, one major problem of ours is this: that we do not have someone who knows both languages: that of modernity and that of 'back to our origins'. I know this does not go well with the intellectuals, since it is they who are the first to be charged with not doing their share. And they may be held to be above criticism.

So, when I make the next claim, that I did learn to communicate in the two languages, that when I know no foreign language, it must seem very curious!

It is most painful to notice that we live a life where the branches are not attached to a trunk, and the trunk is without branches: and hence our incessant wars, and that is why we despise each other, since no one is willing to condescend to just understand the other - they each know each other by their darkest side.

Now you see the modernists divide themselves into the modernists and post-modernists and into more stages of modernism.

But the 'back to the origins' feel themselves to be the majestic portion of society; so far, they suspect no threat to their position: that the modernists will simply collapse. The truth is, though, that this camp too, the ancestor-devotees, are moving from 'back to origins' towards 'closer to origins', for they know no better. What happens has been demonstrated by the Afghans, for, after doing enough fighting to feel fatigued, they fell to cut up their land among themselves; the Arabs had done it before, and the Pakistanis!

- 2 -

Q. What is it that made of you the Jawdat Said that appears in your book? Are your intellectual constituents unique to you?

A. I have two ideas, which I arrived at after long experience, and which I attach much importance to. One is: that all humans have equal abilities, equal potentials and the chance to advance; and the other is: that all cultures, too, are capable of advancement, and there is no culture debarred from moving ahead.

I find the above two ideas true if viewed in a sufficiently long-range perspective. When it was destined that I be in the womb, I had millions of companions at the same time with me, but none of them except for me was destined to develop into a human being. One can contemplate this with reference to the law of huge numbers, and the probabilities of success and failure: to follow up the number of impediments and the

probabilities of success, from the beginning of creation until now, the outcome of such research would be incredibly huge.

Yes, so far, the law of huge numbers, or coincidence, has mostly been the determining factor of what happens in people's lives - but it does not have to go on like that, for humans have started to have a real command over their destiny.

Before the human learned the starting of fire, he did not seem very different from the rest of creatures - he/she could do almost nothing to control his/her own destiny. But then the humans learned how to start a fire, then they learned agriculture and domesticating animals: these and many more were steps on the way taking control of a human's own existence.

I may state here my point-of-view with regard to destiny, when people ask: 'Does the human have free choice, or are things deterministic?'

It is beautiful to review how the human learned the starting of fire, which is not so different from learning the control of electricity: they are the same in that they are both steps on the road of man's progress. They are both natural phenomena which the human controlled, and in this way got ahead, and will go further ahead in the future. We must not forget the past, as the Qur'an reminds us: "And he makes comparisons for Us, and forgets his own origin and creation;" (36:78). Progress is progress, as it is all controlled by the same law: it all reminds us that the human is a species different from the rest of creation. But do we notice something here: that, without society, the human is nothing; and, without the

individual, society achieves nothing? The human who discovered how to control the fire was not equipped to discover how to control electricity - the latter required many discoveries and inventions before it could be realized.

The discovery of a law is a singular event, but once it has happened, it becomes law for everybody to refer to and exploit. What happens once can happen again, and what happens by coincidence can happen on purpose: it must be controlled by a law, no matter how mysterious or inaccessible. The discovery of reading and writing is another discovery, like the discovery of starting fire and having control of electricity, though it was the biggest discovery in human life - for it gave man the key to the store of all knowledge, an indelible memory that even death cannot erase: Is this not true of writing?

This is how humans produce culture: rare events happen, and accumulate, and human memory registers events - and then the human discovers the laws through reviewing the events, and once you discover the law, you can reproduce the thing which was found by coincidence.

I would like to go another step, though with some hesitancy: What the Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ, did was like starting a fire - not setting wood on fire, but by starting light in the hearts. We do notice this event, but have not so far discovered its law, or *sunnah* in the Qur'an's terms - and yet, it is law that works here, and the event can be repeated, like any event governed by a law, so it is amenable to repetition.

It is true that what the Prophet did required the right circumstances and the right time, and this is true of the

starting of fire, the discovery of the alphabet and the invention of the computer. But it is a discovery that is governed by a law, and is repeatable, not miraculous or metaphysical - it is we who viewed it as miraculous; and this viewing of it has prevented us from repeating and improving upon its application. Otherwise, why take the Prophet, ﷺ, for an example? What is the use of sending a prophet like him?

Ten thousand years ago, man was naked, and used to eat human flesh. And then, in such a short time, for a few millennia is a short time when dealing with the universe, he/she made civilizations - it is true that the human very often slipped, in the same way as a baby soils its diapers: the ten or twenty millennia in the life of humanity is similar to the first two or three years in the life of an infant. We do not think it is a problem that the baby keeps soiling itself during the first year or two of its life, but it is a problem if he/she goes on soiling himself/herself beyond the age of early childhood. And there is something wrong when we leave somebody illiterate when it is possible to teach him/her.

This reminds me of what I read in the book *Bread and Arms*, that the Arabs have spent a trillion (a thousand billion) dollars on armament in twenty years. And these weapons are really not unlike the charms which people wore round their necks, hanged in cars and at main doors, to dispel evil spirits.

Well, brother, shall I say: "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness," (John, 1:23)? No, I am not crying; I haven't reached the level of crying! I am still shy: shy when I say: "Let go of the empty heroics! Let go of the days of the Arabs and the rhetoric of ardor and euphoria! There is

something new: turn rather to the new horizons of understanding and science!" I wish I had the horn to cry out in it: "Stop war!" But though there has been a deafening noise, when the atomic bomb was detonated, and the world has not awakened in response! Not yet! So, will these words, on some sheets of paper do more? Shall we attach much hope to these words? The Qur'an itself starts a big number of suras with single letters, for letters can reflect spirit, and knowledge is a spirit, and inspiration is a spirit, as the Qur'an says: "We have by Our Command, send inspiration (Arabic: *ruhan*) to you;" (42:52). Therefore, in reply to your question about anything unique about my cultural background, I must say 'Yes' and 'No'.

-3-

Q. A writer's past, especially a thinker's, is a main source of knowing of many aspects of the writer's character. So, what is your relation to your past? How can you define it cognitively?

A. It seems to me very unlikely that I can give a satisfactory answer to this question. Any one of us is the child of his/her culture - very little of one's abilities may be claimed as his own, independently of the culture. In a general way, one's past has left its mark on the individual. With all this general nature of things, little can be said to help an interested person come to terms with the kind of character they wish to unveil. It is true, however, that no one but has his/her own

relation with his/her past and culture that is unlike that of any other individual's. Small things and increments add up over history, and take the shape of general cultural value. When I contemplate my relation with the past, I find that there was a point in time from which there started this curiosity of mine, this trying to get to the root of notions - there was such point, though I cannot say I can define how it started. And then, this curiosity of mine grew and developed. There is this special relation of mine with the past - which induced me, for instance, once I found a certain writer interesting, to read his work again and again, summarizing, and bringing under headings what he/she said concerning specific issues. This tenacity in following up things grew on me as the years passed. My reading of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abdo, and Rashid Rida was a major factor in thinking that a better conception of things can be realized, and the detecting of something new. If this is what your question alludes to, then yes: my relation to the past in this sense shaped my character. I still have this crave to come upon deeper understanding, with the assistance of what other people anywhere in the world have understood - as a means to help me solve the problems of the *ummah* (the Muslim nation) I belong to. It is quite a regret to me that my channels of viewing the world are most limited, far from what they should have been. At the same time, my focusing on the little I have had access to has given my product its special nature.

Q. What is it that induced you to designate your line of thinking as 'The Laws of Changing What Is in the Soul and Society'? Is this a world that one can claim to know, since it encompasses the entire history of man, and at all levels, and from all perspectives? How would you define your intellectual-cognitive position in this world?

A. I may say that it was Iqbal who was first to alert my mind to this issue. I held tight to Iqbal, despite the scarcity of persons who devoted enough effort to absorbing his work. This man had viewed the world and history from a perspective that is much wider than what we were familiar with among our references. It was my return to him again and again that alerted me to the importance of the Signs of the regions of the world and souls. He says: According to the Qur'an, the regions of the world and souls are a source of knowledge: to know truth, you need to refer to the regions of the world and souls. This is a quite momentous thing to say, and Iqbal learnt this from the Verse of the Qur'an: "Soon will We show them Our Signs in the regions of the earth, and in their souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth;" (41:53). He awakens us to a mine of knowledge that is quite huge, and I do not claim to know much about it, nor can it really be exhausted. But it awakened in me such questions as: What regions are before the human to explore in the course of the next century, the next millennium, or even the next million years. Does this not whet the human appetite for satisfying

one's curiosity and to develop his/her knowledge? About this, Iqbal used to say that the cosmos is designed as such a complex thing for the human to practice his/her ability to overcome the hardships. And the prophets' task was really to deal with the problems of the soul and society, and help the human to rise to a better level: I see the molding of the human and society as a human task.

One can cite the Messenger's, peace be upon him, *hadith* (Tradition): "Each newborn child is born upon *fitrah* (in the pure natural state). It is its parents (and those around it) who make of it a Jew, a Magus, or a Christian;"¹ as pertaining to the *sunan*, or laws, of changing the souls, of individuals and communities. When an individual comes out into life, it has no ability but that of the ability of receiving signals; and it is society which gives this unarmed individual all attitudes and values, positive and negative, good and bad. Then, it is history which eliminates the bad and enhances the good - this is the way advance takes place.

And now, how may I define my cognitive-intellectual position in this world?

I recognize two sources of knowledge: the Qur'an, and the history of the world. Obviously, the history of the world has not come to an end; it keeps growing and developing: and it keeps pruning itself, and eliminating error, no matter how slowly. Hence, I am not pessimistic nor desperate nor nihilistic; I am rather full of hope and optimism - though I do often feel sad and ill at ease at the little we humans do to

¹ Reported by al-Bukhari, in the Part on Prophets, Nos. 6:328 and 339; and by Muslim, in the Part on Virtues, No. 2366.

disseminate knowledge. I keep widening my horizon through referring to the Qur'an, and also through referring to the history of the world: The creation of the cosmos did not happen all at one go: it is still in the process of creation, and creation happens before our very eyes! Even what was created in the past has in a large degree come before our eyes, and of course this understanding of what happened must keep expanding. It is also left to humans to condense such information and make it more accessible. To obstruct the spread of knowledge, or to impede its growth is a very grave sin and error of humans - think of that in the light of a Verse of the Qur'an like: "Those who conceal the clear Signs We have sent down, and the Guidance, after We have made it clear for the people in the Book - on them shall be Allah's curse, and the curse of those entitled to curse;" (2:159) and let us remember that the first word revealed to the Prophet, ﷺ, was 'Read'. Not only is the universe in the process of creation, but it is proceeding to a better state. In the same way as we have, "He adds to Creation as He pleases;" (35:1) and "and He created things of which you have no knowledge;" (16:8) we have: "For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth;" (13:17). If we notice that a particular society is stagnant, or in decline, progress is the condition of the world as a whole - any advancement, at any time or anywhere, is for the benefit of the whole of mankind.

So, when you ask me about my cognitive-intellectual position, my reply must be it is a historical position. Anyone

who is ignorant of history cannot have sound or proper knowledge.

Humankind must teach its individual history: what happened, and how it happened. This must happen with every new generation, since there must have been some addition. By getting acquainted with history is, to my mind, being moral, and having respect for the human being: It is striving to cooperate, to forgive others' trespasses, and to take one's fellow humans as progressing towards what is better; it is accepting from people their best, and passing by their shortcoming (Verse), trying to make up for that in the best and kindest manner. You see that my position is quite unlike that of sophistry, or nihilism. As far as I know, the philosophers of the world are stuck with the stage of nihilism: many seem to draw from the physical study of the universe this position of nihilism: they find the world not to have an aim or purpose. If such scholars and philosophers occupy a distinguished place, that does not shake what is settled in my mind: that this world was not created for no purpose. It is the Qur'an which saved me from nihilism, for it says: "Were they created of nothing, or were they themselves the creators?" (52:35) and "Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us for account? Therefore, exalted be Allah, the King, the Reality" (23:115-116).

No, this cosmos is not for nothing, and absurdism kills human effort, and it is a cause of despotism.

Let me admit, however, that I have not done justice to such momentous ideas.

Q. You are known as the herald of non-violence. How can you persuade those who find violence as the primary manifestation of humanity, at its various stages? Does your doctrine condemn violence by way of affirming non-violence?

A. Well, brother, it gives me such a boost of morality, it thrills me in great measure, to be known as the herald of non-violence. And it depresses me a lot to have my call to non-violence suspected of not being genuine. When I wrote my first book *The Way of Adam's Upright Son*, in the mid-sixties of the twentieth century, I included a chapter entitled: "This Book Is for Proclamation not for Persuasion", meaning that I wrote that book to proclaim my position as non-violent. This position is still true of me. It is my endeavor in all my writing and discourse to stress that I am a herald of non-violence.

That many people are persuaded of my upholding non-violence, a sincere advocate of non-violence - this is a major step in itself, a stage that must be realized: it is the basis for any persuasion that I endeavor to attain.

I met some young persons from the Gulf countries, and they urged me to elaborate this idea of mine. "Is it not high time," they said, "that you go beyond the stage of proclamation and work on persuasion?" "Well, yes," I replied. "I hold this as the most valuable crowning of my life. Let me commit myself to devoting all the rest of my life to

consolidating the faith in non-violence, first in my own mind; and then to search for more evidence. I find that my biggest defect is that the repugnance to the call to non-violence that I keep encountering makes me regretful and frustrated - and this may cause my discourse concerning this doctrine to be have an overtone of some flaws in my evidence, when I am confronted everywhere with the flood of violence.

So, it is my hope that my position is firm enough that have it as a settled fact about me in the consideration of those who believe in violence; that I have no hesitation on my part in a way that causes misunderstanding me. To have a firm faith works wonders. This reminds me of a line of Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, in which he said: "A lover speaks with a hundred tongues, even if dumb;" so I hope to speak in a hundred tongues, despite the little evidence I have mastered. My hope is that everybody knows of my faith, that no one tries to doubt my faith. That people have not accepted this doctrine so far does not weaken my faith: for I know enough of history. I can recall how often people refused true ideas, preferring to them the illusions they had inherited and that had a strong grip over their minds, in such a way that they were prepared to send the others, those who believed in different ideas, to death! It is enough to recall Galileo's experience, as everybody is familiar with it, and knows it to be a historical fact.

Your question gives me the impression that you are neutral concerning this doctrine - not having come across enough evidence to accept it, nor wishing to take the other side - you say: they say that; they think that. No harm. I have many friends who had associated with me for a long time, and

who fully accepted the position of non-violence; and then, after mixing with the multitude who adopted the violent way, they were swayed and felt hesitant; and some returned to me seeking more evidence in favor of non-violence. I do not blame them: has not Abraham, peace be upon him, appealed to his Lord to see more evidence, and when God asked him, "Do you not then believe?" he said, "Yes! but to satisfy my own understanding;" (2:260)?

But I have enough evidence to feel confident that you, Ibrahim, though you seem to be inquisitive and neutral, will be won over to the front of non-violence. I not only find this persuasion approaching: I think it is already happening, although you have not declared it yet! I am not urging you to do it out of copying anybody, for you know how to reason and reflect. But the other front, that of violence, is the front of unfounded heroics, and silly exhibition of bravery - it has its uproar and clamor, in a way that many are swayed by it, and take it to be the right policy.

I view the world as divided into two groups: those who try to convince others on the basis of violence, and those who renounce violence as a way of persuasion, and condemn this approach. It is true that, at present, you find many mixed positions, but there will only remain in the end these two divisions.

We have Adam's two sons: One believing in solving problems violently; and the other who refused this way of his brother's: he took his brother's way to be wading in the mud of violence; he had the brightness to understand that it was not the suitable way for humans. God gave him enlightenment

enough to consider and reflect - and he preferred death to taking part in the fatal game; and when he welcomed death rather than accept that way, it was clear to him that nobody but was bound to meet death: So, why not die refusing to commit the crime of violence? Socrates understood that much when he said: "Death is not an error, for no living being but is mortal. It is an error, however, to do an error in fear of what is not an error." This doctrine of non-violence is expressed in a different way, with the change of those who adopt it. As for me, I prefer the word used in the Qur'an, when it reported how Adam's son refused violence, and accepted death in cool blood - when he said: "If you stretch your hand against me, to slay me, it is not for me to stretch my hand against you, to slay you;" (5:28).

I have my reasons for believing that you, Ibrahim, will come to adopt and advocate this doctrine: you called your son *Habil* (Abel), after Adam's son who refused violence. I do not find this name used in our age, so your reviving this name is, as I choose to understand it, out of an intuitive preference for Abel's way. I may also mention your article which was published in the journal *The Arab Future*, concerning the intellectual violence. That article was in fact the occasion for our acquaintance. I find in your question about the way I may reply when it is said that violence has been the primary manifestation of humanity across history - I find in that a reminiscence of when Abraham asked, as the Qur'an reports: "My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead!" He said: "Do you not then believe?" He said: "Yes! but to satisfy my own understanding'";" (2:260). I find in that an acceptance on

your part of the doctrine of non-violence, though you feel the need to have your mind contented with it. It is honoring to me that you address this question to me, though I do not claim to be in the position of giving the final word concerning this serious problem of mankind. It is, however, the biggest challenge I encounter. Indeed, even Sheikh Ahmad Sahnun, Algeria's foremost scholar said, when I visited him, that I should be writing more on the topic of Adam's Son. It is honoring that I was entrusted with that, but for such a serious problem it is not enough that a few persons write on it, when it is not accepted by the majority of common people, scholars, and intellectuals. You know that most people do not accept an idea on account of its correctness, but because it is accepted by a large number, and because those who accept the idea show a high degree of confidence in it. At the same time, let's not be hard on those who require more evidence, but we may add that it is everybody's duty to put in their effort to add to this issue. It is for this reason that I call on you, and on all of those who have some influence in the intellectual sphere, to put in their weight. I address this to every scholar or intellectual and thinker - and I have addressed this to all those who I have had the chance to debate with. Dr. Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Buti was one of those who responded well, when he wrote his book *Jihad in Islam: How to understand it, and how to practice it* (published by Dar al-Fikr, Damascus, 1994). I appeal to all intellectuals in the world, not just in the Arab World and the Muslim World, not to keep idle and silent about this serious issue. I have met with strange reactions when discussing this with scholars and intellectuals

- many of them believed in the correctness of the idea, but they were unable to confront the crowds, the torrential flood that adheres to this terrible ritual of violence.

It boosts my morale when I reflect that I am one of the first to uphold the doctrine of non-violence. Why should I feel diffident or shy to advocate this way? I say, as Abraham, father of many prophets said, as the Qur'an reports: "How should I fear the beings you associate with Allah, when you do not fear to give partners to Allah without any warrant being given to you? Which of us two parties has more right to security? Tell me if you know;" (6:81). However, I will not be able to bring out all the supporting evidence, explicit and implicit, that has put me on this road - for really no one can detect all the causes behind his/her faith. At the same time, I say with assurance that a deep study of human history cannot but lead one to believe in non-violence.

One book I would like to cite is Toynbee's *War and Civilization*, especially his chapter on military virtues, and the adoption of other people's ideas. It is very rich in thought, that chapter, at least to my mind. One needs to read it well, and to prioritize the proofs listed in the chapter. We need to reconsider the halo in which the military leader is seen - in his neat uniform and his brave and solemn features. There was a time when war was such a charming thing, a young pretty coquette; but by now she is just a limping hag, mostly disgusting - not unlike what a pre-Islam poet, Umru'ul-Qays, described it:

In the early stages, the war is still a young girl,
Tempting to every reckless man;

But then, when it throws its weight and is in hot flames,
It moves away, a crone with no husband around;
A hag that no one would wish to be near,
None choosing to smell or kiss.

And let us remember that, even Toynbee wrote the book mentioned above before the new spirit of modernity, and before the hellish bomb was detonated. Yes, war did have its part in life in the past, but no longer: It is by now a machine of death, not more. It never solves problems. In his discussion of war, Toynbee compares it to hunting, which played a vital role in the survival of humans in the past; but, should people have continued to rely on hunting, they would all be starved to death by now, except for a very small number. Schools have not awakened to these facts: our syllabus still teaches the glorification of war, and we need the best and brightest minds to turn to this, in a way that all schools include in their syllabus a review of what part the war played in the past, and the situation now: it must not be a memorization of texts, but a discussion and debate. The hero in the past was the killing party, but the hero is really Adam's son who held back his hand, and preferred to receive death. He did not respond to a stupid challenge with a more stupid challenge. Let us get over this intellectual gibberish which ruins our children's minds. The leader in his neat uniform, as represented by Toynbee, has lost his luster, and so has the elegant statue of a commander. To my eyes, at least, it is a source not of admiration, but of disgust.

I apologize, since it will not be possible to condense here all that I have been developing over the years - I did apologize

like this near the end of my book *Read and Your Lord Is Most Bountiful*, to all those who long for weapons not made of iron, but of the evidence of history, to prove that, to face the weapons of iron and fire, our best weapon is the noblest achievement of mankind: enlightenment. I see *jihad* in Islam as the surgery that is only resorted to when it is the only way to save life. If the surgeon's lancet gets confused with the criminal's dagger, then life will be unbearable.

Therefore, Ibrahim, do not expect me to include here all that I can think of about this question: you do not expect me to give justice to it, when it is one of fourteen questions that you address to me. I can only raise this point, so that people may not say one day: Why hasn't somebody raised it? If I search for one expression to condense this position, the position of Adam's Upright Son, I quote what the Qur'an reports the prophets as saying to their people: "We shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt you may cause us;" (14:12).

You said in your fourth question: 'Do you not think it is hard for you, in what you have been doing, and is still doing, to claim that you know what you are about, for it encompasses all human history, at all levels ...'. Well, no, I do not claim to know world history and the history of the human being. But I wish to say another thing: This universe has been subjected to man, and man's very soul has been subjected to man. The human can shape the environment, which will mold the human in its turn; to change the human condition and raise him/her comes about through changing what is in his/her soul - and to change what is in your soul you look sharp at what

has happened, and how it came to happen. Ten thousand years ago, the human roamed about, knowing nothing about agriculture, a naked being who lived in caves. And, before that, and for over a million years, he looked for a prey to hunt and devour just to survive. That was human history. And then you find him/her discussing ethics and human rights and man's position in existence, and you see them plan for their future. When I review this, I have great confidence and great hope in the human's future. Did not the human relish eating the flesh of the fellow human, and then found it disgusting to eat that flesh? Well, it is the same with killing a fellow human: he/she will come to stop killing humans. Did not the Qur'an set up an aim for the human to feel disgusted at backbiting the same as he/she feels disgusted at eating human flesh? (see the Qur'an, 49:12).

If some find violence as the most prominent manifestation of human effort, I do not find it so. In the Qur'an's story of the creation of the human, when the angels predicted that the human would do mischief and shed blood, the Almighty replied, as the Qur'an reports: "I know what you do not know;" (2:30). I set for my destination to realize that which God alluded to in the above Verse, that which was hidden from the angels; and so it is hidden from the vision of those who believe that violence is the prominent manifestation of human history. Yes, it is a heavy task, but should not drive us to stop trying; it must induce us to work the more. Therefore, I am not desperate, and I find that history supports me. Such hope as I cling to was expressed by Muhammad Iqbal when he imagines Jalal al-Din al-Rumi as saying:

I saw the sheikh roaming about with a lamp in his hand,
Searching, searching, everywhere,

And he said in the meanwhile: 'I feel bored to have none
but animals around me,

So, I wish I find a human. Could I find one?'

'No!' we said, 'We have done our search, and your quest
is impossible!'

'Well,' he said. 'My dream is to find that impossible!'

Like Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, I hope with a needle to shatter
the Mountain of Qaf.

Let's just imagine how many things used to be described
as 'impossible' and then they became 'possible', and then
'commonplace'. It is history which provides us with this wide
scope; and God commands us to examine history and review
it. Socrates challenged violence, Jesus challenged violence,
Muhammad, peace be upon him, with his Companions,
challenged violence. And if Socrates and Jesus did not see the
fruit of their effort, we have a very illuminating example in
Muhammad's, peace be upon him, Companions. So, we are
called upon to revive that effort and strive more.

All philosophers, scholars, poets and wise people - and
every human who has the blood of humanity in their vessels -
must do their utmost in supporting this way, and to rid
humanity of offering human sacrifices. Let us say goodbye to
arms; let us break swords and bows and arrows; let us follow
in the steps of Adam's Son, who our Prophet, ﷺ, ordered us to
take for model. And if we refuse to do that by choice, we shall
have to do it when we are compelled. You see how the big
ones of the world will no longer resort to force, and this is

evident in the world. Nor is violence by now a successful way out of problems among the small ones: it only serves the interests of the arrogant parties. Do you see how stupid and dull the intellectuals are? How incapable of reading the alphabet of the new world?

I cannot explain everything in these papers, nor is my whole life enough for that. But I insist on pushing this issue further, in hope of having it reach an advanced stage. Is not this a sacred task? Is it not a great honor? I am endeavoring to bring contentment to the anxious hearts. I hope to see realized what the following Verse of the Qur'an predicts: "It may be that Allah will grant love and friendship between you and those whom you now hold as enemies. For Allah has power over all things; and Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful;" (60:7).

It is such a rich topic, but it is only neglect which pushes it out of attention. It is as a Verse of the Qur'an puts it: "And how many Signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn their faces away from them! " (12:105) It is my duty to keep putting up signs and posts, and to keep waving my hands, in hope of people's paying attention.

I consider the human who still clings to violence in hope of its getting over problems, I consider him sick. I try my best to reveal to him the various aspect of this serious issue. Once he/she realizes that violence does not solve problems, he/she will be in great comfort and peace, and will be most contented. Is this not worth devoting one's life to? To work for regaining a life of right guidance? A more productive life?

This is what I dedicate my life to, brother, I am a voice in the wilderness, calling on God: Let your Kingdom come; let peace spread. O, God, You are Peace, and peace proceeds from You. let us, God, live by peace. I have chosen to cling to peace, even unilaterally. And I know our grandchildren will enjoy peace. Adam's killer son will have nothing then but self-reproach, loss, and regret. The progeny of this violent son will join their uncle, that who opted for peace: they will choose his way, and not that of their father, for history has brushed aside that way!

Will you teach that to your son Habil (Abel), Ibrahim. Peace be to the ancient Abel and the modern Abel.

-6-

Q. You take Islam very seriously: the Muslim World; the Islamic society; the Islamic congregation; the Islamic thought. How can this be true when there is more than one Muslim society, and more than one Islamic system; and when there are many Muslim races and nations?

A. As in your other questions, you stir a wound, and you recall an old source of pain.

It is pleasing when you say I work for Islam most diligently. From your first question, you wished to understand what it is that induces me to work like this for Islam, and you asked: Who are you? What are you? You are right: my attitude and my effort cannot be what they are without some philosophical perspective, without a definite view of

existence, without a worldview and a conception of the origins and the end.

I can start by asserting that there is a striking resemblance between your first growth and mine.

When I was in my second elementary year, in the early forties of last century, we had in our textbook two versions of the 'prayer of testifying' for the end-of-prayer sitting; they were quite similar, but not identical. I did not dare to ask my teacher or my father why we had two versions, but I asked my mother. She stared long at the two versions, with all the embroidery around them, and then said: "this," indicating one version, "is for followers of the Shafiite madhab (school of Islamic law); and that," indicating the other version, "is for us, followers of the Hanafi madhab." And she concluded the dialogue with some aggrandizing of the latter madhab, being her madhab. That was all about my debate with my mother, but I started to ask myself: If another student, a Shafiite, goes to his mother, and asks her, she will not hesitate to aggrandize the Shafiite madhab. That was only the beginning of my internal debate - for I started to ask myself how people of different denominations, and different faiths, and people without any particular faith decide about what is right and wrong in faiths. I started then, and am still searching, and acquiring knowledge; and inquiring: How does the human know what he/she knows? How can he/she distinguish what is right from what is wrong. It is my world, this ceaseless inquiry; and even if I am occupied with something else, I am sure to return to this and contemplate more. It was a main inducement to drive me to read and think and rethink. I claim

to have reached at last some degree of independence in choosing my way, maybe very little independence. As every infant separates from the body of its mother, can I claim to have been born again intellectually? Independent from the legacy of the fathers? I cannot say this separation is perfect in my case, but I hope I have my share of intellectual independence and independent reflection. Are not such claims what makes you address your questions to me?

In answer to my inquiry about the source of knowledge, I say that the source of knowledge is history. People will say that the source of knowledge is God, which is true - if it is taken to mean that God created the human capable of acquiring knowledge: Yes, God does command us to open our eyes and ears and look well at things. The source of knowledge is history - it is by history that we can distinguish right from wrong; and it is for this reason that God commands us to learn history and draw lessons from it, by examining the ways of old and recent societies. I did what I could to be acquainted with the human culture, and I noticed that people say that knowledge proceeds from Allah, and not from history. They were not observant enough to notice that God refers them to history to know right from wrong. One good thing about history is that it goes its way, not caring for our wishes and mental images. I find that the philosophers of the world have not awakened to this fact, that God tells us to seek knowledge by going to history. When the believers failed to recognize this, the others renounced belief. They say that God died at the hands of Nietzsche, when the latter discovered that people attribute their thought and wishes to God. Then people

glorified the human, raising him/her to the level of a god. But they later discovered that the human was not reliable, that he/she can be wrong in understanding things - and we have evidence enough of that in the blunder about the sun and earth, which orbits which.

They did not awaken to the fact that the source of knowledge is history. I do not claim to be the one who discovered that history is the source, but do claim that I did understand this. I find in this the reply to my inquiry when I asked my mother, and heard her answer. I find that the facts of the world support this revelation, and that God's Scriptures support it. When Jesus was asked, 'How can we know if the prophets are truthful or false?' he answered: 'You will know them by their fruits;' (Mat. 7:16) and their fruits are in history.

The Qur'an states this in the form of a law: that the law of existence is based on: "For the scum disappears like froth cast out, while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth;" (13:17). And when Abraham, peace be upon him, asked his people about the idols and statues that they worshipped, he asked, as the Qur'an reports: "'Do they listen to you when you call on them, or do you good or harm?' They said: 'Nay, but we found our fathers doing thus what we do;'" (26:73-74).

I find this as the way to knowledge. The world's problem now, as discussed in philosophy, is: How do we know that we know? What evidence can we find that what science states is true? The answer is that something is acceptable as long as it is the most beneficial, until something more beneficial comes and repeals it. We find in the Prophet's, peace be upon him,

hadith: "The most favored human by God is the one who does the most good to God's creatures;"². God also says of wine and gambling: "In them is great sin, and some profit, for men; but the sin is greater than the profit;" (2:219). But how do we know, how can we distinguish what is advantageous and what is more advantageous? It is history that will reveal it. I have enough confidence in this, and I have no worries concerning this. Anyone who can find what does more good will succeed. In this way, I was rid of nihilism and absurdism - for nihilism and absurdism are the level which current philosophy is stuck at. There is no absurdity everywhere: there is stumbling that can be put right. When this was clear to me, I rearranged my culture in the light of the Abrahamic principle, who was right guided, when he asked (as quoted above): "Do they do you any good or harm?" I was enlightened in this by both the Signs of the Book and the signs of the real world and the world of human souls: and I felt great peace and tranquility. I felt that this is the way God has guided me to; and it dawned upon me that those who have rejected God cannot put forward a better alternative. My faith in God and His System is based on solid bases - and I feel a great urge to have it within access of all those who are tormented. Does not Jesus say in the Bible: "Come to me, all you who are weary;"? (Mat, 11:28) And the Qur'an describes the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as sent to remove people's heavy burdens and yokes (see the Qur'an, 7:157).

² Reported by al-Tabarani, in his *al-Mu'jam al-Kabir*, 10:105.

After I reached this concept, as learned from the real world, and corroborated by the revealed Islam, I had no more reason to hesitate in clinging to it, and advocating it, and seeking to present it in the best style that is adapted to our own age.

One understands better the facts of life, at the material or intellectual or the spiritual levels, with every new attempt, to which the following Verses of the Qur'an alludes: "Say: 'O my Lord! advance me in knowledge,'" (20:114) and "He adds to Creation as He pleases;" (35:1).

As for your mentioning the multiplicity of Muslim societies, there is no harm in this. I am independent with my family from other families, I am at one with my village and my clan; and though I am independent in my village and my clan, I am at one with my country, my region, and my race. As it is so, why not realize that I am at one with the whole world? The only obstacle before unification is accepting violence. As I understand Islam, it is possible for me to associate with people, in justice and kindness to all people - with only one condition, that they give up violence, and do not resort to violence to impose their convictions. It is strange that we do not learn such principles when our Lord's Book says: "Allah does not forbid you, with regard to those who do not fight you for your Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just;" (60:8).

There is nothing to prevent a unification of the Muslim World but ignorance, and the erroneous concepts we have inherited from our fathers.

And once I reached a solution of our problem, and absorbed it, I felt that I had gotten over the disease that I had had, like every other Muslim. I also feel that it can be disseminated: Do you not notice that when we succeed in treating one person afflicted with malaria upon scientific basis, we can give the good news to all those who have this disease, that healing is now possible. Our task after that would be educational and cultural.

Let me remind you, dear Ibrahim, that what I am advocating is an open-to-all doctrine, which can encompass everybody, except for the advocates of violence; and that about one fourth of mankind now subscribe to this doctrine, and the number is increasing. It is a doctrine with a history, and has its values and its advocates: all this cannot be realized overnight. More than a billion people now believe in this, a faith that links earth to the sky; and heaven accepts the testimony of the earth to support the truth that descends from above. That is why I say it is an open-to-all faith.

When this religion, Islam, was first revealed, it admitted as belonging to it all the efforts of past prophets, whether we know them or not; and then, after it proved its point, it cut off the relation with heaven again, closed that gate, and directed humans to the facts of earth. But as this source of knowledge remains ignored by most people, they are unaware of the process of progress and correction. But it does attract more and more followers everywhere on earth. History has its strange ways: Christianity moved to Rome, at a time when the Roman Empire dominated Jesus's birthplace, and the Romans had great contempt for Jesus's people - but then, Christianity

moved to Rome, the very center of the Empire. The Christians did not try to dismiss the colonizers, but taught them what turned them away from their colonization: they penetrated to their homeland through their minds - unlike anything that the colonizers had adopted. Cannot I, in view of this, say that Islam attacks the colonizers at their own home, an attack that is so different from the attacks of politicians and the military - it does not move according to our wishes and selfish plans, but according to what is good for the future of mankind.

I do not wish, brother, to confine myself to the narrow perspective of the others; I choose to have a wider view and more freedom. I view Islam, the Muslims and the Muslim World, despite their shortcomings, differently from what the others view them. I see the future as coming, to fulfil the Qur'an's prediction, when it says for instance that God's Light is unextinguishable. Indeed, history does endorse this prediction.

Iqbal reports that Goethe said to Akraman, in the course of a debate, referring to the Qur'an: "This system can never be a failure; and no one can think of a principle better than it."

Now, when I assert that there is in the world by now a basis (a more balanced view of civilization) on which we may build, it is now our responsibility to work for awakening the world. It maybe that Muslims, in their hope for a better world and a better civilization, have always rejected the Western civilization with all its technology.

It is not for humanity's good, in fact, that we call everybody to adopt the values of the West: It still works on the principles of the Romans, and the Veto Right. We aspire

to a world in which no one feels he/she is better than any other, or worse, except in so far in so far as they do good deeds. From all this, though my abilities and my readings are quite limited, in a way that I often do not find the words to express myself - despite all that, I feel confident that I can learn more, and can put forward a new open kind of view - a view that must be welcome except for those who subscribe to violence, and wreak havoc in the earth. History will remember these dreams of mine - let it remember me or forget me as an individual, but my dreams and hopes will come true: for God does not waste the reward of those who do their work well and for good purpose.

Do I seem to blow in ashes? It may be ashes, but not without ambers under the ashes: I can see the flame in the distance, as Iqbal saw it for his poetry.

-7-

Q. Is it not closer to truth to try to understand what is now predominant in a spirit of giving it justice as 'foreign' stuff, but transcending it at the same time? Is it not closer to truth to say that what is there in the world is an addition to Islamic values and concepts, without claiming that the it already exists in the Islamic values and concepts, without underestimating these values and concepts? How can we correlate what is historical, and therefore subject to development - and the religious, therefore part of an inalienable law, as it is often affirmed?

A. I sometimes, and maybe it will be clear in the present answer, feel I am speaking while running, as if I pant while I give my answer. When my wife was reviewing the first draft of these answers she said: "One has the impression that, while you write, you are sometimes in high spirits, and sometimes in low spirits. So, what is it really?" That is her impression, but I say that I keep having bright moments and dark moments - I cannot keep up the chain of thought lighted all the time; not all the ideas follow from each other in a logical way. Maybe those who follow my writing have this feeling, or it is a fancy on my part.

This seventh question of yours revolves around trying to understand what is predominant at present, trying to go beyond it, and trying to add more to it, rather than consider what is new already implied in what is predominant. And how you end your question gives a clear form to the problem: How can one correlate what is historical, and therefore subject to development, and what is religious, and therefore part of the inalienable law?

We can take this problem to emanate from a certain worldview - it is really part of existence and being. I am, as a human, a real thing, and I have my real existence, a concrete fact; but, because I have my historical side, which means that I keep changing from moment to moment: I keep developing and consolidating my ideas, adding something and eliminating something, and going beyond some of them. I wish we bring this within the comprehension of our children, when they ask us about things that we do not know - not inspiring to them that we know everything, that knowledge

has been perfected and completed, that there is nothing to add. This is a dangerous hint, but our culture has it. Muhammad Iqbal realized this, and it gave him much pain, this 'all is perfect' approach which we disseminate: the truth is that nothing but is capable of being understood better; everything is amenable to be made again at a higher level.

Muhammad Iqbal is the one who looked into this problem, under the heading: "How creation originated,". How was our Islamic life brought to a state of rigidity? What is this problem? How to correlate what is historical and what is religious, and is therefore a law, not subject to change? I may ask you, in my turn, how has this idea come to your mind? How did it originate? Is there anything that we see or hear not subject to history? It is Allah alone Who is not subject to historical change - all His creation is subject to historical change; even religions are subject to historical change, and God's Messages are historical (I mean they proceed from God, but are not God). History is made by God, and God adds to history and to creation. Prophethood has its history, and it has come to a conclusion, to an end, and it will not come back - we know that there will be no prophet after Muhammad. This fact of historicity is the most prominent change in existence - it is a guarantee that no one may have the right to assume that he/she receives something special from the Lord: It all now has come under light.

The Qur'an itself has appointed history, or events, as a source of learning what is true - in this, there is a transfer of evidence from the world of the unseen to the world of the seen.

This is a basic idea that we may not cease to repeat, in various tones and supported by a diversity of evidence; we must not feel weary of repeating it. The Qur'an not only focuses on the past, as a source of learning lessons and increasing knowledge, and of distinguishing right from wrong. It accepts even future, to refer to future for deciding who is in the wrong and who is in the right: If you do not find so far enough evidence concerning our point of discussion, you will find in the coming days what will prove to you the truth of a certain claim. Does not the Qur'an say: "Do whatever you can: we shall do our part; and you wait! We too shall wait;" (11:121-122). Challenging people with reference to the actual events, even to future events, is a most important way.

When history was affirmed to be the measure of right and wrong; when it was given the power to even eliminate what is false, no matter how long it takes, and leave in the earth what is advantageous to people - once this was laid down, and made clear, there was no more need for prophethood, and prophethood was 'sealed', brought to an end. This is an obvious fact, but the world has not awakened to it, is not yet quite aware of it.

So, I ask again, what is constant and invariable? Creatures are relative; even the material things, which were long held to be constant and immutable, have been seen to be fragmenting beneath our feet, into infinitesimal particles. History does not belong to others or to us; it is the history of humankind - for God commands us to examine history, He does not exclude

the others' history, not the outcome of what the others have done.

You see how the Qur'an sets up 'Ad, Thamud, Pharaoh, as examples to distinguish truth and falsehood - why cannot we set up the Soviet Union, Germany, and Britain, as a source of learning, at a much larger size than the examples used by the Qur'an. The Qur'an tells us, for instance, how the haughtiness of peoples had resulted in their perdition, while the justness and fairness of a people had saved them from such fate, as is shown in the case of Jonah's people, when the Qur'an says: "Except the people of Jonah - when they believed We removed from them the penalty of ignominy;" (10:98). The idea here is that we need to be more realistic, and to be able to go beyond inherited conceptions. This indeed is all that I am striving to achieve, all that I dedicate my life and effort to, admitting at the same time the limitedness of my resources. I am quite keen to bring to the notice of people that, whenever God's law repeals something, it will replace it with something of equal or better quality: this is true of the prophets' messages. And then, the chain of prophethood was brought to an end, once the method of referring to laws was made to replace referring to miracles: and the last Message, that of Muhammad's, ﷺ, was based on laws and not on miracles.

The law, or *sunnah* in the Qur'an's terminology, of history indicates that justice is a cause of a society's well-being, while injustice is a cause for its downfall; this is God's *sunnah*, as the Qur'an tells us: "no change will you find in Allah's *sunnah*; no turning off will you find in Allah's *sunnah*;" (35:43). And when we apply justice, we need to keep

developing it, and applying it in ever better ways, for the potentials of justice keep expanding all the time. And not only justice, there is kindness, and repelling with what is better (Ref. the Qur'an, 41:34), which is the way of having the enemy change into a friend, into a close ally. The door to realizing these values has not closed - it is really open wider than at any time. But if we do not succeed in realizing justice, how can we hope to realize kindness? What happens in the world is that when people have power, they do not side with justice; and as for kindness, all the kindness they wish to do is towards themselves and not others. Let us work to see the powerful adhere to justice, and be kind to the weak, to collaborate with them for establishing a better human life, the kind of life in which kindness keeps growing, in size and quality.

Let me give you an example of the constant and the changeable. We find that God says in the Qur'an that horses, mules, and donkeys are for riding and for adornment, and He adds: "and He has created other things of which you have no knowledge;" (16:8). Now, if you think of 'and He has created', you find that it indicates what is constant and changing at the same time; as a fact, it will remain that God creates that which we cannot perceive before it is before our eyes, but what is created is not the same every time, for people keep producing something more amazing. For people to reach other parts of the universe, they need a speed more than that of light, and people take that to be impossible, but the Qur'an does not say that; it says, "Not without authority shall you be able to pass!" (55:33). And our authority over things and subjecting things

keep developing and progressing from day to day. Civilization will keep progressing, not excluding the Muslim World, for its turn is coming, and soon. But I must say this to the Muslim World: We, the intellectuals, those who are supposed to deal with thought and ideas - we must prepare minds and souls for the approaching part the Muslim World will play, to be a real agent in constructing the future of Islam, and the future of man. The Muslim World was at the head of humanity for about seven centuries, and I do not say it will be again at the head of humanity, but it will definitely have a major role in building the future of the world. It is our duty, we the intellectuals, to remind the Muslims that it must not be our wish to be at the head of the world, but to demonstrate to everybody how we contribute to the development of the world: the Qur'an urges us not to focus on the perdition of enemies, but on our part in constructive work, as in the Verse: "It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you inheritors in the earth: that so He may try you by your deeds;" (7:129) not to forget history, for, in that case, we shall be like those people who are unjust to others, but yet assume that they are doing what is good. We may reflect in that connection on these Verses: "That Home of the Hereafter We shall give to those who do not intend high-handedness or mischief on earth;" (28:83) "Then, is it to be expected of you, if you were put in authority, that you will do mischief in the land, and break your ties of kith and kin? Such are the men who Allah has cursed for He has made them deaf and blinded their sight. Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up by them?" (47:22-24).

Let us not be among those who, when it is they who commit injustice, they act like blind and deaf to what is happening: these are the people who the Qur'an describes as: 'to whom the evil of his conduct is made alluring, so that he looks upon it as good; (35:8).

More may be said about the Verse: "and He has created other things of which you have no knowledge;" (16:8) for in the same way as the principle is constant as referring to the fact of creation, but it is subject to change in connection with application and tangible reality - something similar may be said when God presents the human problem in His debate with the angels; for they charged the human as being inclined to do mischief and shed blood, and God replied: "I know what you do not know;" (2:30). You will notice that, in both cases, that pertaining to transport and that pertaining to the career of the human on earth, God is telling of that which others have no knowledge of, and history gave its testimony that humans are capable of more than just doing mischief and shedding blood. One day, the human did not know enough to hide his private parts, but learned enough to hide them; and one day the human ate the flesh of his fellow human, but learned enough to stop doing that, and had enough insight to bury the dead and not eat them. But man has not learned enough to stop killing humans, but will learn this, too - there will be a time when not only slaying other humans will be disgusting, but backbiting one's fellow human will be disgusting - does not the Qur'an teach us: "nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead

brother? Nay, you would abhor it ... But fear Allah: for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful;"? (49:12).

God teaches us that we can change our condition by changing what we hold inside our souls; that it is for us to understand the law of changing what is in the souls, and, through that, to change our condition.

It causes me much sadness to see that many know nothing about the Qur'an but the notions of common people; but no, it will not drive me to despair. I know that things can be changed, and it thrills me to realize that I am one of those who strive to see change in the way we view things, that I succeeded in reading the Qur'an in other than reference to the fathers. The Qur'an asserts that people will not be forgiven when they set up their masters and big figures as models to follow: that will not free them from responsibility before God (33:67) - Muslims just read this Verse and go on without realizing what revolution it represents in thinking and conception: that people keep submissive before the understanding of their fathers is refused in the Qur'an - and hence, I do not care if most Muslims are incapable of having a futuristic view, a view that is independent of what was inherited. I say that we are still in the intellectual nest of fathers, that we have not come out into the world yet. A human is physically born without his/her will intervening, and that happens naturally; but the human must take care to be born intellectually. I do not say that I have succeeded in being born, but I can see that I may come out into a world other than that of the father's world. It does not make me feel that I am

abandoning God's command when I try to free myself from the viewpoint of other humans, and have my own viewpoint.

Maybe people take such approach to be utopian, idealistic. But I have chosen for myself a conception utterly different from the Muslims' conception of Islam. And I do not ascribe to the Qur'an what is not in the Qur'an. What I say is not what the world says: the world really denounces such ideas, though they are in the Qur'an: they are much greater than what is people say. It happened in the past that people said to Muslims: You just ascribe things to the Qur'an; but, then, some of the notions put forward by the Qur'an were part of everybody's conception: The Signs of the tangible world and the world of human souls testified to the truth of those notions concerning human future. Some other notions are still far in the future. But I assert here that I do not ascribe to the Qur'an what is foreign to it - I may say that I have not done enough to bring within people's comprehension what the Qur'an calls to.

This is what makes some people take me to be unique in my comprehension: I went a step beyond what people understand. For example, the ancient commentators on the Qur'an wrote a few lines on the Verse: "Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls;" (13:11) but I wrote a book on it; and I still feel the need to do much more, so that people understand the Verse's message in relation to man's responsibility for his future.

In a certain conference I met some secularists, and one of them presented me as one who appreciate science. And I said

in my reply: "Yes, it pleases me that you say this about me, but I say: Is it not time, you secularists, that you understand Islam and reflect on it, going beyond the conception of the past!"

Many take the prevalent ideas to be the right ideas, but these have not studied the history of ideas - and this mistake is unfortunately quite common in our midst.

I do not doubt that there are in the Muslim World some young men and women who have the necessary curiosity, who do not take the fathers to have known all there is to know. And this band of young men and women will take up this topic and write on it much better than I write. I write as a believer in the unseen, but they will write from a scientific basis. Iqbal did feel something like that when he said:

I am a voice, and the poet who will voice my notions will be coming soon.

I hope we shall see young men and women, armed with the necessary tenacity, to come forward and take up such issues, never making do with what they find around them.

-8-

Q. What you have put forward concerning your refusal of father-modelling 'Arabic: *aba'iyah*' is a quite bold aspect of your intellectual world. But does it not involve some amount of violence? Is it not itself an obscuring of your ideas?

A. The problem of father-modelling is a human problem. That the Qur'an, and history, denounce '*abay'iyah*' is on the grounds that fathers have their positive and negative sides.

The negative side is when fathers play the role of deactivating the creative function of the progeny, when they settle for what is already the legacy of the fathers, without seeing the possibility of anything better than what the fathers left. They said, as the Qur'an reports: "Never did we hear the like among our fathers of old;" (28:36): and when the Qur'an mentions this feature of societies, it does not mention it as a merit, but as a thing to condemn.

On the other hand, the fathers have their positive side, in a way that, without the fathers, we return to zero - literally to zero, for from them we learnt the alphabet, and they taught us what had happened in history. Not to be acquainted with what is there is a terrible setback in one's life. Therefore, we cannot do without the fathers; we accept the best they did, and then build on that: this is the sound relation. We respect them, defer to them, and forgive them. We should not expect them to be ahead of their time, not far ahead. The problem is when we shut our eyes to any knowledge and science that emerge, we refuse to have our knowledge expand beyond what the predecessors had left. We need to keep bringing this up: to stay with the fathers, and deny the existence of knowledge that they had no access to - that is a freezing of history, and a rejection of any increase in knowledge - but God directs us to pray that He grants us more knowledge.

Do some find any kind of violence in our accepting any good things the fathers had left behind and going beyond their

findings? I don't. I find in it doing good, having mercy for the human, for the fathers, and for the descendants. Let some believe that going beyond what the fathers did an insult to them: I don't. I will go on appreciating what is beneficial, old or new, and refer it to history: for by examining things against history, what is good for humankind will remain, for humans and not for one or a few, and what is more enduring: this will remain - until something of more benefit or is more enduring comes to replace the old. This is a balanced attitude to the fathers: We must not forget or ignore their effort and endurance to give us some rest; and we learn from their errors, so that we have less errors.

We really must have the right relations with the fathers, for worshipping the fathers by the children has been and still is a problem, an obstacle to progress. We need to keep elucidating this issue in a tone and style that suits the occasion and audience.

Will this attitude of mine obscure my thoughts and ideas? It will and it will not! There are some who hold on tenaciously to the fathers, and these will reject my way, but those who have the right attitude to fathers will uphold these ideas and disseminate them, as long as they find in them a sparing of some suffering, and with less effort. Maybe more reject these ideas than those who accept them, and that is the law of existence. If people reject what I say for it lacks sufficient evidence, then it will not come out into light, but if my thought does have enough robustness and evidence, and if people begin to feel that we need something to lead us out of our predicament, then my ideas will spread and take more root

as time passes, so let the ideas do their part, no matter how humble. Let us not think of our limited time when we evaluate ideas: Ideas are not born perfect, nor does society receive them well from the first moment. Let us do more effort, for we believe that the universe is created in such a way that good deeds do not get lost in it, as we learn from a Verse like: "And if there be no more than the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it to account: and enough are We to take account;" (21:47). There will come a time when people review these ideas of mine not to develop their life, but to see how people used to think in the past, and how they worked for reform - the same as we think of the past. I look forward to a better presentation of our ideas at the hands of later generations.

It will thrill me to feel that I have done something to help a later generation to go beyond what we accomplished: this is the hope that induces me to work, despite all the gloom that surrounds us. I may say that my ideas are getting farther than I had expected for them - which teaches me that had I had a firmer and wider knowledge, the advance would have been quicker and would have reached a wider circle; but maybe that will be so when a later generation picks up from the point we reach.

Indeed, anyone who widens his horizon to encompass humankind, not just his own people, will for sure get over the negative side of fathers. Let us remember that the Qur'an commands us to be witnesses of all people, not of our fathers alone. It is such reflection which made al-Jaheth say: "Nothing is more harmful for later generations than to assert that the former generations had left nothing to be added by

later ones." Yes, each one of us has to have a clan to be born in, but he/she will learn to be born again and again at new levels.

-9-

Q. What about your relation with your intellectual twins, Malek Bennabi? You almost identify with him. Do you not find in going that far a negative effect on your intellectual independence?

A. It is thrilling to me to be called an intellectual twins with Malek Bennabi. It is so for I have the impression that it is he who put me on the road to knowledge; it is his thought which enabled me to conceive that there were other conceptions of the Islamic problem. Yes, that is true. I did read his writings with great avidity, and did contemplate and contemplate every word he wrote. But then, his terminology did not conceal the fact that ideas and meanings have their history, and keep developing all the time; and that the purport of words keep being reproduced; and in the same way as ideas get born, they lose their strength.

That I studied Malek in depth helped me get over his being an obstacle to going further in working at the problem of the Muslim World. This is true, but I admit that no one had a more essential part in developing my intellectual character - this is so because he had something new in viewing the Islamic problem. If as you say I studied him so thoroughly that I identified with him, well, that helped me really be

myself. I am happy to feel that I have been able to fathom the new things he contributed, he and Iqbal.

It is adequate for proof that I did not stop at Bennabi that I have dedicated myself so thoroughly to tackling the problem of violence to the last possible extent; at least I brought out the problem of violence to be visible to all - you yourself said: "It is known that you are the advocate of non-violence." This is not said of Malek, although I must admit that Malek Bennabi did say something that had a decisive effect on my going in that direction. He said of Muslims (in his book *The Problem of Culture*): "They are afflicted with the disease of resorting to force; and have not yet realized that today's power is in knowledge." I do not say it was only his words which made me what I am, but he did have the effect of alerting my mind to this.

It is fair to declare what good others did to us, nor do I feel that has a negative effect on my intellectual independence. On the contrary, I feel it gives me the incentive to continue what he started, and to develop it. You may look at that term, which is at the center of Bennabi's philosophy "Proneness to being colonized." I adopted this term, but it opened my eyes to the purport of a Verse of the Qur'an like: "Say: 'It is from yourselves;'" (3:165) that when we ascribe to others our failings, we are trying thereby to exonerate ourselves, and denying to have committed a mistake. When Adam would not ascribe his sin to the Devil, though the latter was really seducing and enticing, he, Adam, together with his wife, proved their qualification to be vicegerents on earth. A worldview like this emanates from the Qur'an, the Qur'anic

perspective of the existence: it reverses concepts, it compels one to reconsider things, and to correct his attitude. It is the idea of 'repentance' in the Qur'an, which is the right sense of what we call 'criticism' at this our time - to probe well, to investigate and dig for the concealed sources of problems, which we usually pass by, in disregard of them.

Yes, I do urge people to read Malek and probe his ideas, and my purpose is that such reading would enable one to move on to a new level of enlightenment; and also to see where there are gaps that need to be covered up.

Does Bennabi have a part in composing my intellectual set up? I do not deny it: to believe in something or somebody does often hamper your ability to see other possibilities and probabilities. I hope the rising generation remembers that: They do us a kindness, and they show their appreciation of our efforts, when they prove they are capable of getting over our mistakes, and appreciating what is correct in our thought: they must succeed in going further than we went. Have I clarified my relation to Malek? I hope so. I affirm that Malek represents a bright link in connecting me to global thought. God has bestowed on man this ability to realize dreams and abilities, all destined to realize his potential.

But it happens that the individual does not go ahead except through absorbing the accumulated efforts of those before him/her. It is a mistake to imagine that you can start from zero; and it is a mistake to turn our backs to the harvest and labor of the fathers. By saving ourselves the fatigue of repeating what the fathers have already accomplished, we save time and effort, and we have the energy to contribute

some more creative work. It is a mistake, in our eagerness to be distinguished, to underestimate the efforts of past generations, or to brag that we learned nothing from them. It was a bright metaphor when somebody imagined that a dwarf sits on the shoulders of the giant, and therefore sees what the giant cannot see.

It is our duty towards Malek Bennabi, and it shows our appreciation of him, to bring his ideas within access of others. He devoted his life to developing his ideas, and it is acting on the Qur'anic injunction that we cooperate in doing good and piety to support Malek and develop his thought. I don't feel that I have done enough in showing my loyalty to him, but I feel proud to be mentioned with him, for I need to keep learning what he taught, and this does not exempt me from my duty in developing what I receive from him: it is really an indication of my loyalty, to myself and to him.

-10-

Q. You often stress the uniqueness of Islam; for example, in your discourse on '*hijab*' and the Islamic clothing, you take that to be a symbol, a necessary symbol that indicates the uniqueness of this community. Are you not exaggerating the importance of garments? Here is the Indian, for instance, whose clothing distinguishes him/her, but the individual is nonetheless far from being independent, intellectually speaking.

A. Yes, I do stress Islam's uniqueness: it is an aspect of its uniqueness that it heralded the sealing of prophethood, which indicates that prophethood is a temporary stage, a state that is designed to come to an end; in this Islam is proclaiming the transfer of the world from referring to miracles to the stage of laws. We learn this from Muhammad Iqbal, and it is a token of loyalty to him to revive such ideas. It is not completely new, but new in a sense: No Muslim doubts that Muhammad is the last prophet, that no prophet may appear after him. But Iqbal did say something unprecedented, and did achieve a momentous illumination when he perceived the dimensions of such fact, nor was anybody able to declare what he declared; and Iqbal does believe in both the prophets God mentioned to us, and those He did not. That is a major revelation.

Not to notice Islam's uniqueness and its distinctive features is not an indication of enlightenment, but the absence of it. You see how this Muslim World, after having lost both knowledge and action, and is at the rear of nations, still feels that it has a message for the world.

But back to your point, it is true: this example of mine about Islamic clothing, especially the Muslim woman's, being a mark of distinction; and it is true that the Indian, and the Chinese, have lost their identity. I do think that the Muslim woman is indicating, through her clothing, her identity, the return of her identity; she is responding to the cultural challenge, and declaring her defying the wager, and refusing to be defeated in her identity.

At the same time, I do not say that we, Muslims, have uttered the last word, for we have not uttered the first word even. But let me say something about the Western leadership.

It is true that the West has left a strong impression on the world in the splendor of its glitter, the same as Qarun did, as narrated in the Qur'an. But we have our part to play: to have a superior ideal, and to present a better contribution to civilization. It is an untenable mistake to assume that the Muslim World has been penetrated, and will be submitting - the more we understand the present civilized world, the more we penetrate to its truth, we shall be more ourselves, independent of others, and the more we have to contribute, as humans, to the modern world.

If the Qur'an narrates the story of Pharaoh, and uses him as the symbol of high-handedness and arrogance, the Muslim soul has not lost the sense that, as the Qur'an puts it, "Pharaoh elated himself in the land and broke up its people;" (28:4); and if giving less than is due in measure when selling others invokes the curse of the Qur'an (See, 83:1-3), so what may we say about those who refuse to admit any measure, any balance? Is it not an absolute negation of civilization?

Iqbal used to say, addressing the West: "Your civilization has a glitter, but its glitter does not dazzle my eyes, for I applied to my eyes the Medina kohl; your civilization will bring ruin on itself, for it has built its nest on a weak bough; nor does your fire scorch me, for I cling to Abraham's faith." It is the poet who is expressing himself here, so let the future decide how truly he spoke.

But I found my confidence on the Verse, "Their intention is to extinguish Allah's Light by blowing with their mouths, but Allah will complete the revelation of His Light, even though the unbelievers may detest it;" (61:8). I do have my own reading of the world's events, and do have my own understanding of the human soul and the human identity: It is not a question of *hijab* or clothing, but it is that human beings keep looking forward to a better world.

I imagine the Muslim woman saying: If the neck-tie is the symbol of Western penetration, why should not Muslims have their symbol of challenge. So, it is more than just the *hijab*: It is what the following Verse of the Qur'an asserts: "O you Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. but the raiment of righteousness - that is best. Such are among the Signs of Allah, that they may receive admonition!" (7:26).

The dress of piety takes various manifestations, but it is definitely not the present Western manifestation. It is piety which must be our distinctive characteristic: if the others have more piety, then they are better; and if it is we, then we are better - but what may not be disputed is that the world needs more piety: and any group, any group at all, which prove to have more of this, they are unique and superior. And the essence of piety appears in justice and kindness.

-11-

Q. Your perspective on the will is monotheistic, in that you link it to the 'communal collective', which reflects

your comprehensive attitude to Islam. Is there no contradiction there, in a way that it results in fragmentation within Islam itself?

A. The first part of your question is hard to grasp without referring to its latter part. It seems to mean how can a unification of Muslims be realized, when there is contradiction in life itself, which leads to fragmentation? The system of existence is based on diversity; and the human body, despite the diversity and differences of the functions of its organs, realizes the principle of 'all for all', in perfect harmony and cohesion. Parts work in contradiction of other parts when the diversity is of a cancerous nature.

My understanding of Islam leads me to believe that the diversity and differences of opinions realize their richness and productivity; and I attach this conception to the Verse: "they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom your Lord has bestowed His Mercy: and for this He created them;" (11:118-119).

Diversity and difference are a mercy; they lead to progress. In our example above, the body needs the different functions, and this serves the needs of the body - it is cancerous difference, however, when a certain part of the body tries to impose its way of functioning on the other parts. If violence stops, and no one resorts to violence, and no one tries to resort to violence to compel others to accept his/her views, then we have peace.

We read in the Qur'an: "and do not say to any one who offers you a salutation: 'You are not a believer;'" (4:94) and

we have: "if they withdraw from you but do not fight you, and instead send you guarantees of peace, then Allah has opened no way for you to war against them;" (4:90).

What we have here are rulings of extreme importance, but they are ignored and rejected and forgotten; and I take it to be my duty to revive them.

The system introduced by God for the organization of society is amazing; incapable of ever failing, the same as the system of electricity. In the same way that we need to deal with electricity according to its conditions, we need to deal with God's system for society according to its system, and it will be indispensable. But if there is a mistaken approach to dealing with the system, all kinds of mischief and maybe explosion take place. This is how I understand the Islamic system, the same as I understand the system of electricity. If people fail to deal with it according to the laws of electricity, those laws will not be changed to suit people's desires - and they may well kill and burn those who contradict them. If, on the other hand, we know how to deal with electricity according to its laws, its services are unlimited, nor can we do without it.

It is like an obsession with me, that I try and try to bring this concept within people's comprehension, and shed more light on it - despite all the discouraging reaction of most people. I take violence to be the 'short circuit' of Islamic work: to deal with ideas in violent ways has the effect of a short circuit in electricity. It is not right, for it bring on us ruin and devastation. To resort to violence is to resort to the tyrannical ruler, who assume the position of a god. This is why the

expression of *tawhid*, i.e. Oneness of God, is explained in the Qur'an with the Verse: "Whoever rejects the false and tyrannical god (in Arabic: *altaghoot*) and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks;" (2:256).

Altaghoot is violence, compulsion; belief in God is the safeguard against compulsion and violence. Can you get to the bottom of this? I hope you can. The Peace Treaty of *al-Hudaybiyah* in Islam is an admission of 'Let there be no compulsion in religion': Let us put an end to fighting, and let any individuals or groups choose to be allies of either side. If I can make this serious problem quite clear, I will feel that my life is very rich, that it is a life of good work. And let us have no doubt that it will come to be fully understood and accepted by people: this principle will take root, and it is the kind of religion that people will uphold - a religion in which each lives respected and respecting, on equal footing, on one condition: that he/she rejects the resort to violence for spreading ideas.

And, mind, I am not saying the condition is that one enters Islam: to live in peace with Muslims one does not have to be Muslim - it is only to reject violence and enter the circle of peace. This is the kind of Islam I am advocating, Islam in a wide sense, in which people live in coherence, in all their faiths and denominations, even those with no faith: if one accepts the principle of peace, and if he/she accepts that ideas may not be conveyed or disseminated through violence or compulsion, then he/she will have come under the common terms between the two sides, as the Qur'an puts it (3:64), will

have rejected *altaghoot* and believed in the faith of peace: God is Peace, as is asserted in an authentic Tradition, commonly used by worshippers: "O God: You are Peace; peace proceeds from You; and ends up with You."

We may contemplate the Verse, "O you who believe! Enter into Peace (Islam) whole heartedly" (2:208): It is diversity, cooperation, and common life: that is what we advocate. As for those who believe in imposing ideas by force, they are all of one type - notwithstanding the differences of their faiths - some might be Muslim, as long as they believe in dictating religion by compulsion. I see this as an abandoning of Islamic principles, and having doubts in Islamic values - and see it as failing to enter the world of: "Enter into Peace (Islam) whole heartedly" (2:208); it is rather entering the world of compulsion, believing in *altaghoot*, a glorification of tyranny. It is believing that religion will not spread except through resort to force, and a rejection of the idea that religion may not be disseminated except through force - this belief in force has led to believing in *altaghoot*: submitting to the him, and failing to reject him; it is failing to have pride in God. I sometimes feel I have nearly succeeded in expounding this issue, but then feel that no, it is still far from clarified - and yet I have full faith in it as far as I am concerned, though I may not succeed in putting forward all the evidence needed to establish this. I never feel desperate, for time will have its part in bringing this doctrine to prevail. It will come to be realized in the future, as may be learned from the Verse:

"It is He Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the pagans may detest it;" (61:9). It is the doctrine of truth, which will outshine in the future all other doctrines, and everywhere in the world. Let us be prepared to receive this faith, for its indications are already visible.

Let me urge you, Ibrahim, and urge every bright young man and young woman, to think this over in earnest, to think and research on your own, not picking what is being said here and there.

Let us also reflect on the Verse, "I do admonish you on one point: that you do stand up before Allah - it may be in pairs, or it may be singly - and reflect within yourselves: your Companion is not possessed;" (34:46). Muhammad was not mad when he forbade his Companions to repel aggression with aggression, forbidding self-defense, when Muslims were being tormented for their thought. And none of the prophets was mad, when they all said, as we are told in the Qur'an: "We shall certainly bear with patience all the hurt that you may cause us;" (14:12).

We need to exert ourselves in comprehending the religious system, the human system, the communal system, and the political system propounded by Islam: It forbade the setting up of the system of rule through force - it is prohibited, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. The ruling system may be established through invitation and persuasion alone. This is clear in the Messenger's, peace be upon him, *hadith* (Tradition of the Prophet): No force may be employed in installing the ruling system. But Muslim ignored this, and

forgot it, forgot all the Prophet's exhortations concerning this. You may wonder how it happened that Muslims just passed by the *hadiths*, the many *hadiths*, said by the Messenger, ﷺ, concerning this - the words are there, but they are vitiated of meaning: I do not recall in all my review of the Islamic legacy to have seen a research, by any Muslim legal scholar, that a Muslim, in compliance with the Messenger's direction, must break his sword, hit his sword against a rock and blunt it, break his arrows and cut the string of his bow, to enter and stay at his home, having gotten rid of his weapons; that should the others enter his home, intent on killing him, the Messenger clearly commanded the Muslim to behave like Adam's Upright Son, to throw his garment over his face, so that he is not dazzled by the glitter of the sword.³

We have authentic *hadiths*, according to the rules set by the professionals on hadith: and yet, I do not recall to have seen any Muslim to have taken them up, and inferred what should be inferred from the Messenger's, ﷺ, Traditions. Why is it so? Did not the Messenger say in his 'Farewell Pilgrimage': "Do not revert after me to disbelief, by cutting off each other's heads;"⁴ and when he, peace be upon him said: "Should two Muslims meet, each raising his sword, then both the killer and the killed will be hurled in Hell;" "But, Messenger of God," someone said, "We understand that the killer is to be in Hell; what about the killed?" "It is," he

³ See for this Tradition Abu Dawud, the Part on Turmoil and Armed Conflict, Nos. 4256; and al-Tirmithi, the Part on Turmoil, No. 2194. The latter rated the Tradition as 'fairly authentic'.

⁴ Reported by al-Bukhari, in the Part on Turmoil, No. 13:25; Muslim, in the Part on Faith, No. 66; and by al-Tirmithi, in the Part on Turmoil, No. 2194.

replied, "because he was intent on killing the other fellow."⁵ I do understand the above *hadiths*, in their literal sense and their cultural sense; through my faith in Islam and the Last Day, and Hell; and through my understanding of the Signs of the world and the world of souls and human life. Yes, the signs of the world do count, for if the Fire of the Last Day scorches, the fire of human suffering in this world scorches, too: we live in a fire of this world. Let those who do not believe in the torture on the Day of Resurrection think of the torture in this world - this must be an incentive to all people.

All Muslims, really, live in gloom, and look on things in dismay, but in complete perplexity: they have no idea what is behind our condition! But I do not look at things like this - there are really discoverable causes, causes that can be probed and brought out. And it is not a miracle that we discover what is behind the Muslim dilemma: it is natural causes that are amenable to scientific investigation, that may be found out and treated. I know for sure that our ailment is similar to the physical epidemics that used to come, reap a large number of people, and then disappear, without any human intervention. People had nothing to do but show patience. Then germs were discovered, and things changed. And Muslims are now attacked by intellectual germs, and they reap us. It may well be that the one who infects you, who comes and kisses you, and with all love and good intention, might cause death to the dear one: and he/she might weep bitterly for the loss. I have

⁵ Reported by al-Bukhari, in the Part on Faith, No. 1:81; by Muslim, in the Part on Turmoil, No. 2888; by Abu Dawud, in the Part on Turmoil, No. 4268; and al-Nasa'ee, on the Part on Prohibiting the Shedding of Blood, No. 7:125.

understood this, and will keep bringing it to people's notice, and will urge them to disseminate it. I understand this from the world of worldly evidence, but also from the revealed text: the two sources work together. This is my uniqueness, if there is uniqueness. I do not deny that one comes across minor contradictions, and that only enriches the mind. But I do denounce the major pitfall: that believing in violence solves problems. I will keep, all the rest of my life, thinking, debating, and calling: O you who believe in the revealed Book, and you who do not believe in it, and you who believe in no book at all: come on! Let us come to common terms, as amongst you and us: that we do not worship the *taghoot*!

I reflect on Verses like: "We have assuredly sent amongst every people a messenger, with the Command: 'Serve Allah, and eschew the *taghoot*,'" (16:36); and "Moses said: 'O my Lord! expand me my breast, ease my task for me; and remove the impediment from my speech, so they may understand what I say,'" (20:25-28) - We have not realized this so far, but it is not so far off, when things are revealed and clarified. I can see that you, Ibrahim, keep looking around you and seek guidance, to find better solutions, and God will not waste your efforts.

Have I replied? Perhaps not. The idea is that what we are discussing here is not a Muslim problem, but a human problem. Do you notice, Ibrahim, that the people who waged the two world wars, sit together now, and come to an understanding, without war: they solve their problems in peace, without anyone losing anything: not losing money, or land, or position, or life: a win-win situation! Is it an error

when I call on Muslims to solve their problems in peace? And it has happened, actually happened, and before our eyes. Is it not our duty to open our eyes and see this? It is history, and we are obligated to understand. Why be bitten twice from the same hole, when the Messenger, peace be upon him, says: "A believer may not be bitten twice from the same hole;"⁶. How many wars should we enter before we hold our hands back, and refuse to take part in this?

How many Afghan-like war must we wage before we stop these tragedies and stop participating in these follies?

What I am discussing here is indicated by what we see and what we hear, by the revealed legacy and the human wisdom. These facts are realized by humans, by those who believe in the facts of this world, and those who believe in the Hereafter. How can I have doubts? I have no doubts. The Qur'an also teaches me that those who fail to understand with the present evidence, let them wait for the future - for what is refused at present may not be refused in the future!

The Qur'an makes this clear, but the signs of the tangible world support this, too.

-12-

Q. It is a pleasure to review your assertions that your enlightening project has its roots in Islam, and you are right there. But do you not agree that Islam is, more than its texts, what actually exists in the world, through

⁶ Reported by al-Bukhari, in the Part on Good Conduct, Nos. 10:439 and 440; by Muslim, in the Part on Ascetism, No. 2998; and by Abu Dawud, in the Part on Good Conduct, No. 4862.

Muslims' manifestations of it, the Muslims in all their conflicts? The truth of Islam is, before anything else, what is reflected in Muslims' conduct.

A. I'll try to clarify this point, or this dilemma.

Yes, it is a pleasure to tackle this topic. You allude to the idea that Islam and Muslims come to the same thing in actual terms.

There is a difference between Islam and the Muslims. More generally, there is a difference between existence and people's conception of existence. This was realized by some Muslim scholars, and I can see this for myself, that to seek to understand relying on utterances (or texts) leads to one's loss - it is like wishing to go west when one is moving to the east. The right approach is to have a clear conception of senses first of all, and then to give designations to the facts one has understood: this is the way of good guidance.

It may help to mention here what some Muslim scholars called the 'levels or orders of existence'. An object, like the sun or moon, has its existence in the world, independently of our awareness of it; this existence is reflected in a second level, the existence of the object in the mind: this second level of existence, existence in the mind, is the same for all people in a way, but not the same in another way. Here we have the first level of existence, a physical existence, and when it is received in a biological sense, it is still equal. The rays of the sun are a physical fact, a fact independent of the observers; and the cells which receive these rays are possessed by all people - something similar to what happens in a camera and,

in so far as the camera is accurate, the rays are picked by all cameras.

This idea of 'to seek to learn a sense from utterances leads one to loss' was put forward by a great scholar, Abu Hamed al-Ghazali; and it is he who also discussed the 'levels of existence' in his book *al-Mustasfa*. He distinguished, in the course of his discussion of the 'levels of existence', between the existence of something in itself, like the existence of lightning, thunder, the moon, and the sun: an existence external to our senses; and its existence as an image in the mind; then, he mentions a third order of existence: existence as a term uttered by us: an illiterate may utter the terms 'lightning', 'thunder', 'sun', and 'moon': this is then a third existence. But there is a fourth level of existence, when you write 'lightning' or any of the above words on paper.

All the three levels, the second, third and fourth, may be close or far in their application to the first level. Besides, there may be an existence of things in the mind before their existence in the physical world: to God, the Creator and Originator of things, they existed prior to their physical existence. As for God Himself, we Muslims believe, that nothing is like Him. According to al-Ghazali, the first and second levels of existence are the same for all humans. But this is not accurate: it would have been true if people's minds were like cameras, registering the same image. But the human minds are not the same: We know that Ptolemy's view of the sun and that of Copernicus were not the same: yest they were the same from a biological and physical perspective, but not the mental one.

Am I discussing the self-evident? It is not so, for when I expounded this, the four levels of existence, in my book *Read*, I went beyond all four levels of existence, and asserted that they do not represent truth, that the human mind is unreliable, that it understands something not according to its physical and biological existence, but according to the mind's psychological background, as inherited from fathers. Here lies the difference, not in physics or biology: it is in conception. Hence my assertion that the human mind is unreliable, that we need something else to make sure of things.

The Almighty teaches us in the Qur'an: "If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth;" (49:6). I rather view the human mind as we must treat the 'wicked person', as the above Verse directs us - and, for proof, I keep referring to the story of the sun and earth, and which goes around the other, according to people: how long were people unanimously agreed that it was the sun which went around the earth - as a foregone truth, and then it was revealed that it is the earth which orbited the sun.

I find that alluded to in the Qur'an's mentioning the sun as an indication - though the direct meaning of "Then We make the sun its guide;" (25:45) pertains to the shadow and movement, but it is indirectly a reminder that, though people had no doubt it was the sun which went around the earth, and for such a long time, it was a mistake that we bore in the mind, but the fact was there, in the world. Therefore, we have in another Verse: "If the truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heavens and the earth, and beings therein

would have been in confusion;" (23:71) a reminder that if our impressions were the basis for the workings of the universe, the latter would have been ruined.

Let me stress that, in my citing of Verses, I do not find my proof in them: proof is in the world, the tangible reality of things in the world - as al-Ghazali warned us not to seek meanings on the basis of terms and utterances. The texts must have their meanings with reference to the facts of the universe; and this is the way which al-Ghazali says will lead to right-guidance.

The Qur'an itself refers us to the tangible facts of the world, and accepts the facts of the world as a witness for the truthfulness of its text.

As you see, the facts of the world have priority: therefore, God commands us to refer to history, to events, to the sun and moon - not to texts.

And He commands us to review the outcome (Arabic: *'awaqeb*) of behavior, and the outcome, the consequences, are not the texts - texts are the fourth level of existence, and hence you find that God Himself accepts to have His text be examined against tangible facts and outcome. *'Al'awaqeb'* is a Qur'anic word; and the events are not a reference unless we go to their consequences: consequences can be good or bad.

When we review the 'levels of existence' we find each level less accessible than the one before it - and hence we must accept the tangible fact as the reference. The Qur'an, the text, refers us to the tangible facts: look at the actual realities to ascertain the truthfulness of what I say; and you see what status hearing and vision are accorded in the Qur'an; and

hearing and vision represent, respectively: what you learn from others, and what you discover on your own. Let me add here that I view the mind differently from the common conception of it - the mind is not a tool, not a scale, not a reference, that measures things - which I elaborated in my book *Read*. I view it as a function, and I know that this does not accord with the majority view - which is all right. I take the reference to be the outcome, and dealing with the real facts, and from the facts we go to the outcome of dealing with facts: I uphold the principle I learn from the Qur'an that 'what is better and more enduring, among consequences, is what will remain, what will stay on earth.

I know that I am just putting the topic forward, without elaborating or giving it justice. When you say that Islam is what Muslims have done, I do not agree. There is the mental image of Islam, and there is what Muslims actually did, and neither is the reality of Islam. Islam is not what we utter about it: it is a tangible fact, like the sun and the moon; and people hold in their minds something else: they cannot have the tangible facts of the world in their minds, but have only an image of them. When the mind thinks of fire, it cannot have fire in it, for if it had fire, it would burn. In the same way, texts are not the real facts that are in the world - and in case any dispute takes place, then the reference is *'awaqeb*, and what is better and more enduring. It should be added here that *'awaqeb* and what is better and more enduring are not static or unchanging; for God adds to creation, in a way that what is 'better and more enduring' is in a dynamic state: what we have now of what is better and more enduring remains the better

until something 'better and more enduring' better than what we have comes to replace the older level of what is better and more enduring: the better abrogates and replaces what is older, as may be gleaned from a Verse of the Qur'an like: "None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar;" (2:106).

Imagine someone taking down his/her observations at a lab. In this situation three factors control the mental image, i.e. one is what observations are being taken, i.e. any changes in the data; second: the human element, i.e. how exact the observer is; and third, the medium through which he/she conveys his/her observations to others. We have no way of transmitting what is in our mind to another except through a visual or acoustic medium; i.e. one uses utterance if he presents data vocally; or uses light if he presents them in written form.

In the same way, we may think of the events of the world, the whole universe: there is what happens in the world, and the human mind, the receptor. And then we need channels that transmit what a certain mind has known to other minds; i.e. we need the vocal-aural medium, or the visual medium. Now, I may say: there is no way of denying that the reference for understanding something is the thing itself; there is no escaping the fact that the thing is more expressive of itself than the text used by humans to describe the that thing. No matter how many books people may write about the sun, the atom, or the social history - the sun, the atom, and the social history themselves are more expressive of their truth than all

the linguistic representations of them, nor can ever be representations that surpass the tangible facts themselves.

And when we speak of 'God's Words', the facts of the world, the created things, are God's true Words: the revealed Scriptures alone are not the truth: that is why God orders us, in His Scriptures, to refer to His True Words, to understand better and realize better. Hence the injunction that we refer to the actual, tangible, reality.

The created universe is objective, and man has taken no part in that; man is subjective, directed by the human mental images.

When God revealed His Books, He used human material, not when He created the universe; and we find that the Qur'an refers to that: "We did not send a messenger except to teach in the language of his own people;" (14:4). In revealing the Book, God used human material. These things are evident, but are obscure at the same time, and people keep skeptic and doubtful about such topics; but let us keep examining all the aspects and nuances, so that no doubt remains, and no more moot disputation. We have the essential fact, that it is God's law that what is good for people will stay, and what is froth, worthless, vanishes - no matter how tightly some will hold on to it.

By having outcome as the reference, and what is better and more enduring as reference, is the means of not only giving the verdict concerning the present, but also the future. As I see it, Islam sets both the observation of facts and referring to the Book as the reference.

When you speak of Islam as being synonymous with what Muslims do, why do not you include what they will be doing in the future? Yes, Islam is not just texts: it is actual events, and the events happened in the past, and will keep happening in the future; and the Islamic texts did challenge the opponents to wait for the future, for the events of the future will keep revealing the facts and the evidence.

I hope I have shed light on my enlightening project, which is not what the Muslim hears from others; nor do I suffer from any contradiction: I feel there is harmony between my mind and my intellectual system. Let others accept or reject this system, and this thinking. And neither my holding to this nor others' rejection are the reference: if what I uphold and convey is of benefit to people, I feel content that it will stay and take root; and if what I uphold is worthless, is froth, as the Qur'an puts it, then let it go, and let people be ecstatic when it vanishes, and let stay only what is profitable.

It must be added that, in relation with this and many issues, we are compelled to wait and see; for we live a transitional period, from the static to the dynamic. What used to be connected with the stable and fixed is really connected to what is dynamic, to new creation; and this is what the Qur'an alludes to in Verses like: "He adds to creation as He pleases;" (35:1) and "And He creates things of which you have no knowledge;" (16:8).

I find it splendid to contrast the two attitudes: one who views the world as a static and unchanging thing, and the one who views the world as dynamic, a cosmos in which more is being created, more in objects, in understanding, and in

subjugation. Think of a still picture and a moving picture, for the latter has the first in addition to more creation: movement is a creation. Iqbal was alert to this, for he said the only unchanging thing in life is the fact of change. Concepts change: look at the sun, glowing above your head, and you realize that our understanding of the sun has been changing, and will keep changing. I am trying to bring this issue within everybody's access, but I cannot put on it the final touches, for it is an ongoing issue, and there is no end to it. What we can realize is to put forward what is more profitable than what already exists, and the best of us is he who adds what is more profitable, and supports what is true but needs support. Are we, you and I, doing our share there? I hope so.

-13-

Q. One finds, in your attitude to Islam, and in your efforts, an attempt that is more a reinterpretation than an interpretation of Islam. This is what one may glean in a general way from your books. Is this the reason why there is this attempt to black out your thought, in more than one sense?

A. I feel that nothing but one, or maybe two, features about my thought cause all this attempt at suppressing what I say: my unusual approach to violence, and may be my attitude to sanctifying the fathers. How far I am interpreting or reinterpreting Islam will be a subjective evaluation, that varies from person to person.

In the Qur'an, we have the word '*ta'wil*', or revealing the hidden meaning' in two senses: it can mean the final sense of something in light of later events, and giving to a term or statement a meaning that can be different from the predominant one. In the story of Yusuf in the Qur'an, Yusuf says to his father "this is the fulfilment (Arabic: *ta'wil*) of my vision of old;" (12:100) meaning that the final sense of his own dream is now being revealed, in the whole family's coming over to Egypt and prostrating themselves before him. Does not this happen to us? Our understanding of the cosmos is undergoing drastic change, and this is a reinterpretation of our previous image of the world: things are being transformed because of new facts being revealed. What our senses perceive, in terms of sound and light, is really an interpretation, which is clearer in light than in sound. Take the colors, for instance. There is nothing like a color red or green, not exactly as our eyes sense and perceive: there are different frequencies of waves, different wavelengths, and then our mind transforms that, interprets that, as colors: a particular frequency of waves is interpreted as green, and that different frequency as red, and so on. This is a reinterpretation and a transformation, giving a symbol to what is presented to us: and it is our physiology which does this transformation, and our range of vision is not the same as that of animals. We may add that some people do not have this ability to distinguish colors; they are color blind. The idea here is that, without reinterpretation and transformation, we understand nothing. Something similar applies to hearing: we need interpretation to recognize the calls of animals. One more step is needed to

understand what a reader is reading: and here we have another level of interpretation. To sum up, humans can understand nothing without interpretation.

Yes, some young people did object to my ideas on the basis that they were an interpretation or reinterpretation. And in my reply, I said: "Yes, that is true. But nothing happens in our life without interpretation: you do it, and I do it. But interpretation is true when it gives better results: like the differences in our languages, and we do not object to somebody's having a different language." But violence as a problem is not a problem of language, for it has its existence outside language: you do not refer to language, a particular language or any language to approve of violence or reject it. Violence must be approved or rejected with reference to what is profitable or harmful: when it may be of advantage, and what are the conditions for it to be profitable and acceptable? This is the crux of the disputes: According to me, and from my understanding of Islam and what happens in the world, for violence to be justified, it must realize very exact and precise conditions.

Let us take the Prophet's, peace be upon him, refusal to resort to violence in Mecca, even in replying to aggression. I understand this like this: There is nothing in Islam as establishing the ruling system through violence - never ever: not at the beginning, nor in the middle, nor at the end; not in the past, nor at present, nor in the future. To establish a ruling system is, according to Islam, to be attained through persuasion and calling people: once people accept you, without any resorting to violence, then you are legitimately

entitled to be ruler. If most Muslims disagree with me, this does not change my position: I consider any attempt or call to establishing rule through violence a violation of Islamic rulings. And this violation of the Islamic rulings did happen, from the day the Muslims lost the Rashid Caliphate, and from then until now they cannot imagine how it is possible to regain a Rashid rule - and therefore, they let something foreign to Islam enter Islam. There is a unanimous and tacit acceptance of the violent approach: it is an interpretation - but the problem is not linguistic: it is conceptual, a problem of believing in violence as a way to establishing rule: taking this to be allowed in Islam. This is a basic problem, and I see it to be at the root of many problems that stem from it - for example, I understand that it is the cause why democracy cannot find acceptance in the Muslim World; that many countries which do not uphold Islam find it easier to accept democracy than the Muslim nations. So, this may explain why this pressure to obscure my thought.

The other reason I suggested is the sanctification of fathers: holding them to be infallible, which blocks any novel way to seeing things.

I hope to be able to help Muslims to get over the above two obstacles.

In your observation about some trying to block out my ideas, you seem to regret that my thought might be easier to be accepted by persons who are not considered practicing Muslims; and that some may consider my ideas a tool in the hand of those who wish to block the spread of Islam. Well, there will be all sorts of attitudes to my ideas, but let me get

along: I want this thought to take roots, and to prove that these ideas are there, no matter how fiercely resisted. It is something this realization on your part that there is this attempt to keep my thought in the dark: at least it is thrilling to realize that people may not say after this that the idea of this approach is not heard of.

Can I hope that you will be among those who may help in bringing these ideas out into light? To bring them to the notice of people, so that they are no longer neglected and ignored? I thank you for your time when you sat and reflected on my thought, and I now hope that you will have a part in publicizing it. In fact, this kind of thought is associated with negative preconceptions, but when a new voice takes it up and presents it from a different angle, this will rid these ideas of their negative associations. There is no doubt that a fresh illumination will give these ideas a better chance.

This reminds me of something Malek Bennabi said about entering the battle of ideas in the Muslim World: When someone enters this arena, he/she is like one entering unarmed - as if he/she enters as an opponent of Islam, or is in the lines of Islam's enemies. This is particularly true of those who try to put some concepts right, or to change some of what people hold on to, assuming it to be right: What is in our souls is so dear to us that it is a most challenging experience to make any changes to that. But it is a noble and pleasing effort, so I thank you and all those who stir these discussions, for every such step brings us closer to the solution.

Q. If you look critically at yourself, after this long intellectual walk of yours, how would you define your relation to these overlapping spheres, the 'regions of the world' and 'people's souls'? How far have you gone, through an interaction of these two terms, in realizing change, on the personal and subjective level?

A.

**My endeavor concerning the relation between
'the regions of the earth' and 'people's souls'**

You stir such a rich and deep topic: a topic of crucial impact on human progression. Not only Muslims, but people in general have shown vast differences in their conceptions of this and that. I may say that it was Iqbal who was first to alert me to the importance of this when he said: "God has made of the 'the regions of the earth' and 'people's souls' a source of learning truth."

He was referring to the Verse of the Qur'an: "Soon will We show them Our Signs in the regions of the world and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth;" (41:53).

I devoted a whole chapter in my book *Read* to this Verse, and treated it as a Qur'anic embryo that needs to be born into the world, then to grow into adulthood. I stressed the need for this Verse to be the reference, or rather to see the rule propounded in the Verse, i.e. the 'awaqeb, or consequences,

of dealing with the Signs of the 'world' and of 'souls', as the source of discerning truth. As for the relation between the Signs of the 'world' and 'souls', it is delicate and rather mysterious. We may say that the 'regions of the world' were first to be created, and the 'souls' came later on the scene. But, though all the souls, all human life, had a unitary source, "created you from a single soul, created, of like nature, his mate;" (4:1) souls are the essence of creation, the objective of creation, as the Qur'an points out: "subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: behold, in that are signs indeed for those who reflect;" (45:13).

It may be said that the relation between the 'world' and the 'souls' is the relation of subjugation, in the sense that the cosmos is there to provide the human with its services free of charge. Yes, the souls are part of the universe, but God made of them a different being, so Glory be to God, the Best to create.

It is right to go on to say that transferring the ascertaining of truth, and the demonstrating of truth, and discovering the truth, to the regions of the world and the world of souls, was behind the Qur'an's announcing the 'sealing' of prophethood', i.e. putting an end to the method of receiving truth from God, via the prophets. The last Prophet, Muhammad, ﷺ, was the prophet who taught the Verse: "Soon will We show them Our Signs in the regions of the world and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth;" (41:53): this is the truth which was taught by the 'seal' of prophets: that to know truth, we need to refer to the Signs of the world and of souls.

It is such a momentous topic, and it keeps opening up more horizons; God will enable those who endeavor to discern more possibilities and signs; and every stage of discovery will bring in more to wonder at.

Let me urge all those who have the potential to expand our acquaintance with the world and souls - and they will be in touch with the source of knowledge. Not only that, it is the knowledge described in the Qur'an as the 'Truth' in existence. The Holy Qur'an keeps exhorting us to look hard at this existence, for it will lead us to the Originator of existence. Iqbal is again relevant here, when he says: "It is an objective of the Qur'an's to point out what this cosmos is an indication of."

This universe is a Sign of what is behind it. In the same way as we have the letters which combine together to be symbols of meaning, the universe is a sign and symbol of what is behind it. I know that philosophers say: 'Nothing is beyond the universe,' but our deepest being refuses that. The Qur'an alerts us to that, this human yearning to what is beyond: "When you Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, saying: 'Am I not your Lord?' - they said: 'Yes! We do testify!'" (7:172): As you see, no one may say we did not know of that, for it is impressed in our deepest being.

This world is not created as a plaything, nor is it for nothing, nor for no purpose. There are those who have their illusions, and think themselves bright, though they believe in absurdist conceptions - which is the result of some old

misbehavior of certain people, who sought to enslave others and predominate people. Some try to turn to account our inborn belief in the Supreme Cause, the Supreme Significance of creation, and try to have all that act for their own pleasure. But no, for God will not allow but that His Light should be perfected.

When we wish to understand the Verses of the Qur'an, we need to refer to the signs of the world and souls. And as for the relation between the world and souls, it is the relation between the subjective and the objective: the soul is subjective, and is therefore prone to fall into mistakes, but the objective, the universe, does not act in compliance with the soul when it is in the wrong, nor its desires and wishes. And this is crucial, for it is in this way that the soul knows there is something to correct its behaviors and attitudes against. The *'awaqeb*, the outcome and consequences of some behavior do not happen according to the wishes of the soul. At the same time, it is possible for the soul to put itself under investigation, and reveal the truth about itself. Yes, it can be an elusive part of investigation, and one can have difficulty studying his own mind and soul objectively. But there is always the progress of the world, ready to put us right. It has not let us down so far, and will not let us down in the future. And as for those who cling to absurdism and sophistry, they will be froth, and of no value, as the Verse teaches us - and let history and the future be our judge there. As for us, we have no reason to be afraid, for the Originator of this universe, and the universe's system, will never be in the wrong.

It is good that we, humans, have been created with this ability to get over our slips and errors: Adam did the right thing, and showed his superiority to Satan, *Iblis*, when Adam confessed his mistake, while *Iblis* denied his own mistake!

I know it will not be possible to do justice to this topic, but I can only give some hints and glimpses.

The soul, being subjective, has no way of stating what is true, what is objectively true. It can only decide after examining the outcome of behavior. The outcome and consequences of behavior are what reveal the truth and bring disputes to an end. Once consequences are revealed, you see how people bend their heads in submission, for they cannot do otherwise. This fact will be realized by both believers and non-believers.

When you think that I went far in identifying with Malek Bennabi, this is not exact. Yes, I did give him much attention, but so did I give great attention to Iqbal, and some may say I identify with Iqbal. I wish Muslims give enough attention to Malek Bennabi and Iqbal, and such scholars, for this will bring us nearer to identifying the signs of the world and souls.

It is the human who invented writing, using a visual sign to represent a vocal symbol which holds meaning; and he was endowed with the hearing, vision, and the mind, to use both forms of perception, which is what a Verse of the Qur'an indicates: "And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge; for every act of hearing, or of seeing, or of understanding will be enquired into;" (17:3): this tripartite system is the equipment of the soul: It is through this system

that the human was enabled to be God's vicegerent: a divine deputy as Iqbal puts it in his collection: *al-Asrar wal-Rumuz*.

Well, how can I put into a few paragraphs all the ideas, the aspirations, the emotions, and the dreams - I certainly cannot condense all that. I leave it to those who have endeavored and labored to come to terms with the signs of the world and souls to appreciate what I have gone through: my attempt in self-analysis, trying to get to the way of guidance; and I keep detecting new things that stir my aspirations and my emotions, but I increase in faith and certainty. It is the way of detecting truth, along the way of truth, marching towards truth (as a certain Sufi put it); it is an endeavor to be a tool in the hands of God. On the other hand, I feel bashful when I recall how little we can understand about ourselves, our souls. Iqbal devoted an entire collection of poetry to revealing *al-Asrar wal-Rumuz* (i.e. the Secrets of the Self, and the Symbols of Effacing the Self.) And when Iqbal complained to God about the condition of Muslims, the Lord replied (as Iqbal imagined): "Why not show in yourself God's Ability?"

We have been deceived, brother, and imposed upon, when they brought us up as captives, as poor followers - in a way that we did not realize *tawhid*: we need to establish our faith in the One God by referring to the one spirit, to our own soul, not the souls of others, for, as a Verse of the Qur'an puts it: "No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another;" (17:15). Can we understand? Can we learn the alphabet of the signs of the regions of the world and the world of souls? It is through a review of this book, the tangible book of the world and the world of souls that we arrive at truth.

To my mind, we are like people in deep sleep - we may wake for some moments, but go back to sleep. Things are being said, but we are not aware of that: It will go on like this until we realize what happened and how it happened: an intellectual birth. We have gone through our physical birth, the physical puberty, and the physical adulthood - but shall we reach the stage of intellectual birth? Intellectual maturity? This is what I have devoted my life to - despite my humble ability, and the little means I have at my disposal; and despite the lame expression I can use.

It refreshes my heart, however, to find that someone has awakened to my voice, that someone has inquired: what has this man got to say? What I am endeavoring to do is to see my way, with something like antennae, between the Verses of the Book, and the signs of the world and the world of souls: I keep reviving my understanding of the Revealed Book, by referring to the tangible reference: the signs of the world and the world of souls. Can I specify how far I have gone in realizing the interaction between this and that? Can I describe how far my soul has matured in heeding to this and that?

One thing I may assert is that any interaction I have endeavored to realize is not between the signs of the world and the world of souls; it is definitely and solely between the Signs of the Book, on the one hand, and the signs of the world and the souls on the other. I think I do not have the right to say I have achieved something: I may only say that I did enter this abandoned domain and done some work - maybe those who enter this same domain to do some work will find the traces of someone who had been here and did some work!

I can say I have achieved something of real value when I see you, Ibrahim, address your questions - unless you do it in a mocking tone. If you are in earnest when you say:

"It is worth our while to read the work of this man - me - who has had to undergo much duress, and has not seen his ideas appreciated ... but he keeps toiling and striving to see his ideas grow and mature ... He is a unique human specimen: for he has the distinction to be in harmony with himself, demonstrating his ideas to the international human being ... fully open to the other, the adamant foe of violence, advocate of right that applies to all without distinction ... on the basis of an Islamic attitude that you may never come across something similar to - though his ideas are quite simple and sound, and his purposes are absolutely in earnest."

It is an achievement to read this which you write about me; and when you add: "To advocate, on the level of individual striving, to prize individual differences, the similarity-in-diversity, drawn from the social components; adding modern elements to what our ancestors had left behind, since they were human beings like us: nothing of what they said or did but is the product of their age.

"For one to renounce the glorification of fathers, and all kinds of personal and social guardianships: this is also another gate to genuine and original thought.

For the same thinker to assert that he is prone to be in the wrong at any time, and it is crucial to put right his mistakes; that he is likely to be inadequate as a thinker, and so it is crucial for others to work diligently for improving upon what he did ... All of this is amazing and intriguing."

So, when you ask me what it is that I count as an achievement, it is sufficient to assert my ecstasy that I have been an incentive for you to say what I have quoted. As you are much younger, I hope this will be a chance for you to go some steps beyond what I have done, to enhance what is right, and remove some of the dimness. Let us, you and I, be good followers of the Prophet Abraham.

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5/5/1994 CE

Jawdat Said