

Being a Muslim in Global Times: *Taqlid*, *Jihad* and *Hijra* in the Quranic Hermeneutic

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When a person is asked to imagine a particular instance connecting faith with clothing, which of the followings would first come to mind: a Jewish man with a *kippah* on the head; a Hindu man with a turban and long beard; or a Muslim woman with a Hijab? Would we picture a Muslim and a non-Muslim in the same way? What would a Muslim who lives in a non-Islamic community look like? Or a Christian living in a Buddhist community? Or a person of faith in a faithless community? Given our current social and political context, the question of religious identity arises with increasing urgency. One of the reasons for this urgency has been spurred by the recent crisis of Muslim refugees and the difference that they inject in our societies. This difference finds itself exacerbated by the very nature of the Islamic faith and its emphasis on *Ummah*, or community. The question of the Many and the One moves into a social context. Can Muslims retain their specificity while at the same time becoming more integrated? Is the Western value of individualism irreconcilable with the Islamic idea of *Ummah*? Do certain Islamic values, such as *Jihad*, present a threat to Westerners?

This study aims to address these vital concerns by examining the different approaches according to the Quran, especially what the main Islamic resource, the holy Quran, says about the question of religious identity. My aim here is to reach both Westerners and those Muslims who have made their home in the West. To the first group, I intend to sketch out a concise idea of the Quranic worldview in order to provide a clearer understanding of some of Muslim terminology which have been misused. To the second group, I hope to refresh their faith and knowledge of the Quran. I will explain and analyze three fundamental and relevant concepts: *Taqlid*, *Jihad* and *Hijra* as to hopefully illuminate some of the issues mentioned above.

Taqlid and Jihad

The examination of the historical background of a given section of the Quran began quite early in the development of Islam and was recorded in earlier Islamic texts under the name of *Asbab al-Nuzul*, which means the reasons and circumstances for the revelation. This perspective paves

the path for a modern hermeneutic, though it remains rather under-developed throughout Islamic history. The foundational practice for this hermeneutic consists in dividing the Quran into two sections: the verses revealed in Mecca (610-622) and the verses revealed in Medina (622-632). The Meccan verses illustrate the fundamental concepts of Islam such as the Oneness of God (Tawhid), Judgment Day and the missionary calling of the prophets, the Medinan verses touch on the detailed forms of the religious practices including acts of worships and acts of intersessions.

The three terms mentioned above – Taqlid, Jihad and Hijra – originally appeared in the Meccan verses (although they are also mentioned in the Medinan sections of the Quran). These three terms are dynamic and interrelated; it has important implications for our times to understand their characteristics. In other words, these concepts, to be properly understood, must be heard together. We see that Taqlid and Jihad are situated on opposite ends of the spectrum of Islamic theology, yet they are kept in balance by Hijra which is a much moderate concept. To understand the concept of Jihad without a reference to the concept of Taqlid means to have a limited and distorted understanding of what Jihad really entails. This is why, in my view, that this concept resonates in a strange and nonspiritual voice in our times. Moreover, to ignore Taqlid also has the effect of reductively associating Hijra with Jihad, which lays the foundation for a radical and fanatical interpretation of the Quran as an excommunication ideology.¹ A deeper analysis of the meaning of these concepts is needed. Let us first turn to the issue of Jihad and Taqlid.

As said above Jihad and Taqlid are found on the two opposite ends of the spectrum of Islamic theology; the former is associated with struggle and effort, while the latter with lack of struggle and laziness. Taqlid is often associated with not taking responsibility and failing to rise to the challenges at hand. I will discuss Taqlid in more detail in what follows. What I want to mention are a couple of points about Jihad – etymological and exegetical. The first noteworthy etymological point is that the etymology of Jihad by itself has nothing to do with war. There are two close but distinct words in Arabic, which refer to war: *Harb* (from Arabic root H-R-B) and *Qatl* (from Arabic root Q-T-L) which appear in different forms of speech. Several times both words are used in the Quran and their most common uses have to do with aggressive fighting.² The most common application of H-R-B is for war, warfare and combat and the Q-T-L is for assassination, killing and murdering. Both *Harb* and *Qatl* originally refer to battle and fight, the etymology of *Jihad* is completely different. J-H-D,

¹ Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, “The Guise of the Sunni-Shiite of Use of Excommunication (Takfir) in the Middle East,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University and Pakistan American Foundation, 2015), vol. XXXVIII, no. 4, 1-22.

² The Quran, 5:33; 2:190-193 and 217; 4: 75-76 and 89; 8:39; 9:14 and 29 and 36; 49:9.

the word's root, means effort, exertion, struggle and facing a challenge. This semantic meaning reflects most uses of Jihad in the Islamic civilization. Muslims typically utilize the term Jihad in three distinct but interrelated contexts: intellectual, personal and socio-political.

From the intellectual perspective, the concept of Jihad is used to describe the task of the Mujtahid – the individual who deduces Islamic law from Sharia's resources with valid methodology. The high level of exertion and difficult challenge of relating the scholar's modern-day reality to the ancient resources of Shariah is a clear cause to attribute J-H-D to this hermeneutical process. The outcome of this scholarly work appears mostly in the format of issuing new legal perspectives called Fatwa. Here, Mujtahid is synonymous with Mufti, a more familiar title in English literature. The second use of Jihad has to do with the personal effort of the faith to keep his/her independence of character and of agency against the social pressures or trends in his/her socio-cultural environment. To keep one's faith alive and effective inside a faithless, often alienating community needs much effort and struggle. This was the case for earlier Muslims in the time of Muhammad and the revelation of the Quran as I will discuss more below. This form of Jihad, is known as the Great Jihad (Jihad-e Kabir) and the Major Jihad (Jihad-e Akbar) in Islam. The Major Jihad would later be further developed with existential features by Sufis. Most Muslim ethicists use the term "Jihad al-Nafs" (fighting ego) referring to self-examination and self-reform.³

It is only in the third context – socio-political – that Jihad is related to war and battle against an enemy. Originally this happened through the use of military force, but in modern politicized Islam Jihad took on such new features as militia warfare and mobilization. Physical fighting in a military context, however, always remained subject to a number of restrictions and regulations bound to various perspectives in the philosophy of jurisprudence. Fighting against an enemy constitutes merely one-third of the Islamic uses of Jihad and even then, this concept remains restricted by the many regulations in Sharia law. What these different uses of Jihad reveal is a profoundly dynamic concept specifically organized around the notions of struggle and of effort. More significantly, this very implication possesses its roots in the Quran.

³ Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, "Reflection on Nostra Aetate," *Nostra Aetate: Celebrating 50 Years of the Catholic Church's Dialogue with Jews and Muslims*, eds. Pim Valkensberg and Anthony Cirelli (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2016), 147-148; Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, "How Muslims and Christians Can Practice *Wilayat* (Support) Toward Each Other? A Response to Nostra Aetate," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University and Pakistan American Foundation, 2018), vol. 42, no. 1, 41.

The history of interpretation of the Quran teaches us that the first verses on Jihad belong to the time of Mecca, when Muslims were a minority, lacked personal agency as well as the freedom to form communities of faith and experienced severe discrimination, oppression and boycott.⁴ In this context, the Quran suggested the new faithful to maintain their faith and agency in the face of mounting social pressures and oppression. There is a clear emphasis on individual choice, responsibility and ethical values. For example, in chapter 29 (called Ankabut) we find the following injunction: “if they strive hard (Jahado)” for the sake of God, God will guide them to “His Paths” an encouragement to remain steadfast in faith and not give up because of social pressures and discrimination. This encouragement to “strive hard” (Jahado) is sometimes called the Great Jihad (Jihad-e Akbar) which commands the faithful, including the Prophet Muhammad, to not follow unexamined wishes as their ultimate goal,⁵ but to apply their reason when making decisions for this is what distinguishes man from the animals,⁶ to examine God’s signs in the world⁷ and to not submit to the unfaithful, but rather “strive against them with the great jihad.”⁸ In these Meccan verses the concept of Jihad is thus explicitly associated with an intellectual endeavor and effort and is not yet understood as a physical battle.

Having said that, the concept of Jihad would later evolve into its more aggressive form as a physical challenge and battle in the Medinan parts of the Quran where the faithful dwelling in Medina are permitted to defend themselves when under attack as a war target. It is in these Medinan verses that the Quran is first seen as promoting a defensive and military form of Jihad.⁹ Still this permission to engage in defensive fighting is clearly justified inasmuch as, in the Medinan context, Muslims were often the object of oppression and discrimination and were often expelled from their towns and villages by wars. There are very secular and reasonable factors to justify the use of defensive force. It is worth-mentioning that this very first Quranic revelation on physical Jihad uses the terminology of Q-T-L (Yuqatalun) rather than jihad. Another verse which justifies the physical Jihad uses again the term Q-T-L, as a defensive mechanism to protect free conscience.¹⁰ Many later Quranic verses also apply Jihad in this context. The current term Mujahid refers to this use (mujahid means

⁴ Muhammad Said al-Ashmawy, *Islam and Political Order* (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 69-70.

⁵ 25:43.

⁶ 25:44.

⁷ 25:45-50.

⁸ 25:52.

⁹ 22: 38-40.

¹⁰ 2:217 and 4:75.

who does practice jihad). All of these verses about the use of force, however, remain subject to the principles of justice and fairness. For instance, “Fight in the path of God those who fight against you, but do not aggress. God does not love the aggressors.”¹¹

O faithful, be steadfast for the cause of God and just in bearing witness. Let not a group’s hostility to you cause you to deviate from justice. Be just, for it is closer to piety. Have fear of God; God is Well Aware of what you do.¹²

A more comprehensive understanding of Jihad can be attained if we approach it in the light of Taqlid. While Jihad implies exertion, high effort and struggle in order to preserve one’s authenticity and integrity, Taqlid is associated with the act of imitation, mimicking or copying. The Arabic root of the word, Q-L-D, appears in various forms of speech to imply echoing, copying, following and imitating. One common use of qalad in Arabic refers to actions of the ape, in contrast to the human intellectual effort. A meaningful form of Q-L-D in Arabic is al-Qiladah, meaning a leash or a rope or similar material attached to the neck of an animal for restraint or control. But human beings also can find themselves to be attached to a “leash.” This leash can take the form of society, stereotypes, ideology, power, politics, faith, public figures and traditions. Also, Q-L-D is associated with laziness and lack of responsibility. What leads humanity without its awareness and its conscious decision is a leash or Qiladah. In Western literature, Taqlid can be viewed as a lack of Enlightenment as described by Immanuel Kant, “The Enlightenment is man’s mental emancipation from self-incurred immaturity.” This Enlightenment is kind of intellectual Jihad. As such, the enlightened one (Mujtahid) proceeds by the light of self-sufficient reason and spreads clarity into his community and beyond.¹³ The Mujtahid or the enlightened one uses “the Principle that Good and Evil have a Reasonable Nature” to survey the fundamental concepts of faith in theology and the “Rational Independents” to legislate religious practices in Sharia law.¹⁴ This light also applies

¹¹ 2:190.

¹² 5:8. Salehi Najafabadi, *Jihad in Islam*, trans. Hamid Mavani (Organization for the Advancement of Islamic Knowledge, 2012); HussainAli Muntazeri, *Hukumat-e Dini va Huqoq-e Insan* (Qum: Saraii, 1387).

¹³ Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, “The Tradition of Rationality in Islamic Culture,” *The Secular and The Sacred*, eds. John P. Hogan and Sayed Hassan Akhlaq (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy 2017), 761-775; Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, “Rationality in Islamic Peripatetic and Enlightenment Philosophies,” *Philosophy Emerging from Culture*, eds. William Sweet et al. (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy 2013), 71-86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, “The Tradition of Rationality in Islamic Culture,” 383-406; “A Hermeneutics of the Sacred and Secular in Shariah,” 761-775.

to ethics and morals. Achieving the position of Mujahid and Mujtahid, in all ethical, intellectual and socio-political spheres, is not possible except by leaving one's previous state (Hijra) and renewing one's faith (Iman). Let us now examine some Quranic passages about Taqlid.

The Islamic emphasis on the self-examined life is among the critical reasons behind the formation of Islamic theology (Kalaam) and the development of rational schools of thoughts (Mutazilite, Maturidiyyah and Shi'ite), the welcoming attitude toward the integration of Islam with selective elements of other faiths and worldviews, and the birth of Islamic Philosophy, Sufism and the Principles of Jurisprudence with varied approaches. The principal miracle of the Prophet Muhammad appeared in the form of a book: the Quran.¹⁵ The first verse revealed to the Prophet Muhammad is a command to read.¹⁶ The first revelation portrays God who is teaching humanity with a pen.¹⁷ God takes an oath to penmanship and to the craft of writing¹⁸ in order to show the lofty position they possess in His mind. It is these verses that inspired some early Mutazilite of Islam to consider doubt as the first religious duty. That is every faithful has to follow a Cartesian method of seeking knowledge to make sure s/he is free of all kinds of unexamined ideas. This means that an individual cannot reach the position of the true faith unless he/she doubts everything about individual and social values and views in advance. There are several modern theologians who advocate the same idea. They consider hesitation a fundamental concept of faith, a holy path.¹⁹ This perspective, however, cannot be grasped if the Quranic verses on Taqlid and the unexamined life are not discussed.

There are four types of Taqlid that are condemned by the Quran. They are:

(a) imitating prestigious people and looking at them as an authority of values and views. The Quran states that some people will be questioned on the Judgment Day for their wrongdoing. They may respond that they followed their chiefs and the great ones. This is not a justified excuse according to the Quran²⁰ as each individual is responsible for his or her salvation/happiness, he/she is responsible for his/her own views and values.²¹

¹⁵ 2:23-24; 10:36; 17:88; 52:33-34.

¹⁶ 96:1.

¹⁷ 96:33-5.

¹⁸ 68:1.

¹⁹ For example, see Morteza Motahhari, *Majmoe-ye Athar* (Tehran: Sadra, 1394 SH), Vol. 30, 169; Sayed Yahya Yasrebi, *Moqaddeme-ii bar Falsafa-e Siyasat dar Islam* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1387 SH), 310

²⁰ 33:62.

²¹ 76:2-3.

(b) Copying the previous generations and parents merely because they are before us or older than us. This group of verses contains some of the major passages of the Quran rejecting imitation and *Taqlid*. The Quran narrates that many previous people fought against prophets and the messengers of God because they thought prophets and the messengers were destroying established values and views transmitted from parents and elders.²² Yet, the Quran maintains that tradition is not the criteria for truth; that whether an idea is old or new does not respectively qualify or disqualify it from being true. Whether an idea comes from the East or the West, geography, is likewise not an effective manner to welcome or reject it. For example, many people in the Middle East are radically criticized in Quranic stories and narratives while chapter 30 of the Quran (*al-Rum*) gets its name from Rome and gives it an honorable mention for its being the cradle of the Christian faith.

(c) Copying religious leaders without examining their validity or looking at their deeds. The focus on the Oneness of God (*Tawhid*) in Islam has many pragmatic implications. One of them is that there is no absolute authority for truth except God. The Quran criticizes many Jews and Christians because they “Took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides God.”²³ Thus, Jews and Christians are criticized by most Muslim exegetes for following blindly their leaders instead of the Lord Himself. According to the Quran, however, the priest or the imam or the *mujtahid* should not think on behalf of the people. People must therefore not try to avoid personal religious reflection while depending on priests and imams to think for them; nothing can replace conscious reflection.

(d) Copying the powerful authorities. Power gives self-confidence and has a way of making people arrogant and lawless.²⁴ Weakness, by contrast, removes self-confidence and even self-esteem. This feeling of power lays the foundation for associating truth with power and consequently encourages the imitation of the rich and the powerful. The Quran clearly states that many poor and weak people will face the punishment of God along with powerful wrongdoers on the Judgment Day because they followed them for their power.²⁵ Today, of course, power can take the many faces of modern institutions, large corporations and the mass media.

The significant point here is how the Quran understands the true duty of the faithful: To examine their faith and not copy external values and

²² Cf. 2:170; 5:104; 31:21; 37:69-70; 43:23.

²³ 9:31.

²⁴ 96:6-7.

²⁵ 14:21.

views. The verse 73, chapter 25, elaborates on the faithful's characteristics: "who, when reminded of the revelations of their Lord, do not try to ignore them as though deaf and blind. Rather, they try to understand and think about them." This is a very explicit command: A Muslim is not allowed to accept the Quran unless it aligns itself with their common sense. Of course, this common sense changes from a place to place, from a time to time. To balance between timebound realities and facts and timeless and eternal ideals and values needs a great jihad and scholarly work. However, the result affects both sides. Regarding our subject, inhabiting in a new community, particularly with a different culture and faith, requires a new stance, not only with regards to creating new social connections and cultural relations but also with regards to one's own faith and understanding of Islam.

To conclude, reducing Jihad to its mere physical form and then ignoring its causes and restrictions misses the spirit of Jihad they which consists in a largely intellectual and spiritual struggle for free consciousness and agency in a non-Muslim context. On the other hand, while Jihad describes the struggle of the faithful in a non-faithful context,²⁶ the refusal of Taqlid must be remembered in Islam, because it is the rejection of conformity to a given Muslim tradition, authority or context which terrors and violence often ensued from a blind trust in a given authority or leader. This leads us to Hijra which I will show to provide a great opportunity to refresh faith, to widen one's horizons, to grasp Jihad in its true nature and finally, to leave behind poisonous imitation.

Hijra

The severe discrimination, oppression and lack of freedom of conscience caused Muslims to leave their hometown Mecca while Islam was still establishing itself. Two historical migrations (Hijra) happened in the time of Muhammad and of the revelation of the Quran. The first migration was to Ethiopia in 615 CE; the second was to Medina in 622 CE. The Prophet Muhammad was among the second group. Earlier, the Prophet Muhammad gave three reasons as to why Ethiopia would be a good country to migrate to: (1) its king did not allow for unjust actions, (2) honesty was dominant there and (3) it was dream place for comfort.²⁷ The Quran

²⁶ I use the term non-faithful intentionally to refer to that Jews and Christians are considered as faithful, not infidel, in the Quran (see Akhlaq, "Reflection on Nostra Aetate," 146-158; Akhlaq, "How Muslims and Christians Can Practice Wilayat [Support] Toward Each Other? A Response to Nostra Aetate," 28-48.

²⁷ Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, "Identity and Immigration, A Quranic Perspective," *Building Community in a Mobile/Global Age: Migration and Hospitality*, eds. John P. Hogan et al. (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy 2013), 87.

encourages the faithful to look for both worldly and otherworldly happiness.²⁸ It counts a safe life and good economy as the bounty of God (106:4). Again, this means that secular and rational values like justice, honesty and a comfortable life are recognized as sufficient reasons to leave the Holy land of Islam and to give up the honor of being a companion of the Prophet. The second group of Muslim immigrants headed to Medina and the Prophet eventually joined them. These two movements gave birth to the new terminology in the Quran and Islam, which divided the faithful into immigrants (Muhajir) and helpers (Ansar).²⁹ The Quran was welcomed by immigrants because of their firm faith, sacrifice and openness. Despite the different traditions that they bring into the Muslim community, the Quran shows as much respect for immigrants as it does for the original companions of the Prophet.³⁰ But there are more lessons to learn.

In terms of etymology of Hijrah we find the Arabic root of H-J-R which means to leave, break away, desert, expel and immigrate. It connotes encountering difficulties and overcoming them by taking a risk. *Hijrah* differs from *harb*³¹ which often covers the physical state of escaping, fleeing and running from something. Another close concept is *Safar* which implies travel, journey and departure. While *safar* is advised to enrich knowledge³² and is a matter of religious practice,³³ *hijra* is more fundamental inasmuch as it is seen by the Quran to develop specific virtues.³⁴ Such significant virtues are attributed to immigrants as pure devotion to God, honesty and supporting God and His messenger;³⁵ true faith;³⁶ patience and trust in God;³⁷ sacrifice;³⁸ hopefulness;³⁹ returning to God after failure;⁴⁰ pioneering in good-doing;⁴¹ and being successful.⁴² These values are essential to immigrants.

²⁸ 2:201.

²⁹ Akhlaq, "Identity and Immigration, A Quranic Perspective," 83-106.

³⁰ 3:195.

³¹ There are two Arabic terms which look similar in English: Harb (حرب) and Harb (هرب), but their pronunciations and spellings are different in Arabic. There is no English equivalent for the first one Harb (حرب), which means escape and fleeing. It has with a regular pronunciation, which is breathy, strong and heavy with the throat constricted. The second word Harb (هرب) means war and combat discussed above.

³² 6:11; 27:69; 29:29; 30:9 and 42.

³³ 2:184-185 and 283; 4:10.

³⁴ 9:100 and 117.

³⁵ 59:8.

³⁶ 8:74.

³⁷ 16: 41-2 and 116.

³⁸ 9:20.

³⁹ 2:218.

⁴⁰ 9:117.

⁴¹ 9:100.

⁴² 9:20.

We discussed earlier that the concept of *Tawhid*, Oneness of God, is the core of the Islamic faith. This oneness is furthermore associated with the idea of liberation and with the annihilation of false gods or of whatever might replace them such as saints and religious leaders. This is why many movements in Islam, including Salafism, emphasize removal, deletion and deconstruction rather than the erection of multiple and constructive institutions. Mutazilite, the most liberal theology which was the most prodigious in the early centuries of Islam, emerged only after the first half of Islamic history centering on the oneness of God. *Tawhid* is the existential journey to remove all fake gods and ultimately to find favor in God's eyes. Rumi puts this concept of *Tawhid* at the center of the prophets' missionary endeavor. He says,

Who is the '[divine] protector'? He that sets you free and removes the fetters of servitude from your feet. Since prophet-hood is the guide to freedom, freedom is bestowed on true believers by the prophets.⁴³

This removal can take place only through a devoted faith. In this light, one might understand *Hijra* in a religious or spiritual sense as the existential abandoning and leaving behind of idolatry which characterizes all faith in the Quran. Whoever truly and fully trusts in God is devoted to Him and is able to leave previous attachments, idols and gods. In this context, many scholars of Islamic ethics suggest that the true immigrant be the one who leaves sin behind. The total abandonment of the past paves the way for welcoming new possibilities. As such, *Hijra* is typically contrasted to *al-Ta'arrub*, literally "desertification." Though *al-Ta'arrub* has its root in A-R-B which has the connotation of "relationship," here, it merely refers to the mentality and morals of primitive tribes and people. The same meaning is used in the Quran: "The dwellers of the desert are very hard in unbelief and hypocrisy."⁴⁴ However, while the leaving behind of an uncivilized and undeveloped place in favor of a civilized and developed one is *Hijra*, the opposite move is a major sin. *Al-Ta'arrub ba'd al-Hijra* (desertification after immigration) is a backward move from civilization to primitive life. This shift from the Sahara and the desert to a city or town is not merely a geographical change; it has cultural, educational, ethical and psychological aspects which all reflect on faith. City life and the opportunities and challenges presented by city dwelling are praised even among Sufis who normally tend to prefer rural places and life of a

⁴³ Jalal ud-din Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalalud-din Rumi*, trans. and ed. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (Tehran: Research Center of Booteh Publication Co., 1381/2002), 6:4540-41.

⁴⁴ 9:97. Sayyed Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'ii, *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Quran* (Tehran, Muasisah Al-Alami lil-Matbu'at, [No Date]).

peaceful and uninterrupted nature. One great example of this is found in Rumi, the lord of love in Sufi Farsi literature. Rumi justifies his view based on a Hadith of the Prophet and also equates living in rural place to the unexamined (imitating, originating from Taqlid) life. Of course, Rumi adds his own Sufi interpretation of the issue as well. This is the story he tells:

Do not go to the country: the country makes a fool of a man; it makes the intellect void of light and splendor. O chosen one, hear the Prophet's saying: 'To dwell in the country is the grave of the intellect'. If anyone stays in the country a single day and evening, his intellect will not be fully restored for a month. For a [whole] month foolishness will abide with him: what but these things should he reap from the parched herbage of the country? And he that stays a month in the country, ignorance and blindness will be his [lot] for a long time. What is 'the country'? The Shaykh that has not been united [with god], but has become addicted to conventionality and argument.⁴⁵

All of the above shows how much Hijra is celebrated in Islam. We now understand why Muslim jurisprudence talks of al-Ta'arrub as a major sin. This also clarifies why all 24 times that Hijra appears in the Quran and it only does so in the form of a verb. In Arabic, a verb differs from a noun and an article inasmuch as it refers to an action and is bound to a particular subject and time. In contrast, neither the noun nor the article has a sense of time and therefore constitutes static entities. Hijra, in its reoccurring verb form therefore constitutes a dynamic concept and as such, works as a bridge between theory/faith and practice.

In the Quran, the word Hijra appears seven times between the word faith (*iman*) and the word Jihad. These verses concern the believers, the immigrants and the Mujahids alike, all which should have faith, perform hijra and jihad. When Iman, Hijrah and Jihad appear together in the Quran, they cannot be easily added or removed. On the contrary, they create the individual anew, give him/her a new vision and mission. Having faith, immigrating and participating in the Jihad originate from the same individual: a Muslim hopes to renew him or herself through these actions. But the order in which these injunctions appear is also significant. In the Quran the order in which words are written is very important and meaningful to Muslims. Jihad, whether it is physical or financial, always comes after Hijra which, in turn, comes after faith. Jihad occurs only in the third phase and requires that the faithful should have passed the two previous phases (Iman and Hijra). But what is Iman? Iman (faith) is the showering

⁴⁵ Rumi, 3: 518-522.

of God's mercy and compassion. The examination of the etymology of Iman (faith) in Arabic leads to the root A-M-N which implies peace, security and safety. The Quranic name of God is *al-Mu'min*, meaning Him who provides safety and security. A Muslim faithful is one who brings safety, security and peace into the community by seeing everything in the light of God's mercy (al-Rahman) and Compassion (al-Rahim). The next step to deepen one's faith is Hijra. Hijra constitutes the removal of all cultural, geographical and historical obstacles, presuppositions and prejudices. It implies embracing new people, new communities and a new life based on a social contract and such values as justice, honesty and welfare. This is how the Constitution of Medina – the contract between Muhammad and the people of Medina – became the basis of Umma, the faithful community and laid the foundation for a new community. Finally, Jihad is founded on the first two – a spirit of compassion (Iman) and openness (Hijra). As such, far from implying hatred or violence against the non-faithful, Jihad is built on the dual community values of compassion and openness and signifies rather the preservation of the individual Muslim's uniqueness and agency in a given community. The Quran is aware of the fact that a society that enjoys the values of freedom and justice will be more receptive to the spreading of the word of God and of spirituality – this could take place in a completely secular society. In such a context, there is a genuine incentive for the faithful to peacefully negotiate between reason and revelation, secular and sacred values and create a fruitful cooperation between them in order to save humanity without killing common sense and joy.

Assimilation and Uniqueness

Islam asks a Muslim to be simultaneously integrated and unique, the latter being a divine quality: Allah is unique but exists everywhere: "He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward."⁴⁶ The faithful are to imitate God's names and attributes as much as possible. Two very popular attributes of God which often accompany Allah's name often are al-Rahman and al-Rahim. These two attributes appear particularly in Islamic prayer in the opening expression of "Basmallah-e al-Rahman-e al-Rahim." Both names are rooted in R-H-M meaning compassion. Muslims consider al-Rahman a broader compassion which embraces all beings and peoples, regardless of their gender, faith, values, views and nature. All people receive God's compassion inasmuch as they are created by Him and exist. Muslims believe that there is a higher version of God's compassion which targets the faithful specifically. This is called al-Rahim which is given in the context of the particular relationship between the

⁴⁶ 57:3.

faithful and God. Of course, this opportunity is open to everyone since there is no original sin and anyone can become a Muslim. Inasmuch as Muslims are called to imitate the divine, they are to develop both qualities and enact them in their communities. The first attribute of al-Rahman serves to improve social life and coexistence in the neighborhood. The second one, al-Rahim serves to improve spirituality and make life, suffering and struggles more meaningful. A Muslim is one of many people, a faithful, citizen, inhabitant and so on; but still s/he is unique with his/her own opportunities and challenges, with his/her own consciousness, with his/her own approach and relationship to God. S/he has to find his/her own spot in many and to play his/her unique role.

As God is the creator, a faithful must also be creative in order to share God's quality. There are two verses of the Quran which illustrate this: one has to do with God's creative nature and the other with human beings' responsibility to create. Verse 29 chapter 55 (called al-Rahman) states, "every moment He is in a state (of creation)." This verse highlights how God's creation is continuous.⁴⁷ A faithful seeking to embody God's attributes will also be creative, not only materially, but also culturally and socially. Verse 61 chapter 11 of the Quran explicitly tells that when God created people from the earth he requires them to build and tend to this earth. Therefore, creativity is not only in God's nature, but also constitutes God's aim for the faithful to contribute in creation.

The direction of this creative impulse is clear, that is, to spread compassion and mercy in the community. There is a Quranic verse which states that the objective of creation by God is that people worship Him.⁴⁸ Muslims have traditionally interpreted this verse as equating worship (Ibadah) with knowledge (Ma'rifah). Other verses confirm this interpretation.⁴⁹ There is thus a link between worship and knowledge. The Quran is not a book of science written merely to awaken curiosity but a book of wisdom serving to lead people to a pious and spiritual life. One may conclude that the knowledge mentioned above is the knowledge, which is expressed through gratitude and celebrates beauty, richness and glory of life and nature welling up in a feast of thankfulness. It is in this way that we may understand the relation between creation and compassion. Interestingly, the root R-H-M of both al-Rahman and al-Rahim means the mother's womb in Arabic. We are not just to create with compassion and mercy, but the entire creation itself emerges from the "womb" (R-H-M) of compassion and mercy (al-Rahman). I wonder what would happen if people were to invest new technologies and modern industries from a

⁴⁷ See also 5:64.

⁴⁸ 51:56.

⁴⁹ Cf. 40:13.

place of compassion. Would we have the present climate change and environmental crisis?⁵⁰

Several times the Quran suggests that God created some traditions, ways and principles for the world, both internal and external, which cannot be changed.⁵¹ A thankful scholar could learn from them and improve human life quality based on these traditions. These traditions and ways are unbiased and neutral with regard to place and time. They can help us to be more creative or remove obstacles on the path that we have chosen. One of these traditions is that God created people diverse by intention. At least four verses in the Quran directly touch on the issue that God created people diverse and even with different faiths in order to lay the foundation for free will, conscious decision-making and make possible enhanced knowledge.⁵² These many traditions come from one because all people are created from a single being.⁵³ The foundation of creation is laid upon the one and the many; unity and diversity, assimilation and distinction. They come together to constitute the whole of creation, the sign (Ayah) that God is present in both nature and culture.⁵⁴ People are created equally with the same nature.⁵⁵

Although the Quran calls for a common word,⁵⁶ differences in religion are not considered as a reason to disrespect them. It is clearly said that God has honored all people with dignity, traditions and devises for life,⁵⁷ not only a particular people, race or faith. People are examined under God's Lordship. Though the symbol of the Father is used in the Quran and Sunnah, as well as in some Hadiths, Islam considers all peoples as belonging to the family of God (ahl-lallah). The concept of brotherhood is used in the Quran to highlight how people are from the same family and root and how they are connected to each other. One Quranic tradition states that God created people not merely equally, but in a kind of brotherhood, an emotional and family relationship. This notion goes back to the ideas of compassion (al-Rahman) and merciful (al-Rahim) rooted in the womb (Rahim). A very inspiring note is that the Quran maintains that brotherhood exists between prophets and their enemies, between the highest faithful and the most corrupt sinners – those who reject justice, accountability, truth, reform, piety and the blessing of God. There is, according to the Quran, a general brotherhood among people regardless of

⁵⁰ Sayed Hassan Akhlaq, "Christian-Muslim Cooperation Demonstrating God's Image/Caliph in Ecotheology," *The Ecumenical Review* (World Council of Churches, 2018), 70(4), 788-805.

⁵¹ 17:77; 33:62; 35:43; 48:23.

⁵² 4:68; 11:118; 16:93; 49:13.

⁵³ 4:1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ 30:30.

⁵⁶ 3:64,

⁵⁷ 17:70.

their values and worldviews. This provides the diversity of communities with the opportunity to develop coexistence through the universal values of justice, love, compassion, free will and significant social contract. Of course, there is a specific task entrusted to the faithful to share their religious experiences and spiritual journeys.⁵⁸

To conclude, in the Quran, the world, physical and intellectual, constitutes a space of creation for both God and humanity. Both God and people simultaneously are unique and similar. There is no one like God, but He fills the whole world. Everyone is unique but still they are diverse peoples, creatures and part of a category. Uniqueness requires us to reject imitation (Taqlid) since there is no one exactly like us to be followed. Each individual is a unique treasure and creation of God and has a specific role in the world. God created people diverse, with free consciousness, free will and intellect. Jihad, on the other hand, consists in the struggle for the integrity of the particular self, that of a given community and the high objectives of life based on the common good and universal brotherhood. This understanding of religion (iman/faith) comes true through Hijra. A Muslim is not permitted to project the presuppositions and prejudices s/he has of the given faith or worldview without renewing her/his values and views through the process of Hijra, or exile/immigration. Just as a snake which sheds its skin a person of faith needs to leave his/her previous perspectives, categories and prejudices in order to encounter the true God. The process of leaving includes traditional concepts of God and religious concepts alongside socio-politico, media and money-related judgments. The only and absolute sacred is God, this cannot be reduced to a concept. Hijrah is thus a medium for renewal, a medium to leave Taqlid and to achieve the true meaning of Jihad.

This struggle applies in both public and private life. In the public realm, the Muslim is commanded to build a better family, neighborhood, community, society, nation and globe. And in the private realm, s/he is required to work for the betterment of the self with positive and constructive values and views. When people are encouraged to work together respectfully as equal creatures of God, they begin to learn from each other. They should be open and welcoming to each other and to share compassion with each other. This is the Quran's message to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike particularly in our time of mutual distrust and crisis. Thus, the uniqueness evoked by the Quran is not only meant individually and physically but extends to collectivities which themselves are meant to safe-guard and celebrate their uniqueness to be themselves and to think of

⁵⁸ I discuss in detail how Christians are considered as valid faithful in the Quran and how Christians and Muslims mutually can enrich their faith by each other. See Akhlaq, *Reflection on Nostra Aetate*, 146-167; Akhlaq, "How Muslims and Christians Can Practice Wilayat (Support) Toward Each Other? A Response to Nostra Aetate," 28-48.

others. Muslims can and should keep their own understanding of life and faith but also learn from other faiths, values and views. They have to move from Taqlid (being one of the many) to Iman (having their own connection with the Truth), Hijra (leaving prejudices and unexamined presuppositions) and Jihad (physical and intellectual struggles for the betterment of the globe) if they want to be true Muslims. Thanks to technology and media, it is now possible for everyone, believer and non-believer, to practice this great wisdom of the Quran:

Therefor give good tidings (O Muhammad) to my bondsmen those who listen to the word, then follow the best of it; those are they whom Allah has guided, and those it is who are the men of understanding.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ 39:17-18.

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Edited by
Denys Kiryukhin

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