

## Islam, My Islam

It seemed the most the most natural thing in the world for me to attend a *Christian* Church after a year of studying the Bible and the Koran (and watching various television ministries which ranged, in my view, from enriching to appalling) given that that was what my family had been (present company—almost entirely—excepted) a mere generation—or two—ago. After all, I wasn't a Jew; although a case could be made that my maternal great-grandfather may have been Jewish or half-Jewish. The subject only vaguely interests my grandmother in the way that all subjects concerned with families—their own and others'—always at least vaguely interest women (my grandmother is a Christian fallen away, in long-ago sequence, from a variety of Christian churches and a woman—like most women—now content with a quiet reverence for...capitalized...Nature as the bedrock of what humanist faith she retains). My great-grandfather had been a paper-hanger and a painter, conducting his livelihood from a pushcart in the streets of Edinburgh. A vocation and a means of conducting that vocation which was not unheard of among the Jews of that metropolis at the turn of the last century. The possibility of her father having been wholly or partly Jewish certainly doesn't appear to shape or colour my grandmother's remembrance of him one way or the other.

I gave the Anglican Church a try. Pretty close to perfect attendance every Sunday for about six months. One of the priests (there were three) was a woman. It seemed, on my part, a very Christian act to endure what I considered to be a near-blasphemous (all right, a *completely* blasphemous) reality: a woman ordained as a Minister of God delivering a sermon. My cross to bear (nyuck nyuck nyuck). One among many as it turned out. For every exhilarating surprise among the hymns ("Holy, Holy, Holy"—where on *earth* did I remember *that one* from?) there would be a half dozen that made me wish I'd brought my own crucifix or vial of holy water (Get back! All of you! I'm not afraid to use these!). The break point for me came, ultimately, over communion. I tried to stay as open-minded as I could as everyone else filed up to the front to indulge in a little metaphorical cannibalism, reminded myself and reminded myself of the undoubted validity of the ritual, prayed my own prayer and tried (in vain) to ignore the fact that communion occurred only in the somewhat (to me, anyway) ambiguous Synoptic Gospels (the Jesus of *John's* Gospel washes the feet of his disciples: no transubstantiation ritual). But mostly I just sat there being very, very, *very* resentful on behalf of the Jews. The Jews with their strict/stricter/so strict you could *plotz* dietary laws (No. Blood. "For the blood is the life thereof.") And yet...and *yet!*...for centuries upon centuries the Christians had accused the Sons of Jacob of holding secret rituals where they devoured the flesh and blood of Christian babies. And there the...goyim...were: up at the front—waiting their turn to nosh on Baby Jesus Bits.

*Oy gevalt.*

That was *the* break point. There were smaller straws that didn't in themselves *break* the camel's back but which sure put a kink in his hump. The sparseness of the scriptural readings, for one. One from the Torah (excuse me, the *Old* Testament) and one from the New Testament. One chapter or one Psalm, usually (*Psalms?* What are they reading from the *Psalms* for? Oh, right. Jesus' Great-Great- Great-to-the-ninth-power grandfather: "Jesus, thou sonne of Daud."). Chapter three from Prophet A this week. Chapter nine from Prophet X—who had lived five hundred years prior or subsequent to Prophet A—the next week. How do you say "whiplash" in Hebrew? I'd go home and read Isaiah. Takes about six or seven hours. Scripture, to me, is a meal, not a snack. Put away the Baby Jesus Bits and read something *all the way through*, f'cryin' out loud.

I'm making mock here, I freely admit it and I freely confess that that is a very bad thing for me to be doing. It sure isn't because I lack respect for Jesus or his revelation to the world. Exactly the opposite. Whatever fault I find with the various Christian churches and denominations, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Creflow Dollar (you think I'm making that name up. Check him out on your local faith channel sometime)—and it seems more difficult each day to find *any* modern-day incarnation of Christianity that I *don't* find completely abhorrent—still, Bottom Line:

Jesus got nailed to two really, really big pieces of wood with three really, really big spikes. And there wasn't a moment in the last years of his life that he had any illusions but that that was *exactly* what he was headed for on his way to somewhere nicer. Even allowing for the fact that there would have been voices in his head assuring him everything was going to be okay, the "fix is in" (or whatever it was that They) (back in the Age of Prophets which I believe ended with death of Muhammad in 632) (told someone who had been selected to be one of God's Messengers)...voices that (*allowed* him? *encouraged* him? *compelled* him?) to keep moving, one foot in front of the other, on the straight and narrow path...even allowing for the *Existence Of* and the *Reassurance Provided By* those voices...there was (evidently) also no shortage of voices and *faces* that would come leering out of the jostling awe-stricken crowds, "Jesus, thou sonne of Iesse...aren't thou come *before thy time?*" Attempting to sow doubt and fear about the central reality of his own task, the central reality of his own nature, the central reality by which he must needs keep moving, one foot in front of the other, minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, day-by-day,

month-by-month, year-by-year, on the straight and narrow path to those two really, really big pieces of wood and those three really, really big spikes.

Courage? There isn't a word large enough to describe that kind of courage. Faith? There isn't a word large enough to describe that kind of faith. Which is why I find so much of the subsequent Christian...navel-gazing...both inexplicable and appalling. 'Was Jesus God?' 'Was he the Son of God?' 'Was he half-human and half-God?' 'How much was he human and how much was he God?'

What are you *talking* about? You have a documented record of The Single Greatest Combined Act of Courage and Faith ever enacted by a... "I think all us Church Leaders should get together in Nicae and vote on this, so we can come up with a definitive answer as to how much he was human and how much he was God."

VOTE on it? VOTE? On it? "Yeah. It's three hundred and twenty-five years later and it's really getting to be a problem. Inquiring minds want to know."

Vote. On it. What a perfectly...*goyish*...thing to do.

Jesus had such absolute and unshakeable faith in what he was *doing*, in what he was *told* to do that he kept moving in a straight line for years *knowing* that he was going to get big spikes driven through his wrists into a big piece of wood and another big spike driven through his ankles into another piece of wood and he was going to get hauled aloft with only the splintered remains of his wrists and the splintered remains of his ankles to support his *entire weight* until he *died from the sheer, physically crushing burden of*...

"Right now it looks as if 'Triune God' is going to win out. We're just putting the finishing touches on the winning declaration."

Courage. And Faith. That's it, to me. The rest of what has been attached to it over the last two millennia...as you can see...makes it very difficult for me to contemplate The Courage and The Faith without making jokes about the (to me? frankly? *Appalling*) sideshow which has attached itself to Them.

The Koran assures us that Jesus did not die on the cross. A substitute sacrifice died on the cross—metaphorically like the Ram with its horns caught in a thicket which was given to Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son, Isaac (which event, the Koran also assures us, happened with *Ishmael*, Abraham's son by his wife's Egyptian slave, Hagar, and not Isaac, his second son, whose mother was Sarah. The not-unconvincing Islamic case? That even in Genesis, Abraham is instructed to sacrifice "thine *only* sonne". Given that *only* Ishmael could ever be accurately described as Abraham's "only son"—and was indisputably so until he was fourteen—and that Isaac could only realistically be described as Abraham's *second* son or *one* of his *two* sons...as I say, the case is not unconvincing). The Koran also assures us (repeatedly) that the resolution of these disputes between the Torah, the Gospels (The Evangel as it is called in the Koran) and the Koran will be made plain in the next world.

On the offhand chance they let me in, I'm bringing a notebook full of questions with me.

Not being a Jew (for more on this see my essay, "Jew", in *Cerebus* 269) and not looking remotely Jewish (I'm about as goy-looking as you can get without wearing a Wonder Bread t-shirt), I couldn't picture myself going into a synagogue to pray once it became obvious to me that I would not be going back to the *Anglican* Church. I have my own prayer that I wrote (running time: 10 mins.). I always pictured the rabbi—or whoever would be in there—looking over at the goy (who wouldn't look out of place in a Wonder Bread t-shirt) on his knees praying and that (whoever they were) they couldn't help but think that I'm *probably* praying for the souls of all these Christ Killers: that God should please send a big bolt of lightning that would cause them all to die on the spot and go straight to hell, thus making the world safe for all us good and decent devourers of Baby Jesus Bits, Amen. And, really, who could blame them for thinking that? It's not as if I would be the first, by any stretch of the imagination. And wouldn't they have a *right* to be suspicious? I mean, I do mention Jesus and Muhammad in my prayer, you know, favourably. *Very* favourably.

[I thought of writing out my prayer when I was going to the Anglican Church and saying to the senior priest, sort of, "Say, is it okay by you if I pray this prayer in here?" But then I thought, what business is it of *his*? This is between me and God. And then I thought, well, yeah, but this guy was obviously tight with the whole Anglican thing when I was still getting *my* theology out of Foolbert Sturgeon's *New Adventures of Jesus* and *Jesus Joins the Armed Services* comic books. And it *is* an Anglican Church. Paid for by Anglican worshippers with a handy book of Anglican rules and regulations right there in every pew. And I did mention the Koran to him in one of those "Thanks for coming out" *en passé* deals after one service and he definitely got that gastric upset look on his face that Margaret Thatcher perfected back in the 1980s. What if he has to send my prayer to "head office" for approval and it comes back full of deletions? What if he says, "What's wrong with the *lord's* Prayer?" I mean *there's* a can of worms. "I'm sorry, father, I just can't ask God to 'lead us not into temptation'. What sort of an awful thing is that to say to God? When has God *ever* led *anyone* into temptation? Does that *sound* to you like something God would do?" And then I figured we'd get into a big ruckus over the Synoptic Gospels and...well...I just prayed my prayer. But, as casual as I tried to be about it, there was a definite illicit quality to thanking God for His Glorious Koran while kneeling in an Anglican Church. So I thought the same thing about the synagogue. Excuse me, rabbi? Is it okay by you if I pray this prayer in here?

It starts off good: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (the goy names for the Books of Moses) followed by Moses, Peace Be Upon Him (so maybe the rabbi doesn't get out much and he wouldn't recognize the

“Peace be upon him” as being Islamic, nu?)...all the way down to Malachi (I won’t bore you with the whole list of The Books of the Prophets, I’m sure you know them as well as I do). I pictured the rabbi pointing to Malachi. “Tell you what, Wonder Bread, howzabout you call it a day when you get this far and then beat it the hell out of here?”

*Worst-case scenario?*

Nono. The *worst-case* scenario would be finding myself in a synagogue that turns out to be one of those new, improved, *modern* synagogues (Pardon me, rabbi, is this synagogue Orthodox or Deformed?). Like the Reverend Dupas’ First Existential Church in Jules Feiffer’s play *Little Murders*—Donald Sutherland played Dupas in the 1971 movie version (looking and sounding *eerily* like Alan Moore)—“Christ died for our sins. Dare we make his martyrdom meaningless by not committing them?” That line definitely didn’t make it into the movie version, but that’s the kind of squishy “it’s all good” secular humanistic moral relativism that sent me to the traditional Anglican Church in the first place, instead of the Peter, Paul and Mary Folk Faith environs I could have chosen instead (“Of course! Pray whatever you want! Pray to Zeus, pray to Palas Athena, pray to Princess Diana, pray to Elton John! We aren’t judgemental at *all* in our synagogue!”)

In a mosque, of course, just praying *verbally* on my knees in a fixed position would stick out like a sore thumb. I have seen the sequence of body postures and gestures enacted hundreds of times on television. They used to demonstrate the movements on *Reflections on Islam* (the only thing I genuinely miss about not having television anymore: *Reflections on Islam* at 11:00 a.m. and *Passages*—except when they would have a chick-and-a-rabbi instead of two rabbis—at 10 p.m. every Sunday) at least once a year. *At least*. That part never stuck with me (although I remember hearing that there’s a “prophetic tradition” that the body postures imitate the Arabic letters which spell Adam’s name). I prefer to pray out loud, I prefer to pray my own prayer and I prefer being by myself when I do it. Which is definitely frowned upon (and possibly *haram*—forbidden) in Islam, depending on whose prophetic tradition you’re listening to. “God wants to see every King and every commoner, with their prayer mats touching, praying in unison, one man’s feet at the next man’s head.”]

*[I’ve got this two-inch stack of news clippings on Islam I’ve been pulling out since late September in anticipation of writing this series of essays. So...*

*Speaking of prayer mats:*

*This is from a dispatch dated 11 November 2001 by Montreal Gazette reporter, Levon Sevunts, filed from Chaghatay, Afghanistan about his encounter with another couple of reporters, one of whom was Volker Handoik a writer for the German magazine, Stern:*

Commander Muhammad Bashir...immediately ordered three tanks to open fire on the Taliban positions...The tanks fired with a deafening thud, releasing an enormous flash and disappearing in a cloud of smoke and dust. Four armoured carriers started moving up the hill, their tracks screeching on the sand and rock.

Satisfied by the performance of his troops, Bashir pulled out his prayer mat and started his prayers.

Looking at Bashir bending and kneeling on the mat, Volker complained he was suffering from back pain. I offered him some Motrin that I always carry with me in a first-aid kit.

*I’ve managed to lose the rest of the article, but Volker Hanoik died about twenty minutes later. Shot or blown up—I forget which. He looks at Bashir praying which reminds him...his back hurts. And he bums a pill off somebody. Twenty minutes later he’s dead.*

*I could write ten pages about why I find that story inescapably—and spiritually—poignant and never get within a country mile of an adequate explanation.]*

Having read the Torah, the Gospels and the Koran before I started going to the Anglican Church—and being a devoted viewer of *Reflections on Islam*—I was aware of the five “pillars” of Islam. One of the “pillars” became another source of friction in my church-going. My motivation in going to church was to receive what I hoped would be insights into the Gospels...

(Particularly as regards their translation from Aramaic and Ancient Greek into English, a problem comparable to what I was finding with the translation of the Torah from Hebrew into English. English is a pretty versatile language but its limitations become quite apparent quite quickly in studying the Torah and the Gospels. As an example, the translation of Simeon and Levi’s transgression in Jacob’s deathbed address to his sons (Genesis 49) is that they “dugged down a wall”. The alternative translation in the margin is that they “houghed oxen.” I had to go to the Big Dictionary at the Library to find out that “houghed” is an antiquated English term meaning “hamstrung”. Whatever the phrase was—and *is*—in Hebrew, English wasn’t up to the task of finding even a close approximation of it. The senior priest was familiar with Aramaic, Ancient Greek and Hebrew and would, very, very occasionally, digress into a discussion of a specific term or usage of a term.

*Very occasionally.)*

...but, for the most part, the two-hour service was taken up with ritual, organ-playing, singing and homey little sermons which (in my view) twisted the point of every one of Jesus’ parables and every Gospel episode into a valuable lesson about Mum, Dad and the Kids which, in good politically-correct fashion, was always skewed to flatter Mum at the expense of Dad and was, thus, appreciably no different, to me (in terms of spiritual content)

than what I was able to extract from television commercials. Or the sermons would be about the necessity to be generous and kind and assist in a variety of church-sponsored social programs. It seemed to me that Islam, with the *zakat*, the “stated alms” I’ve discussed elsewhere, the right of the community to 2.5 percent of each person’s accumulated wealth—had it “all over” on Christianity in that regard. Muslims are exhorted to ask each other, “Did you pay the *zakat*?” and, in answer, “Did you?” Very matter-of-fact. Very central to the faith. One of the five pillars. You can’t be a good Muslim unless you pay the *zakat*. You have to “purify your wealth” by donating 2.5 percent of your total wealth to feeding the poor in your community. If you don’t do so, your wealth is impure and you have no cause for complaint if it evaporates or gets you into some serious trouble. “You didn’t purify your wealth this year? What’s the Arabic word for ‘putz’?” There is, therefore, no overwhelming need (I would guess) to discuss the *zakat* at any length during Friday prayer services in the Mosques. Anymore than it is necessary to deliver a sermon in a synagogue or a Church that starts, “‘Thou shalt not kill.’ Isn’t that the truth? Let’s all make an extra special effort not to kill anyone on our way home today.” In Islam, the centrality to the faith of the mandate *incumbent upon each individual* to feed the poor—occupying as it does the same centrality to the faith that the commandment “Thou Shalt Not Kill” occupies in Judaism and Christianity—thereby doesn’t interfere with or supersede the equally pressing need for prayer—*salat*, another of the five pillars—the way that discussing caring for the poor *does* have a tendency to do in Judaism and Christianity so that it is easy for a given church or synagogue to erode from the exalted state of *Beth-El* (God’s House) into little more than another largely secular, largely humanist social service agency (this is particularly true, I believe, as women are allowed to play a greater role in the churches: the Triune “God” of women being more Darwin, Marx and Freud than Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Once you are a literal Muslim—“one who submits to the Will of God” is the literal translation of both “Islam” and “Muslim”—by definition, the poor and disadvantaged are never far from your thoughts. “Lend to God a goodly loan,” the Koran exhorts repeatedly, meaning, of course, that it is always advisable and praise-worthy to exceed the minimum of the *zakat* to find favour in the sight of God. Once you actually see the effect firsthand of “Lending to God a goodly loan” it’s very easy to get carried away. Small wonder that The Koran Sura, The Night Journey (17:31), cautions: “Let not thy hand be tied up to thy neck; nor yet open it with all openness, lest thou sit thee down in rebuke, in beggary.” There’s a wonderful traditional story of Abu Bakr (later, the first Caliph of Islam after the death of the Prophet) giving *all* of his money away to the poor. And Muhammad, a little aghast, asking him, “Didn’t you keep *anything* for yourself?” To which Abu Bakr, reportedly, replied, “I have given my money to the poor and kept the Word of God for myself.” At this point Muhammad turned to Omar (later, the *second* Caliph of Islam) and said, “What about you?” And Omar replied, “I have given half of my wealth to the poor, and I owe God the other half.” “No one ever went bankrupt paying the *zakat*,” is another prophetic saying. “God will not wrong you so much as the husk of a date stone.” A pretty precise calibration of reward.

Uncertain as I was (and am) that synagogue, church or mosque attendance is a central—or even tangential—necessity in serving God, having chosen to observe a *shabbath*, a day of rest and prayer (at first, I alternated between a Jewish *shabbath*, Saturday, and a Christian Sabbath, Sunday, which meant I was working five days one week, followed by a day of rest, and seven days the following week, followed by a day of rest. I ultimately settled on Sunday—literally from midnight Saturday to midnight Sunday—although I keep thinking I should probably switch to the Jewish observance, “between the two evenings”: sunset Friday to sunset Saturday), continuing to pray twice daily, paying the *zakat*, by the fall of 1999 I had a sense of something missing. Whatever I might’ve thought, ultimately, of the Anglican Church, the decision not to attend church regularly had left a hole in my life of which I was very much aware. At some point in late 1999 I read some reference to the fact that Ramadan was beginning December 9th. “Fasting in the sacred month” is, of course, another of the five pillars of Islam. I was only vaguely aware of the rules which governed fasting. Early on I had set myself the task of seeing how late on my Sabbath I could leave breakfast—how late before I allowed myself to eat anything. I could usually make it until about four or five in the afternoon but, ultimately, I found that my hunger and thirst were so overwhelming by then that I was scarcely able to perceive the scriptures and commentaries that I was reading—which seemed more than a little spiritually counter-productive. Also, it appealed to the “sports guy” side of me a little too much. Hah! I broke my last week’s record by *forty-eight minutes*. Not exactly the sort of spiritual nourishment one associates with ritual fasting. George Petrou (hi, George!) told me about his mother fasting in the Greek Orthodox Church, where she only allowed herself fruit juices or water during the day for...Lent?...I think it was Lent. *Reflections on Islam* did a piece on Ramadan fasting around that time: No food or drink from sunrise to sunset. And, of course, the five daily prayers. The five daily prayers I had a lot of trouble picturing, particularly coupled with the ritual ablutions—after changing into clean, light-coloured clothing, washing the face from the crown of the head to the chin, then washing the right hand up to the elbow, the left hand up to the elbow, washing out the inside of the ears, rinsing out the mouth, inhaling water into both nostrils (you *can’t* be serious), washing the right foot to the ankle, washing the left foot to the ankle, wetting the scalp. Using water or *clean sand*. Water, thank God, I had. Then the prayers. Five times a day.

I remembered the Anglican service which is a little tough on rookies. The Book of Common Prayer, the Hymnal, the New Improved Book of Common Prayer (what *is* it with Christians and this new, improved kick? Did Madison Avenue really look that sensible to church authorities back in the days of the Second Vatican Council? Or did they just envy Madison Avenue’s sheep-herding abilities?). For two hours, I was always at least thirty seconds behind everyone else in finding the right page. *This* bit is on page 59 of the New, Improved Book

of Common Prayer *not* page 59 of the Old, *Not Improved* Book of Common Prayer. It's *Hymn* number 203 but it's on *page* 188. *Page* 203 has *hymn* number 217 which doesn't sound *remotely* like this one. What are the words? Can I allow myself to sing these words? Scan the words. "Listen, all of you. Get back. I have a crucifix and some holy water and I'm not afraid to use them." The Nicene Creed. Always scanning ahead a couple of lines: I allow myself to recite this next part. The two lines after that I won't allow myself to say. ("I'm serious. This is actual holy water. Get back."). It wasn't easy. If most of the rituals and recitations and hymns didn't seem to have even the remotest bit of relevance to the books of scripture that I was reading and re-reading at home, there was a certain satisfaction in making the effort, getting the hang of it, and most especially (*hopefully*) pleasing God in the process—although I found it difficult to get a reading on the reactions of The Primarily Judaic God that I picture and pictured in my head. I was never quite sure if He was saying, "I know. Do you believe this? And they really think this is a way to worship Me" or "The important motivation is deeper than the skewed content. You can't perceive your own motivations *at that depth* as God can. You have to stick with it" or "It's just something I thought you should see. Not, you know, every Sunday for six months. F' Cryin' out loud, did you read the words to that last hymn? Go home! Read some Scripture!"

I wasn't sure if Ramadan made the "Anglican Two-Step" (sit, stand, recite, kneel, sit, listen, stand, sit, stand, sing, sit, kneel, stand, listen) look easy or the other way around. I became evasive. "Aren't there, like, *specific* prayer times in Islam? I won't know what the *specific* prayer times *are*. I'm pretty sure you can't just do five prayers in a row when you get up in the morning and call it a day, prayer-wise (and I only had to do the ritual ablutions once! Nyuck nyuck nyuck). If I'm just *arbitrarily picking* prayer times, aren't I *basically* transgressing in the same way? Isn't the *ethical difference* just a matter of *degree*? What if the *specific times* are *central* to the *efficacy* of the prayer? Is it *not inconceivable*...is it *not*, in *fact*, a *probability* or, in *further* fact, a *likelihood* that *arbitrary prayer times* could represent a...an *insult to God*, in that case? *Heaven forbid that I should insult God!* (I can really get to "chewing the scenery", bringing to my on-going interior monologue-to-God just this kind of histrionic Talmudic scholar quality when I want to let myself off the hook about something. The sheer effort that's required when I know that's what I'm doing, when *God* knows that's what I'm doing, and when I'm not fooling *either* of us can be exhausting). So I decided to leave it up to God. If God would send me a sign that I should fast in Ramadan, then I would fast in Ramadan. Asking a sign from God verges, I'm pretty sure, on blasphemy so I really don't recommend it as, you know, a *lifestyle*. If you *do* ask, however, it's important to *pay attention* and—in a case where the sign seems subtle or ambiguous—to err on the side of *believing* in the sign instead of *doubting* the sign.

The next day, an envelope (from *Reflections on Islam*) arrived at my apartment. Inside was a printed form containing the prayer times for Ramadan under the heading "Oh you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may fear God." (2:179). Subtle, I grant you, but I decided to give God the benefit of the doubt.

## PART II

Lengthy digression before we get back to my first Ramadan fast:

Of course, the reason that I got the prayer times for Ramadan from *Reflections on Islam* is because I contribute to them financially (I also receive an "Eid Mubarak" card from them on the occasion of Eid-al-Fitr—marking the end of the Ramadan fast. The cards are, inevitably, addressed to "Dave Sim & family" which amuses me to no end: in Islam, being childless, I would be considered a "man without a tail": which, you know, suits me fine). In the aftermath of 11 September as Canada and most of the world—and all of the *civilized* parts of it—moved with decidedly undemocratic swiftness to clamp down on terrorist fundraising organizations, I patiently waited to find out if *Reflections on Islam* was a cover organization for Hamas, Hezbolleh, Islamic Jihad, Egyptian Jihad, al-Qaeda or any of the other cornucopia of terrorist organizations within the Nation of Islam. I assumed that if that was the case, I would probably merit a phone call from someone at the RCMP, CSIS or some other Canadian security agency. A "mind if we take a look around?" visit, however unlikely (unless they just wanted to be able to tell the guys back at the office what a Muslim named "Dave" looks like)—to a democratic purist like myself—might easily cross the line from a *quasi*-legal to a genuinely *illegal* infringement of my civil rights. Still, in my own mind, there was no question that I would undergo whatever came my way without a word of complaint, with full cooperation and with no idea of seeking redress in the aftermath.

Why is that, you ask?

To answer that makes this lengthy digression a good deal lengthier:

It is probably best to begin with Linda Frum's article (*National Post*, 20 October 01) on Steven Emerson who is, according to the article, "widely recognized as America's foremost independent investigative expert on Islamic terrorism. According to the former head of FBI investigations and counter-terrorism, Oliver Revell, he is better informed about the activities of terrorists in America than the FBI itself". It goes on to say that although Emerson was "once shunned by mainstream U.S. media as an extremist and a racist, he is now in constant demand by major U.S. news outlets." (thus ever with the laughably shifting sands of what passes for integrity at the major U.S. news outlets, eh?) "His organization, The Investigative Project, is a non-profit outfit that tracks the activities, statements and fund-raising of Islamic terrorist groups operating in the U.S., as well as the mainstream, tax-exempt, charitable organizations which serve as their fronts.

“‘What do they want?’ asks Emerson. ‘It runs in varying degrees. One, they want political influence. Two, they want to see the U.S. become a Muslim country. ...’”

Undoubtedly, this raises an eyebrow or two among my readership where it doesn’t provoke outright hilarity, but Mr. Emerson is quite correct, as we’ll see in the later parts of these essays.

“...three, they want the U.S. to be sensitive to the legitimate interests of Muslims around the world, which they define as support for the Jihad in Palestine, the Jihad in Chechnya, the Jihad in the Philippines, the Jihad in Saudi Arabia.”

“Mr. Emerson has devoted the last seven years of his life to recording what U.S. Islamic leaders say among themselves. For example, Muzammil Siddiqui, the former president of Islamic Society of North America and Imam of the Islamic Society of Orange County in California, was invited to the Oval Office by George W. Bush on Sept. 26 so that the President could thank him for his participation in the national day of mourning and remembrance. Siddiqui told the President: ‘The Muslim community has unanimously condemned and deplored the crime committed on Sept. 11, 2001. It was a most horrible crime against our nation and against humanity.’”

Of course, the Imam is referring to the nation of *Islam* in his quote and the widely-held belief among Muslims that the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were executed by Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency—that is, that the “crime” of 11 September was the “framing” of the Nation of Islam for the terrorist attacks. The quote just doesn’t ring true otherwise: no Muslim Imam would refer to the United States as “our nation”. Any such reference by a Muslim cleric to *any* nation *other* than Islam would be considered heretical in the least close-minded Islamic factions and completely and unforgivably blasphemous by the vast majority of the Muslim leadership. By contrast, another quote of Siddiqui’s does ring true: from his address at the 2000 Jerusalem Day rally in Washington:

“We want to awaken the conscience of America, because—if you remain on the side of injustice—the wrath of God will come. Please, all Americans, do remember that: that Allah is watching everyone. If you continue doing injustice, and tolerating injustice, the wrath of God will come.”

[The use of the name “Allah” when the speaker or writer is addressing me in English really grates on my nerves in a serious way. I don’t worship “Allah” for the same reason that I don’t worship “Dieu” or “Mungu”. Each language has an equivalent term for “god”. Capitalize it and away you go. That’s His Name, but only if you are speaking that language. If you’re speaking Arabic, His Name is Allah. If you’re speaking French, His Name is Dieu, if you’re speaking Swahili, His Name is Mungu, if you’re speaking English, His Name is God.]

Steve Emerson on Siddiqui: “Siddiqui is the leader of one of the largest Islamic groups in the United States. He talks a nice game. Everyone says he’s a nice guy. But the level of naivete and denial [among Americans] is nothing short of astonishing. It’s very difficult to get a sense of the dimension of what we’re up against because of the level of deception. There isn’t a moderate Islamic leadership. There isn’t. And someone has got to say it. We deny it at our peril.”

Exactly. There. Is. *No*. Moderate. Islamic. Leadership.

Steve Emerson again: “There was a major meeting the other day between twenty *Democratic* [italics mine] Senators and representatives of militant Islamic groups. It was just obscene. The Islamic leaders now come crying under victimhood status and as being the subject of hate crimes. But no one has demanded that the price of coming to the table is that they thoroughly repudiate Islamic terrorism.”

This is an ongoing problem in the Western democracies, in my view. The Irish Republican Army represents a comparable level of ridiculousness when it comes to “negotiations”. It seems fundamental to me that getting the IRA or Islam to *repudiate* violence should only be considered the first baby step in the right direction *towards* the negotiating table. Actual *access* to the negotiating table should hinge on purging their own ranks of those who refuse to repudiate violence and those that they know have committed acts of violence—or it needs to be done on their behalf with the full acquiescence of the leadership. That is, the IRA leadership should give Her Majesty’s Special Forces a list of names and addresses and get out of the way. At the *conclusion* of which those who have repudiated violence—and who have not themselves ordered or committed violence—can sit down and *begin* to negotiate.

George Jonas had a column around this time that seems, to me, distinctly relevant to the situation, entitled “A lesson from the professor and the station master”:

*The story of the Turkish station master was told to me by the Hungarian icon, the poet George Faludy, now in his 90s. He heard it from Rustem Vambery, the noted lawyer and diplomat when they were both in New York at the end of the Second World War. The incident itself happened a long time ago, and it involved Vambery’s father, Arminius, the 19th-century Orientalist. Professor Arminius Vambery was a severely crippled man who had to use crutches. This didn’t stop him from becoming an explorer of note, and the author of several important books on Central Asia. There were no private jets in those days, but VIPs often travelled by private railway carriage. Passing through Turkey as the Sultan’s guest one year, the professor had his own carriage attached to the train. After the engine stopped at a small station in Anatolia, on the Asian side of the Marmaran Sea, a Turkish station master entered the carriage. He sized up Vambery with a sly glance, bowed perfunctorily, then informed the professor that, regrettably, his carriage needed to be uncoupled from the train.*

*Vambery was travelling with a friend. They looked at each other. “Why?” Vambery asked.*

"Regulations, effendi," the station master replied with a smirk. "We need to leave your carriage behind on the siding. For a slight consideration, though, an exception can be made."

With that, he calmly held out his hand for baksheesh [a bribe].

The station master was a huge brute, as it happened. His immense palm made a good target, so Vambery immediately whacked it with his crutch. Then he struggled to his feet, striking the Turk repeatedly with all his might.

The station master—who could have snapped the professor in half—didn't even try to ward off the blows. "Effendi, I didn't know, forgive me, I didn't realize," he muttered, bowing deeply and backing off. "In your case, of course, regulations don't apply."

"Didn't you see the size of that fellow?" Vambery's friend asked, shaken, after the genuflecting giant had backed out of the car. "Weren't you afraid to hit him?"

"Of course," replied Vambery, "but this is the Orient. I would have been far more afraid not to hit him."

Mr. Jonas' conclusion drawn from the anecdote seemed particularly pertinent last fall and just as pertinent now even though his more specific point—at the time—was addressed to the ridiculous idea (then circulating) that America might consider suspending its air attacks against the Taliban in the sacred month of Ramadan:

*Vambery's assessment of what is to be feared more, firmness or appeasement, holds true in many parts of the world, not just the Orient. Except in the East it's more than a rule of thumb. It's one of the fundamentals which Westerners—especially Americans—have trouble appreciating...What Americans find hard to understand is that gestures of magnanimity are not seen as such in Eastern cultures. In fact, they have the opposite effect...*

*...There's a bewildered question Americans, and Westerners in general, keep asking after 9-11: "Why do they hate us so?" The question also has an unasked corollary: "Why don't they respect us more?"*

*The answer may be that we haven't yet learned when to whack the station master and when to offer him baksheesh.*

It's a little more complicated than that when it comes to the relationship between the United States and Islam. Being a devoted fan of both entities, maybe I can offer a little insight: The disaster of 11 September can be attributed, I think, in no small part to Osama bin Laden's previous successes against the United States—or those actions which could be construed as successes by an Islamic terrorist. Whether bin Laden himself or some other Muslim terrorist organization was behind the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in 1983, the hotel bombing in Aden in 1992 (where U.S. military personnel were stationed), Mogadishu in 1993, the Khobar Towers bombing in Dhahran in June, 1996 (where nineteen American soldiers died and five hundred others—including native Saudis—were injured), the bombing of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 and the attack on the USS Cole off Yemen in October of 2000—in each case, the setback was followed by a U.S. withdrawal of its forces. From this side of the big pond, this is easy to understand as an implication of the Vietnam Syndrome: the assumption that the American people have a very low tolerance for American military casualties unless a good reason for them can be explained—to their satisfaction—between commercial breaks on the CBS, NBC, ABC and Fox Evening Newscasts. That's a bit glib, I admit, but only a *bit*. Nor am I casting aspersions. The United States of America is the first great democracy in human history, the country that wrote—and continues to write—the book on what democracy *is*. And not just *theoretical democracy* (the Greeks were great at theory) but *practical application*. When the final judgement in all matters of government policy resides with "We the People" it is entirely within the rights of "We the People" to demand that any military adventure contemplated by its elected representatives and/or the head of its Executive Branch be explained in two-and-a-half minutes before *The Simpsons* comes on. I might think it an inadvisable approach to governing The Great Republic and certainly there is no shortage of elected representatives and/or former Presidents who have failed to pass the two-and-a-half minute network news test with any number of policies (when Lyndon Johnson lost the support of Walter Cronkite, he knew he had lost the support of the American people) and who *wished* that there was some *other* way to reach the American people than through two-and-a-half minute segments on network television news. Some of those policies may even (in a hypothetical nation arranged along different lines of priority) have proved to be darned good ideas. Ronald Reagan's decision to send a contingent of Marines into Beirut in 1983 and to house them onshore, rather than offshore, may have been one of those darned good ideas. However, once two hundred or so of those marines died in an Islamic terrorist truck-bomb attack, the idea had had its chance and—given President Reagan's sound political instincts—it wasn't possible for him to withdraw the remaining troops fast enough. A good example of American democracy in action. But, arguably (bearing in mind George Jonas' station master anecdote) the first bad United-States-to-Nation-of-Islam signal. A bad signal, but inescapable, given the nature of the world's Vanguard Democracy. Whatever damage the bombing of the Marine barracks did to President Reagan's Gallup Poll numbers, those numbers would not have been assisted by departing Beirut with a Scorched Earth policy. Given the nature of Islam, the nature of the Middle East, the nature of (may God have mercy on us all) Beirut, Scorched Earth or some variation was the only sensible act before departing. *Someone* had to pay. In fact, at least *two hundred* someone's had to pay if American prestige was to be maintained in the area. Given the bad signal that immediate withdrawal would, inevitably, send to all parts of the Islamic world, several *thousand* someone's would probably have been a more strategically effective number (ten

of *you* is worth *one of us*). But, again, from this side of the pond, the very idea is ridiculous. President Reagan would've been impeached. At the very least, his credibility would've suffered a disastrous blow if he had just arbitrarily picked an Islamic sector in Beirut and bombed the hell out of it killing several thousand Muslims. I may be wrong, but I think we would be a lot closer to peace in the Middle East over the last decade or so if he *had*. But, clearly, 1983 was a different time period and such a level of retaliation would never have "passed muster" with President Reagan's boss: the American people. The result, however, was to plant the seed of perception within the Nation of Islam that America was weak, that the corruption of its myriad vices had left it hollow and with no stomach or heart for conflict. Each successive withdrawal of U.S. military forces only reinforced the perception. No matter how formidable the United States may *appear* (went Islamic reasoning), one good truck bomb explosion and they turn tail and run away. In defence of the "is *The Simpsons* on yet?" American public, I think that their acceptance of these atrocities—while misconstrued by the Nation of Islam as weakness—in actual fact, gave proof of a very broad-minded, cosmopolitan and philosophical magnanimity. A democracy—a *good* democracy—is always going to have a love-hate relationship with its military, tending toward the latter more often than the former. At the time of the attack on the USS Cole, you wouldn't have had to look far to find an American whose view of the attack was "well, it serves us right for all of our meddling in foreign countries." In most of New York City, in the Democrat half of Washington, in Hollywood, in the colleges and universities you couldn't, I would maintain, swing a dead cat at the time of the attack on the USS Cole without hitting an American whose viewpoint tended in that direction. Not too long ago, any citizen expressing aloud just such an opinion in any of the countries which make up the civilized world would have, more likely as not, found themselves prosecuted on a charge of treason. But seeing near-treason—hell, *actual* treason—as just another form of free speech, is one of the more dazzling examples of *purist democracy* that has made the United States "the shining city on the hill", a phrase Ronald Reagan was incapable of using to describe his native land without having his eyes mist over (and a feat—I freely confess—I am unable to manage, myself, as I type the words). A democracy which is capable of treating treasonous remarks as free speech is—say what you will—a pretty broad-minded democracy. However *being* just such a democracy is a two-edged sword: in answer to the attack on the USS Cole, all the U.S. government—all President Clinton—could do to reflect the will of "We the People" was to fire a few cruise missiles in the direction of the caves of Tora Bora and wait for *The Simpsons* to come on. There was no real mandate from "We the People" beyond that. Had he attempted any *larger* military response he would've been committing political suicide—particularly among his own core constituency (see above). Bearing the station master model in mind, this made an escalation on the part of Islamic terrorists inevitable. If all you get for disabling the USS Cole is a cruise missile "slap on the wrist," the only question was one of scale. How much *bigger* an atrocity could the Islamic terrorists imagine than the USS Cole attack?

Pretty big as it turns out.

[Arguably, the bombing of the Khobar Towers military housing project in Saudi Arabia was the larger—but less public—of the two catastrophes and, consequently, the one which more accurately prefigured the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The sheer devastation which resulted from the truck bomb attack was the largest explosion ever investigated by the FBI, dwarfing the Oklahoma City bombing by a substantial margin. However, the love-hate relationship between the military and the American public cuts both ways—or it did, prior to 11 September—and the size of the Khobar Towers devastation was largely kept secret by the military—with the cooperation of the House of Saud—in a way that the Navy couldn't have managed with the USS Cole, since the Cole and the effects of that attack were basically a free-floating photo op in international waters.]

As Charles Krauthammer of the Washington Post Writers Group reported in his column of 18 January 2002: as early as 1996 (the year of the Khobar Towers attack) Osama bin Laden, in his "Declaration of War Against the Americans" was gloating, "Your most disgraceful case was in Somalia...when tens of your soldiers were killed in minor battles and one American pilot was dragged in the streets of Mogadishu, you left the area carrying disappointment, humiliation, defeat and your dead with you." Not one to mince words, bin Laden added (according to Krauthammer) "You have been disgraced by Allah and you withdrew. The extent of your impotence and weaknesses became very clear." A misunderstanding on bin Laden's part of the nature of democracy, of civilian control of the military and of the chain of command in the United States which originates in "We the People" whose collective will is enacted through the President by the implementing of those actions which, in an emergency, he infers to *be* the will of "We the People": actions which are then overruled, modified, curtailed or rubber-stamped by the Congress as the—no longer inferred, but now implied—will of "We the People" becomes clearer in the short- and long-term aftermath of any emergency. Rubber-stamped by the Congress in the case of FDR's reaction to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour as *conforming* to the will of "We the People" and severely curtailed in the case of the escalation and widening of the conflict in Vietnam by Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon as *violating* the will of "We the People". In 1993 it didn't require a rocket scientist to judge that "We the People" would take a dim view of a larger military presence in Somalia when, as Krauthammer so aptly puts it, "you go into a country of total strategic irrelevance for solely humanitarian reasons, then find yourself being fired upon by thugs and ingrates" as happened in Mogadishu. His conclusion, I believe, reflects with complete accuracy what the will of "We the People" was, would be and will be under those sorts of circumstances: "your tolerance for casualties is—and should be—virtually zero. You pick up and get out. This is not cowardice; this is common sense."

Osama bin Laden, on an on-going and rapidly escalating basis, misconstrued that level of common sense and accountability to “We the People” to his own—presumably monumental and permanent—detriment (wherever he might be skulking now)

His whereabouts, as well as the whereabouts of Taliban leader Mohammed Omar, in my view, shouldn't be of the paramount concern to the American people and their leadership that it appears to be. Although, again, from this side of the pond such paramount concern is certainly understandable. Although my knowledge of Tribal ways is certainly less extensive than my knowledge of Muslim ways—the latter interests me profoundly, the former not at all—what indirect awareness of Tribalism I've been able to pick up from my readings of the Sunnu—the biographies—of the Prophet Muhammad, my best guess is that most of the Taliban and al-Qaeda leadership has been ransomed and that these were the actual negotiations which were taking place at Kandahar and at Tora Bora—when the Taliban and al-Qaeda membership were (theoretically) negotiating terms of surrender—after which everyone just seemed to “disappear” into thin air. The ransoming of captives has a long history in Islam and among the pagan tribal Arabs which were their predecessors and the Afghan Tribes which they closely resemble, structurally. Essentially, ransoming guarantees that a warrior of noble birth and from a good family isn't going to languish in prison or face execution in the aftermath of a battle or war. Once it is clear, as was the case in Afghanistan, that one side has lost, the two sides enter into negotiations as to how much the losing side is going to pay the winning side to recover the captives of noble birth and good family. A price is arrived at, the families in question are notified, the money changes hands and the ransomed captives are returned to their homelands and their families. I suspect that the Taliban and al-Qaeda membership which were turned over to the American authorities were those Muslims of poorer birth and without monied families able or willing to ransom them. This will be a bitter pill for most Americans to swallow, but it really shouldn't be. The disgrace of their humiliating defeat in Afghanistan will follow the ransomed former captives back to Chechnya, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia and (I suspect) primarily Pakistan or wherever else they came from and I don't think it a stretch of the imagination to say that many of them, as the years go by, will envy as the more fortunate their Muslim brothers interned at Camp X-Ray at Guantanamo Bay where at least (as they will see it) every Muslim gets to live in the same level of humiliation and disgrace with nothing to compare it to and no *umma*—Muslim community—to be largely ostracized from and disgraced within: unlike those ransomed “veterans” of the Afghanistan debacle who—repatriated to Iraq or Iran, say—will be viewed, universally and ill-disguisedly, as something lower and more pathetic than a whipped dog by those around them.

Hyperbole?

Hardly. In both the Torah and the Koran, the sure sign of God's favour is the disproportionate military victory. Leviticus 26:8: “And five of you shall chase a hundred and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword” is directly paralleled by the Sura (chapter) The Spoils 8:65-67: “O Prophet! God, and such of the faithful as follow thee, will be all sufficient for thee. O Prophet! Stir up the faithful to the fight. Twenty of you who stand firm shall vanquish two hundred: and if there be a hundred of you they shall vanquish a thousand of the infidels, for they are a people devoid of understanding. Now hath God made your work easy, for He knoweth how weak ye are. If there be a hundred of you who endure resolutely, they shall vanquish two hundred; and if there be a thousand of you, they shall vanquish two thousand by God's permission; for God is with those who are resolute to endure.”

Of course the “infidels” referred to in The Spoils are the pagan Arabs of Mecca who opposed Muhammad and the whole *notion* of there being Only One God—something I'll be getting to in a little while—but I think it is far more worthwhile for the American people to recognize that, from a Muslim standpoint, it will soon be inescapable (if it isn't already) that God...*vehemently*...took the *American* side in the conflict in Afghanistan...

[The U.S. Special Forces unit, Tiger 03, as an example—consisting of *ten* Marines—is credited with the death of 1,500 Taliban and al-Qaeda by calling in pinpoint-accurate-air-strikes on a series of cave complexes. That *one* anecdotal fact, I can guarantee you, is of *infinitely* greater moment, significance and concern to Terrorist Islam than whether or not Osama bin Laden—glassy-eyed, trembling and muttering into his own daisy-cutter-punctured-eardrums—is “at large” in some Pakistani backwater of a village...or whether he *ever* ends up in the custody of the U.S. government. Osama bin Laden is the whipped dog *di tutti* whipped dogs of the Militant Muslim world at this point. It would, I think, only diminish the lustre of the U.S. victory in Islamic eyes for the U.S. to continue to express any...undue...interest in him.]

...as opposed to the Muslim expulsion of the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1989, after the Soviets had suffered 17,000 casualties on the ground. In *that* instance, the purest of the Muslim pure (as the Taliban and their Muslim allies had come to see themselves) could justifiably say that God was with *them* in their efforts and that the small God-fearing nation had—like a textbook reading of The Spoils—put their vastly larger opponent to flight. No big surprise. A God-fearing country will always put a godless country to flight when push comes to shove. What was of interest among the God-fearing at the start of the American bombing campaign, 7 October 2001 was: which side will God take? Or will God take either side? My own view was that the conflict would be a long one, the air war could be taken only so far and then the ground war would have to begin. The fact that all of the working models for extricating enemy forces from caves entailed *huge* casualties on the part of the attacking force (the vast

majority from “friendly fire”)...a 10:1 ratio or thereabouts, was what I had read...meant that the conflict would only start to get really interesting, militarily, a few months in. From what I was able to read between the lines of the heavily censored news we were getting at the time, this was not far off the Pentagon’s own best assessment and the motivation behind President Bush cautioning the American people *repeatedly and emphatically* that there were going to be a *lot* of casualties. I assumed this would be one of the President’s major roles: to *keep* repeating this for the three or four months of the air war so it wouldn’t come as a shock to “We the People” when the body bags started coming home in prodigious numbers along about February or March. Slobodan Milosevic had held out against the bombardment of Kosovo for a little over eighty days, but (went my best thinking) that was in a largely urban environment and in a context where it would be noticeable to the leadership that many of the niceties of their civilization were taking an awful beating. As everyone’s quality of life began to deteriorate something had to give and it only seemed sensible to surrender Milosevic to the world community and sue for peace. Afghanistan (I thought) had more in common with Vietnam: insofar as the enemy was effectively indistinguishable from the civilian population (once he put his gun and ammunition down). Also—Vietnam-like—when the enemy is...*literally!*...able to subsist on a bowl of rice and a pot of green tea a day, it becomes exponentially more difficult to punish him in any militarily significant meaning of the term. That is, where there is no appreciable quality of life beyond mere *subsistence*, there is no militarily effective way to erode the enemy’s quality of life as a *strategy*. Couple that with praying five times a day (you may think it irrelevant: I think it central), complete abstinence from alcohol and the fact that for twenty years or more the principle industry in Afghanistan had been the waging of war...well, let’s just say that I was not alone in my assessment that this was going to be far from a cake-walk.

And yet, a cakewalk it was. So much so that it took *everyone* by complete surprise, including the American military leadership. The air war was over—not in *eighty* days, as in Kosovo—but in *thirty-five* days. And what was even more unbelievable, when the air war was over, the war *itself* was over for all intents and purposes.

As a Deist, as a monotheist, when something happens that is that...*dramatically!*...inexplicable, when the result is so completely and thoroughly at odds with every *genuinely* expert opinion from that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to that of the New York Times editorial board, there is, ultimately, only one sensible conclusion to come to:

God.

How much more eloquently could God have expressed His preference for freedom and for democracy over oppression and theocracy? These were the purest of the purest Muslims, the most devout and the most battle-hardened and militarily successful Muslims of modern times living *in* and fighting *for* the purest Muslim state since...well, it would be a good exercise in Muslim scholarship to determine at what previous point in the history of Islam there had existed a more Islamically ascetic, a less Islamically corrupt and a more avowedly devout Muslim nation than Afghanistan under the Taliban. Iran after the Shah was deposed in 1979? Possibly, but it was still largely Westernized, still rotten to various of its cores both from a Muslim *and* Western standpoint. Afghanistan had drawn to itself the purest and most devout Muslims at around the same time but had, in recent years, effectively expunged almost every trace of that Great Satan of Orthodox Islam: Westernization. Television? Banned. Movies? Banned. Music? Banned. Balloons? Banned. Anything which was not Islam, anything which was not widely accepted as having solid roots in the Koran, solid roots in the way of life on the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century? Banned.

And it was exactly this form of theocratic rule which—against all accepted odds, against even the most optimistic of expert opinion—suffered the most disproportionate and absolute military defeat in recent memory. Clearly, to me, God’s indisputable preference was for a nation which will always stand for the freedom to choose, the freedom to exercise the free will which God has given each of us—even though vast numbers of the people of that nation, millions upon millions *choose not to believe in God*. And to give that nation an overwhelming...*mind-bogglingly overwhelming and dramatically disproportionate!*...victory over those who would *impose* God, impose *belief in God* and impose the *worship of God* on others *against their God-given free will*.

Theocracy? No!

Freedom?

Yes!

*essay*

## Islam, My Islam

I concluded the first instalment of “Islam, My Islam” with the assertion that the recent overwhelming victory by the United States in Afghanistan was evidence of God’s preference for Freedom over Theocracy. I’ll get back to that—I hope—next issue (or the issue after: I don’t think I’m going to be able to finish this in three parts as I originally planned), in the meantime, I thought it

worth doing a *Reader's Digest* version (assuming *Reader's Digest* would ever run anything this long) of the early history of Islam excerpted from Essad Bey's *Muhammad, A Biography*, a 1936 incarnation of Ibn Ishaq's original biography from the eighth century. Please note that this is not Scripture. Although all biographies of Muhammad have their origins in Ibn Ishaq's work and feature the same events, there is a *lot* of commentary and variations, conclusions drawn, different phrasing in direct quotes. As opposed to Scripture: where a Koran from the eighth century contains the same words as a Koran from the twentieth century. And with that *caveat emptor*:

### Part III

The Prophet Muhammad was born in the year 570. While his mother, Amina, was pregnant with him, his father, Abdallah died. Then his mother died when he was six and the orphan was raised by his grandfather. His grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, was the acknowledged leader of the Koreish tribe, guardians of the Holy City of Mecca ("We are the sons of Abraham, men of honour, governors of the house of Allah, inhabitants of Mecca. No Arab has such virtue as we, nor such dignity as we. No man of the Koreish should honour territory which is secular in the way he honours that which is sacred—Mecca, the Sanctuary and the holy territory—and the profane—that which is outside the sacred limits.") When Abdul Muttalib died none of his sons was influential enough to succeed him and leadership and influence began to pass to the descendants of his cousin Omayya. After the death of his grandfather, Muhammad was entrusted to the custody of his uncle, Abu Talib.

Muhammad worked a variety of jobs as a young man—the best of which was as a superintendent in the house of a twice divorced (or widowed, accounts vary) woman named Khadija, reputedly the most honoured woman among the Koreish because of her lineage: not only the highest in nobility but also the richest in property. Muhammad became her "cameleer", a merchant travelling in caravans, conducting business and trade on her behalf, a trade at which he proved to be adept. Quite taken as she was with the young man, Khadija—some twenty years his senior—proposed to him and he accepted. She contrived to hold a dinner where she got her father Khowailid so drunk that he was unaware that he was giving her permission to marry one of her servants in exchange for a dowry of a few camels. She and Muhammad were faithfully married to one another for twenty-four years until her death. She was the only one of his wives to bear him children: three daughters who lived and three sons (Qasim, Abd Menaf and Atakhir) who died.

One of the greatest events in the history of the city of Mecca took place during Muhammad's lifetime: the reconstruction of the Kaaba, the sacred cube which Arab pilgrims circumambulated on the *haji*, or pilgrimage. The original Kaaba had, reputedly, been built by Adam and had housed, since mankind's beginnings, the sacred white stone—the *ruku* as it is called, which Adam had brought to earth with him—white as the wings of an archangel—and which, it was said, absorbed men's sins when they kissed it so that, even by Muhammad's time, it had become black as night with the sins it will hold until Judgement Day. The Kaaba was later reconstructed, according to legend, by Abraham and Ishmael. Uncertain if Allah, or the three-hundred-and-sixty other gods of the Kaaba would permit it to be torn down and replaced, one Meccan was selected to begin the demolition. Everyone waited to see if he would be, you know, struck by lightning or something. When nothing happened to him, they all pitched in. And...

*...when they reached the foundations "in the buttress they found an inscription in Syrian, and knew not what it meant until a Jew read it for them: 'I am Allah, the lord of Mecca! I created it when I created the heavens and the earth, when I fashioned the sun and the moon, and I have appointed over it seven angels; Mecca will not perish until its two hills perish! It will be blessed to its inhabitants in water and milk!' When they reached further into the foundations they found them to be green boulders adhering together like a single stone. When a man of the Koreish inserted a lever to separate the boulders, the whole of Mecca began to shake; so the people touched the foundation no more.*

*The groups of Koreish now collected stones for the rebuilding, each group gathering separately and they built until they reached the spot for the ruku.....Then all the people quarrelled, because each group wished the honour of lifting the stone into place. So bitter were the quarrels that the groups made alliances and prepared to fight. One group produced a dish filled with blood and entered into a covenant unto death with another group by dipping their hands into the dish; they were therefore called blood-lickers...*

This “blood-thirstiness” is a recurring motif in the Arab world down to the present day and leads even a cursory scholar like myself to realize that “Blood-thirsty Arab” is not hyperbolic but is, in fact, the equivalent of the “Dirty Goyim”. There are Muslims and there are Blood-thirsty Arabs just as there are Christians and there are Dirty Goyim. A recent instalment of Anne Kingston’s “Modern Life” in the *National Post* recalled the murder of Jordan’s prime minister Wasfi al-Tal in Cairo’s Sheraton Hotel in 1971 by Black September, the first of many “elite” units of Yasser Arafat’s Al-Fatah thugs and gangsters (a role played today by the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade): “As the politician lay dying, his blood flowing across the marble floor, one of the assassins knelt and lapped up the blood with his tongue.” Whoever the assassin was, he might consider himself a Muslim. To me, he is just a blood-thirsty Arab.

*The situation remained thus for four or five nights; then the Koreish assembled in the mosque to consult and reach a decision, and the oldest man among them said at last, “Why not let he who next enters through the door of this mosque be the arbiter in this quarrel, and let him decide it?” They agreed, and the first who entered was Muhammad. And they said, “This is el Amin [Muhammad’s nickname among the Koreish, meaning the Reliable One] ! We agree that he shall judge.” When he came near they told him of the problem and he said, “Bring me a cloak.” When they had brought one, he placed the ruku in it with his own hands, saying, “Let every group take hold of a part of the cloak.” Then all of them lifted it together, and when they reached the spot, the Apostle placed it in position with his own hands, and the building was continued over it.*

Sometime after this, the happily-married Muhammad—now related by marriage to the wealthiest and most influential family in Mecca, prosperous as a merchant and loved by all he came in contact with—underwent a dramatic change.

Inexplicably, in a very short span of time, Muhammad—who had always been careful of his appearance, even to the point of vanity—suddenly ceased to care about his attire and his hair. Even more worrisome, from a Meccan standpoint, he ceased to care about his business affairs. He began, instead, to wander the desert and became an infrequent visitor to his own palatial home. He became a *hanif*, one of the unhappy “seekers-after-God” who inhabited the mountains and the valleys around Mecca. One of the oldest and best-known of the *hanifs* was one of Khadija’s cousins, Waraqa ben Nawfal, a blind man who had been a heathen, then a Jew and then a Christian and had been the first to translate parts of the Holy Scripture into Arabic.

For months Muhammad lived in and around Mount Hira, going days without food, progressively more fearful that he was possessed by a demon. “All my life I have abhorred the magicians and conjurers, and now I fear lest I become one myself,” he said to Khadija. Days, weeks and months passed by in misery and anguish.

Then came the night of el Qadr.

*In the night of el Qadr, in the month of Ramadan, the Word of God came to Muhammad who lay at the entrance to a cave on Mount Hira. Suddenly, he saw a vision—two eyes, the size of heaven, pierced through him and he heard a voice as distinct and clear as any he had ever heard, say,*

*“Iqra!”*

*“Recite!”*

*And as the voice was clear and easily understood, and had nothing terrifying about it, Muhammad answered, truthfully, “I cannot recite.” Unseen hands grasped him, threw him to the ground and began to choke him so that Muhammad thought he would suffocate. And again the voice commanded, “Recite.” In deathly fear, Muhammad answered, “What shall I recite?” Then the vision spread a great cloth before the eyes of the Prophet and, in fiery letters, Muhammad read the first revealed sura of the Koran [sura 96 if you’re looking for it: the suras of the Koran are arranged in descending order of length. “Clots of Blood”—or “Thick Blood”, as it’s also called—is one of the shortest of the 114 suras]*

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful!  
Recite, thou, in the Name of thy Lord who created—

Created man from clots of blood!  
 Recite thou! For thy Lord is the most beneficent  
 Who hath taught the use of the pen:  
 Hath taught man that which he knoweth not.  
 Nay, verily, man is insolent,  
 Because he seeth himself possessed of riches.  
 Verily, to thy Lord is the return of all.  
 What thinkest thou? Hath he followed the guidance? or enjoined piety?  
 What thinkest thou? Hath he treated the truth as a lie and turned his back?  
 What? Doeth he not know how that God seeth?  
 Nay, verily, if he desisteth not, We shall seize him by the forelock,  
 The lying, sinful forelock!  
 Then, let him summon his associates;  
 We, too, will summon the guards of Hell.  
 Nay! Obey him not; but adore and draw nigh.

*Suddenly, the vision disappeared and all was silent about Muhammad. Night lay over him and the desert slept, as the world itself slept in the night of el Qadr. Muhammad arose, stepped out of the cave and climbed to the top of the mountain. He saw the immense canopy of stars over Arabia, the fantastic pointed rocks and outcroppings, the city of Mecca and the Kaaba, the House of God at its center. And—again—a voice, like the stirring of the desert wind, came to his ear and spoke:*

Thou art the Messenger of God, o Muhammad, and I am Gabriel, His archangel.

*Then, the voice was silent, the two great eyes looking at him. Muhammad looked to the right and to the left, up and down. All around him was the piercing gaze of the archangel. Dizzily, Muhammad ran down the mountain. Like a madman, like one pursued, he ran through the rocky ravines. Until noon of the next day, he roamed through the valley and—everywhere!—the eyes of Gabriel followed him.*

Muhammad ultimately fled to his home and to his wife's side:

*“When I came to Khadija I narrated to her what I had seen and she said, ‘Be of good cheer and comfort thyself! I swear by Him in whose hand the life of Khadija is, that I hope thou wilt be the prophet of this nation!’ Then she arose, collected her garments around her and departed to Waraqa.” She described to him what Muhammad had seen and heard, and Waraqa exclaimed, “Holy! Holy! I swear to Him in whose hands the life of Waraqa is, that the Law of Moses has been bestowed upon him and he is the prophet of this nation! Tell him to stand firm.” Khadija then returned to the apostle of God and informed him of what Waraqa had said.*

*On the following day, Muhammad—still doubting and disbelieving—went to the Kaaba. According to custom, he circumambulated the holy edifice seven times, and at the seventh time he came upon the blind Waraqa. “Tell me what you have seen and heard,” Waraqa bade him, and when Muhammad repeated what Khadija had already told him, he said with a trembling voice, “Verily, you are the Prophet of this people for the greatest of all archangels has appeared to you. Men will not believe you. They will call you a liar, will mistreat you, damn you and oppose you. Remain steadfast, however, for you have been called to be the Prophet of the people.” And the old man bowed down before Muhammad and kissed him and blessed him.*

*“I am the Messenger of God,” said Muhammad, in the courtyard of the Kaaba surrounded by three-hundred-and-sixty idols of stone and wood.*

The revelations didn't resume for some time and Muhammad began to despair. Finally

*In order to put an end to the tortures, the despair and the torments which racked his soul, the Prophet decided to climb upon a high peak and cast his body—which he had become convinced was possessed by demons—into the yawning void below. He bent down and saw little stones,*

*which his foot dislodged, vanish into the deep. Only one step separated him from everlasting peace. Suddenly, he heard a voice, low but audible, in his ear. Muhammad stood rooted to the spot. His eyes swept the horizon, then he looked up and—high above his head—was the Indescribable One, the archangel who revealed to him the second sura [sura 93, “The Brightness”]:*

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful!  
By the noon-day brightness and by the night when it darkeneth!  
Thy Lord hath not forsaken thee, neither hath he been displeased.  
And surely shall the future be better for thee than the past:  
And in the end shall thy Lord be bounteous to thee and thou be satisfied.  
Did he not find thee an orphan and give thee a home?  
And found thee erring and guided thee?  
And found thee needy and enriched thee?  
As to the orphan, therefore, wrong him not;  
And as to him that asketh of thee, chide him not away.  
And as for the favours of thy Lord: tell them abroad.

*Accordingly, God’s Last Apostle began—at first in secret—to promulgate the gospel bestowed by God upon him to those of his family whom he trusted:*

*When prayer was made obligatory to God’s Last Apostle, Gabriel came to him when he was in the highest part of Mecca and spurred his heel into the ground towards the valley; a spring gushed forth and Gabriel performed religious ablutions. Muhammad observed how purification for prayers was to be made, and washed himself likewise. Then Gabriel rose and prayed, and God’s Last Apostle did so after him, and then Gabriel departed. When God’s Last Apostle came to Khadija he performed the religious ablutions in her presence to show her how purity was attained, just as Gabriel had done. And she, too, washed as she had been shown. Then the Apostle prayed as Gabriel had prayed, and Khadija prayed after him.*

*Then Gabriel came to him and held noon prayers when the sun passed its zenith; and prayed the afternoon prayers with him when his shadow was the same length as his own body. Then he prayed the sunset prayers when the sun disappeared, and the last evening prayer when the twilight disappeared. Next day, he held morning prayers with the Apostle at dawn; then the midday prayers when the shadow was one with him; and afternoon prayers when it was twice as long as he; then the sunset orisons when the sun disappeared as on the preceding day. Then he prayed with him the last evening prayers when the first third of the night had elapsed, and lastly the morning prayers, when the morning dawned but the sun had not yet risen. Then he said, “O Muhammad! The time of prayer is between thy prayers of yesterday and today.”*

The first male to believe in God’s Last Messenger was Ali, Muhammad’s cousin, whom Muhammad had adopted when a severe famine had made the strain of caring for his large family a burden to Muhammad’s uncle and Ali’s father, Abu Talib.

*One day, Abu Talib happened to discover them at prayer and asked the Apostle, “What religion is this that I see you practicing?” He replied, “This is the religion of God, and of His angels, of His apostles and of our father Abraham. God has sent me with this religion, as an apostle to His servants; and you, my uncle are the most worthy on whom I could bestow advice and invitation to guidance; you are the most worthy to comply in it and to aid me therein.” But Abu Talib said, “I cannot abandon the religion of my forefathers and what they believed in; but no harm shall be done to you as long as I live.” Abu Talib asked Ali, “What religion is this thou believest in?” and Ali replied, “I believe in the Apostle of God and that his revelation is true. I pray with him and I follow him.” His father said, “He has called thee only to what is good; therefore obey him.”*

Ali was ten years old at the time and—after a dinner which the Prophet had hosted for the men of his family in his first attempt to convert them—was the only one to step forward and profess Islam. “You see?” the Apostle of God said to his relatives, “This is my vizier, my satrap.” After the death of the Prophet, this would bring about a fundamental schism within Islam which makes the fracture

between Catholicism and Protestantism look like a minor tiff by comparison. We'll get to that in due course.

The next to believe was Zayd, who had arrived from Syria as a slave. A nephew of Khadija had given him to her as a present. When Muhammad saw him he asked Khadija for him and she agreed. Muhammad then freed him and adopted him as his son. Zayd's father came looking for him and found him. Muhammad gave him the choice of staying with Muhammad or returning to his father and Zayd chose to remain with Muhammad. When God bestowed Muhammad's mission on him, Zayd professed Islam.

Next to profess Islam was Abu Bakr, *Assidiq* ("The True"). Muhammad later said, "I have preached Islam to no one who did not hesitate, consider, and contradict, save Abu Bakr, who neither hesitated nor was perplexed." Abu Bakr's popularity among the Koreish led to Uthman, al-Zubayr, Abdul-Rahman, Sad bin Abu Waqqas and Talha professing Islam at his invitation. In the entire Arabian peninsula there were now eight Arab men—actually seven Arab men and one Arab boy—who believed in One God.

*Soon several men and women had made their profession of Islam and it was much discussed in Mecca. Then God commanded his Apostle to make public the revelation and to invite the people to accept it; hitherto—for three years since the first revelation—it had been kept secret. God said to him, "Publish that which thou hast been commanded, and turn away from the idolaters."*

*When the Apostle began to spread Islam among his people as God had commanded him, they did not gainsay him until he began to abuse their idols.*

At the time, Mecca, the Sanctuary and the Kaaba had degenerated almost entirely into paganism. The Sanctuary itself was encircled by the aforementioned hundreds of pagan idols—including statues of Abraham and Ishmael and a painting of the Virgin Mary—and virtually every religion and pseudo-religion was welcomed to make the Sanctuary a pilgrimage destination. The Koreish had even instituted a rule that no food could be brought into the sacred precincts from outside (which might be where the Disney Corporation got the idea for Disneyland) and that clothing that was brought from outside and worn while performing the circuits of the Kaaba needed to be thrown away immediately afterwards for the sake of purity. Needless to say—given that the sale of food and clothing in Mecca was a lucrative source of Koreish wealth—disapproving of the scam didn't endear Muhammad to them:

*Several nobles of the Koreish, including Utba and Abu Sofyan, went to Abu Talib and said, "Your nephew has insulted our gods and condemned our religion. He considers our young men to be fools and our fathers to have erred. You must either restrain him or allow us free action against him, since your religion is the same as ours; opposed to his." But the Apostle continued to preach the religion of God and to seek conversions, and the people hated him. Again they went to Abu Talib and said, "You are aged, noble and highly respected among us and we have already asked you to prohibit your nephew from offending us. But you have not prohibited him and, by Allah, we shall not overlook his insults unless you guarantee his future good behaviour. Otherwise, we shall fight both him and you." After this they departed and Abu Talib was much grieved by the enmity of his tribe; but he could not surrender or desert the Apostle of God.*

*After this visit, Abu Talib sent for the Apostle and said, "Consider my life and yours, and do not burden me with what I cannot bear." God's Last Messenger feared from these words that his uncle had determined to desert him and he said, "If they were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, I would not abandon my mission." Then tears started in his eyes and he wept. But when he turned to depart, Abu Talib said, "Nephew! Go, and speak what you wish. By Allah! I shall never fail you."*

*And the nobles went once more to Abu Talib and offered him the brilliant youth Umara in exchange for Muhammad, but Abu Talib replied, "It is a wicked thing you propose, that you give me your son to feed, and I give you mine to kill! This shall never be!"*

This sort of tribal loyalty runs deep within the Arab heart—both pagan and Muslim—due, in no small part (I suspect) to the fact that every Arab and every Muslim recognizes that at any given point

Abu Talib might have weakened and surrendered Muhammad to the not-so-tender mercies of the Koreish and Islam would have died in the cradle. It's really the reverse of the Jesus circumstance: had the Jews *not* surrendered Jesus to the Romans and had Caesar's representative in Palestine *not* ordered his execution—thus welcoming Jesus' martyrdom into the heart of the Roman Empire and sowing the seeds of that Empire's destruction/conversion—Christianity might have died in the cradle. On a less exalted level of contemplation, I think this explains why the offer of \$25 million U.S. for Osama bin Laden and demands that the Taliban surrender bin Laden into American custody fell on entirely and scrupulously deaf Muslim ears. Faced with the offer, every Afghan, al-Qaeda and Taliban Muslim became Abu Talib and Abu Talib can make only one right choice under the circumstances: you just don't surrender a Muslim to the infidels.

Faced with the season of pilgrimage in Mecca and an unrepentant Muhammad who continued to preach the Suras given to him by the One God, the Koreish needed some sort of explanation for the pilgrims as to *what* this fellow Muhammad *was* exactly. So the Koreish assembled to discuss the matter. It was suggested to al-Walid, their chief, that they call the Apostle of God a soothsayer. "He is not a soothsayer. We have seen soothsayers; he does not murmur and rhyme as they do." Then it was suggested that he was possessed by djinns (wicked spirits—not as bad as a Satan but wicked: as God says in the Koran, "I will surely fill hell with Djinn and men together." Sura 32:13). "He is not possessed. We have seen lunatics and know them. He does not gasp, nor roll his eyes, nor mutter." A poet? "He is not a poet. We know all the poets and their styles. He is not a poet." What then?

*The best will be to say that he is a sorcerer, because he has come with words which are sorcery and which separate a man from his father or from his brother or from his wife or from his family.*

The Koreish sat by the roadside during the season of pilgrimage, warning everyone about Muhammad. Which, of course, only made everyone more interested and the fame of the Apostle of God began to spread outward from Mecca. The Koreish imprisoned many of the believers, heaped insults on them and tried to turn them away from Islam. That didn't work either. So they sent for Muhammad.

*The Apostle of God hastened to them in the hope that they had conceived a favourable opinion of what he had told them. But they only accused him once more of seeking riches and power. This he denied and reaffirmed his mission from God. [They said to him:]*

*"Ask, then, your Lord to send an angel to bear witness to your veracity. Ask Him to give you gardens, palaces and treasures of gold and silver to enrich you; we know you go, now, to the markets to procure food as we procure it. Then, we shall know your rank and station with Allah." The Apostle of God said, "I shall not do this, nor ask for this. I was not sent to you for this; but God has sent me as a bearer of glad tidings and a preacher."*

*They went on, "Then cause the heavens to fall upon us, for we shall not believe you unless you do something miraculous." God's Last Messenger replied, "This is the choice of God! If He wishes, He will do it." Then they said, "We shall not cease to persecute you until we destroy you or you destroy us. We shall not believe you until you come with Allah and all the angels."*

Many persecutions and imprisonments and tortures of converts to Islam ensued, again, with no appreciable effect apart from bringing more converts.

*The Koreish decided to counteract Muhammad's influence by forming a league against him and his followers. They applied economic and social sanctions, forbade trade with him and banned the Believers from marrying Koreish women. This boycott had some success and the Apostle lived in a virtual state of siege for close on three years, except during the period of pilgrimage. All he could do was consolidate the faith of those who were with him. At last, however, the ban was lifted through the influence of several Koreish who—though not Believers—sympathized with their plight. The Apostle was now fifty years of age.*

Khadija, the wife of the Apostle, and Abu Talib, his uncle and protector died the same year, reportedly within three days of each other. After the death of Abu Talib the Koreish heaped greater

insults upon the Prophet—which they would not have attempted while Abu Talib was alive. One strew dust on Muhammad’s head. The Apostle went with the dust on his head to his house and one of his daughters washed it off and wept. The Apostle said, “Do not weep, my daughter. God will protect thy father.”

Shortly thereafter, a turning point in the history of Islam took place. During the next season of pilgrimage, Muhammad went among the Arab tribes, introducing himself, and met a small company of the Khazraj—a most fateful meeting, indeed.

*When the Apostle of God met them at al-Aqaba, he asked, “Are you allies of the Jews?” And they said, “Yes.” They sat down with him and he invited them to believe in God, expounded Islam to them and recited the Koran. Now, God had ensured that the Jews who lived in the country of the Khazraj, and who were Children of the Book (whereas the Khazraj themselves were polytheists and idolaters) should always say—whenever a quarrel broke out between themselves and the Khazraj—“A prophet will soon be sent and we shall become his followers and kill you with his aid.” So, when the Apostle of God spoke to these men of Khazraj and invited them to believe in God, they said to one another, “This is the prophet with whom the Jews have threatened us. We must forestall them and join him before they do.” Accordingly, they accepted Islam, saying, “We have left our people, for there is no tribe so divided by enmity and wickedness as they. Perhaps God will unite them through you. We shall go to them and urge them to accept your views and this religion so that, if God unites them around you, none will be more exalted than yourself.” Then they returned to their country as believers.*

*When they reached Medina, they spoke of the Apostle of God and invited their people to accept Islam, so that acquaintance with it spread until there was not one among the dwellings of all their families in which the name of the Apostle of God had not been spoken. The converts in Medina became known as the ansar, the Helpers.*

*The next year (621 C.E.), when the season of pilgrimage came again, twelve men of the Helpers met God’s Last Messenger at the hill of al-Aqaba; this is called the meeting of “the first hill”:*

*“We paid homage to the Apostle of God after the unmilitant manner of women—this happened before war was made incumbent upon us. We pledged that we would not associate other gods with God, nor steal, nor commit fornication, nor kill our female children...”*

Prior to the advent of Islam, it had been a commonplace practice among the tribal Arabs to bury female babies alive in the sand. Not all of them, of course, but enough that female infanticide was, as I say, a commonplace practice in Arabia in the seventh century.

*“...nor tell lies, nor disobey what is right. If we fulfill these conditions, paradise is to be ours; if we transgress and suffer punishment in this world, it will be an expiation. But if our sin remains concealed until the Day of Resurrection, the affair rests with God to punish or forgive.”*

Skipping ahead to the *second* “meeting of the hill”:

*“The Apostle of God came with his uncle al-Abbas, an unbeliever who, nevertheless, wished to see his nephew conclude a firm alliance. Al-Abbas spoke first, saying, ‘You know that Muhammad is our kinsman! We have protected him against those of our own people who oppose him. He enjoys great dignity among his people and protection in his country; nevertheless, he shuns them and wishes to ally himself with you...’”*

I suspect that this “white lie” was why an unbeliever like al-Abbas was deputized to speak on behalf of the Prophet. At the very least it was an exaggeration to say that Muhammad “enjoys great dignity among his people and protection in his country”. But saying it circumvented the obvious Arab tribal question of, “If you’re the Prophet of God, why are the people of your own tribe so opposed to you? And why should we protect someone that another tribe has so thoroughly rejected?” I doubt the tribal Arabs would have been familiar with—or much impressed by—Jesus’ observation that “a prophet is

not without honour except in his own country.” Keep Uncle al-Abbas in mind, he becomes quite significant much, much later on.

*“If, therefore, you think you can keep your promise and protect him against his enemies, you may assume the burden you have undertaken; but if there is any likelihood of your surrendering and abandoning him after he has gone over to you, then leave him be, for he is safer among his own people.’ Then we asked the Apostle for his opinion and he said, ‘I call on you to protect me as you would protect your own women and children.’ A man called al-Bara then took hold of his hand and swore, ‘We shall protect you against everything from which we protect our own selves. Accept therefore our allegiance. We are warriors who have inherited the right to arms.’*

*“This speech was interrupted by Abul-Haytham, who said, ‘We have ties with other men (he meant the Jews of Medina) which we would have to sever. If we do this, and God aids you to victory, will you not return to your own people and abandon us?’ The Apostle of God smiled and replied, ‘By no means. Blood is blood, and shedding is shedding; you belong to me and I to you. I shall fight those whom you fight and I shall be at peace with him who is at peace with you. Bring me twelve leaders who may be charged with their people’s affairs.’ And they brought nine men from the Khazraj tribe and three from the Aws tribe.*

*“The Apostle of God said to the twelve leaders, ‘You are the sureties for your people just as Jesus’ disciples were and I stand surety for my people.’ And they agreed.*

*“Al-Abbas asked the people, ‘Are you aware of the conditions on which you pledge allegiance to this man? You pledge yourselves to him, to wage war against all and sundry. If your possessions should be ruined by misfortune and your nobles slain, and you should give him up, then you will reap shame in this world and the next. If, however, you think you can keep your promises in the face of all misfortune, then it will profit you in this world and the next.’ They replied, ‘We shall take him even at the risk of losing all else,’ and turning to the Apostle, they asked, ‘But what will be our reward if we keep our promise?’ He replied, ‘Paradise!’ and they said, ‘Stretch forth thy hand,’ and paid him homage.”*

It seems to me that this is one of the linchpin moments in the history of Islam which—viewed in what I, and I think most reasonable people would assess as a “skewed” fashion—underpins the notion of martyrdom as a centrepiece of Islam. Muhammad was seeking *protection* from the Koreish and promising the reward of Paradise for that *protection*. He doesn’t attempt to whip the Khazraj into a killing frenzy. Even al-Abbas’ assertion of what was at stake: “your possessions should be ruined, and your nobles slain,” doesn’t suggest personal martyrdom even as a subtext. Any and all men of the Khazraj tribe, under tribal law, would do exactly what the nobles of that tribe told them to do. If that entailed dying in a conflict ordered by the nobles, well, that was just part and parcel of being a tribal member in good standing. That treaty just meant that protecting Muhammad was one of the things that all members of the tribe were now responsible for—it was not intended that they would provoke a suicidal conflict in order to enter Paradise. To make a mental leap from that *Arab* tribal reality to the *Militant Islamic* misconception of *jihad*, “striving”—the full expression, used frequently in the Koran, is *jihad fi sabeel allah*: “striving in the path/the way/the cause of God”—is, to me (and again, I think to most reasonable people and to most Muslims) a lunatic extrapolation. One which worsens—*anecdotally*—even as the vast majority of Arabs have been liberating themselves from their tribal loyalties and tribal constraints and implicit tribal blood-thirstiness and have come into a fuller possession of their God-given exercise of autonomous free will: even as the monotheistic—Muslim—nature largely supplants the tribal—blood-thirsty Arab—nature, it is, unfortunately, still the vanishing population which dominates Islam and the perception of Islam both from within and without: in that it is hard to *ignore* an insignificant minority or even to accurately perceive it *as* a minority when its members are blowing themselves up in discos, in pizza parlours and on buses and, in the process, killing dozens of civilians, calling it “striving in the path of God” and viewing themselves as martyrs.

*When God gave His Apostle permission to wage war, the promise to fight immediately became a condition of allegiance to Islam. This had not been so at the first meeting on the hillside, when homage was paid “in the manner of women”; God had not then given His Apostle permission to fight. He had given permission neither to wage war nor to shed blood, but only to call men to God, to endure insults patiently and to pardon the ignorant. Some of the*

*followers of the Apostle had therefore been forced to flee from persecution into the countryside, some to Abyssinia [sorry, owing to space constraints I skipped that part], others to Medina and elsewhere. When the Koreish rejected the mercy of God and spurned His prophet, they tormented or drove away men who proclaimed the One-ness of God, believed in His prophet and adhered to His religion.*

*God therefore permitted Muhammad to fight and to aid his followers against those who tyrannized them. The first verse which came down permitting him to wage war and to shed blood began “Permission is granted unto those who fight because they have been oppressed, and God may aid those who have been driven from their homes merely for saying “Our lord is God”...[decided emphasis mine]*

Again, using this as a foundation for, as an example, the *intifada* which the Arabs have been waging in and around Jerusalem for the last year and half is a lunatic extrapolation of a Koranic verse and the circumstances under which it was sent down to Muhammad. If there is any Jew who has ever driven anyone from his or her home for saying “Our lord is God,” I would sure like to meet him.

The larger point that I’m trying to make here is that it has to be born in mind when reading those Suras and verses which are concerned with waging war on the infidel (“Fight against them until there be no more temptation and until the religion be God’s”) that they were sent down to Muhammad *after* his alliance with the Khazraj when God had already given the pagan Arabs of Mecca, the Koreish, *more* than sufficient time to repent of their polytheism and their idolatry. Many, many of the suras of the Koran make mention of the fact that no civilization or people was ever destroyed except that God first sent “a plain warner,” a messenger or a prophet to warn that civilization or that people that they were skating on very thin ice, the clock was ticking down, times a-wasting, etc. etc. (See Jonah’s warning to the people of Nineveh in the Torah). Muhammad preached daily in the sacred precincts of Mecca for year upon year upon year the Word that God sent down to him through Gabriel. Finally, in God’s View (and who else’s View has any relevance in these situations?) enough was enough and harsher measures were required. For the Koreish, the alliance forged by Muhammad with the Khazraj meant that the last few seconds on the clock had ticked down, time was up and there was going to be a very short sudden-death overtime period. To view those suras and those verses which document God’s *seventh*-century judgement upon heathen, pagan idolators as having even the vaguest relevance to the U.S. housing a military contingent in Saudi Arabia or Muslim boys getting their hair cut like Leonardo diCaprio in the *twentieth* century is, to me, and (I have to believe) to any reasonable thinking Muslim, not only a lunatic extrapolation of those suras and those verses but betrays inescapable evidence of a shameful inclination to perceive inaccurately: to perceive the U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia, or Muslim boys wearing their hair like Leonardo diCaprio—or even the existence the State of Israel—as representing *oppression* of Islam, thus warranting God’s permission to wage war. Muhammad *was* oppressed by the *Koreish*, Islam *was* oppressed by the *Koreish*. Because of that *genuine* oppression, God gave Muhammad and his Muslim followers permission to fight against the *Koreish*.

*The verse continued by explaining that they (the Muslims) had committed no crime against the people (the Koreish) except that they worshipped God, and when they made Islam universal they would observe the appointed times for prayer, give alms and enjoin all men to do good and to abstain from evil.*

Again, I think it a lunatic extrapolation to see this instruction as meaning “observe the appointed times for prayer, give alms, enjoin all men to do good and to abstain from evil and if they—in your view—don’t cooperate fully, then, by all means, blow yourself up while standing next to them in a pizza parlour.”

The anonymous narrator of the events of this second meeting concludes with:

*“After the act of allegiance was over, Satan roared from the top of the hill in such a loud voice as I had never heard. He cried to the people of Mina (the surrounding countryside): ‘Beware of this despicable apostate and his followers! Verily they are assembled to attack you!’ And the Apostle of God replied, ‘This is the Contemptible One of the hill. Harken to me, O enemy of God! I shall make an end of thee yet!’ Then the Apostle told the people to depart to their caravans again, but one of them said, ‘If thou wish it, tomorrow we shall attack these people of Mina with our swords.’ The Apostle of God replied, ‘We have not been*

*commanded to do that.' Accordingly we returned to our caravans and slept there till the morning."*

There's a good example of "Djinn possession" or the inability of pagan tribal Arabs to distinguish their right hand from their left, whatever you want to call it: "Hey, you *want* us to slaughter the people of Mina?" Nonono. *I'm* the Apostle of God. Slaughtering the people of Mina was *Satan's* idea. Fourteen hundred years later, that guy would probably fit the profile of a suicide bomber.

*When, on the hill, the Helpers swore allegiance to the Apostle, to adopt Islam, to aid him and those who followed him as well as any other Muslims who might seek shelter with them, he ordered his companions and others who were with him in Mecca to emigrate to Medina, that they might meet their Helper brothers. He said, "God has marked out for you kinsmen and homes where you may find refuge." Accordingly, the Meccan followers left the city in groups. These were afterwards known as the mohajirun, the Emigrants, and were then around a hundred in number.*

*But the Apostle of God remained in Mecca, waiting for God's command to leave Mecca and to migrate to Medina.*

The command came and soon Muhammad was living in Medina, where it became apparent that many of the Helpers were not exactly, well, *helpful*—paying lip-service to Islam but openly doubting the political wisdom of supporting the Apostle against the Koreish. These unhelpful Helpers came to be known—and reviled—as the *munaḥiqun*, the Hypocrites. Strategically, Muhammad attempted to win over the three Jewish tribes in Medina, the Banu Qainoqa, Banu Nadhir and the Banu Qorhaida (at this point he saw himself and his followers as indistinguishable from Jews and Christians so "one big happy family" was usually the first option he would pursue) to shore up his forces, drawing up a treaty specifying mutual support, and the paying of ransom and blood-ransom. Ransom was a negotiated amount for the return of a prisoner. Blood ransom was the amount paid to the family of someone that you had killed to keep them from sending someone to kill you. Even if the text has been corrupted over the centuries, it's an interesting document, jumping back and forth between "tribal Arabic" and "Islamic":

*In the Name of God, the merciful, the compassionate! This concerns the Believers fled from Mecca and those of Medina, as well as those who follow them; join with them, and fight with them, for they are a community excluding all other men!*

This would, to me—apart from the salutation—be a good example of the "tribal Arabic" part of the treaty and was probably not anything to get the Jews—who had been on the *losing* end of "excluding all other men" more often than the *winning* end for about five millennia by this point—terrifically enthused. Even when the document becomes more "Islamic":

*Verily, the protection of God is indivisible and extends to the meanest Believer of all; and each must befriend other Believers above all men. Jews who follow us shall be given aid and equality; they shall not be oppressed, nor shall aid be given to others against them. The safety of Believers is indivisible, no one shall be saved at the expense of another, when battles are being fought in the name of God, save with equity and justice.*

...it would not have taken a Talmudic scholar (of which there was, reportedly, no shortage in the three Jewish tribes living in Medina) to recognize an "Oy vey" clause when he saw it. "Save with equity and justice". "So, uh, *who*—*exactly*—gets to decide what *constitutes* 'equity and justice', in the event that—heaven forfend—we should not see eye-to-eye on something?" That, as it turns out, was covered in the last sentence of the *subsequent* clause, which (I would guess) skyrocketed off the "Oy vey" scale and then charted somewhere around 7.5 on the "Oy *gevalt*" scale: "If you are at variance on any matter, refer it to God or to Muhammad." Considering that God was possibly even called Allah in the document (as it was translated) this would represent something of a (permit me to indulge in a little understatement here) *problem* for the Jews and they probably signed the treaty with the same philosophical resignation that Israel's representatives brought to the signing of the Oslo Peace Accord at the White House in 1993—while listening, on that occasion, to translations of Yasser Arafat's

speech celebrating the document as a “final solution”. You know. Smiling on the outside (never let the goyim see you sweat) but with that “Oy *gevalt*” look in their eyes.

There follows in Ibn Ishaq’s biography of the Apostle a number of anecdotes concerning Muhammad’s relationship with the Jews of Medina, sometimes with the Christians taking a hand, sometimes not: the Jews testing Muhammad with really obscure questions of theology (many of which have, to me, the taint of Babylon or, at least, King Solomon about them, as well as Alan Moore’s beloved—you should again pardon the expression, *feh*—Kabalah and what-not) which, with God’s assistance, Muhammad always gets right. There is even sura 18 (The Cave) which predates Medina (again, according to Ibn Ishaq’s biography) where the Jews told the Koreish how to test whether Muhammad was a prophet or a fake by asking him about this group of believers who had fled the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and who had gone into a cave. Muhammad said, “I’ll tell you tomorrow.” And then didn’t hear anything from Gabriel for about a month until he was really taking a beating from the Meccans and the Jews, credibility-wise. According to prophetic tradition, this is where the term *inshallah*—God willing—came from. Gabriel berated the prophet for saying “I’ll tell you tomorrow,” instead of “if God wills, I will give you an answer tomorrow” or “perhaps my Lord will give you an answer tomorrow.” You know; you want to play “footsie” with the Jews of Mecca, that’s one thing—God will take it under consideration—but God is *not* your on-call research assistant. One noteworthy confrontation with a Christian sticks out, to me:

*A Christian asked Muhammad, “Do you want us to worship you as we worship Jesus, son of Mary?” The apostle replied, “God forbid that I should worship anyone besides Him, or command any other besides Him to be worshipped. God has not sent me to do that.”*

This is the fundamental Christian-Muslim schism: what is called in the Koran “joining gods with God.” I think Jesus (*and* Mary, for that matter) would be appalled that they were—and are—worshipped as deities. “Jesus is the son of God *and* Jesus *is* God”. You know, I just can’t follow that. Dave Sim is the son of Ken Sim. Dave Sim is not Ken Sim. “Like father, like son” is just an expression of approximations. “The apple never falls far from the tree” is not synonymous with “an apple is a tree.” Nu?

The Koranic verse which best approximates my own thinking on the subject is contained in the sura The Table, 5:19:

Infidels, now, are they who say, “Verily, God is the Messiah bin Mariam [*son of Mary*]!  
Say: “And who could aught obtain from God, if He chose to destroy the Messiah bin Mariam  
And his mother and all who are on the earth together?”

Exactly. Do you really think that Jesus and Mary were as powerful as God? That they weren’t—as the Muslims claim—*both* Muslims, in the sense of being completely *submissive* to God’s Will? That whatever ability they had—and have—to intercede with God (something else which I, for one, sincerely doubt) on behalf of Christians *supersedes* God’s Sovereignty? That is, if the Virgin Mary wants you to be blessed and God *doesn’t* want you to be blessed that it’s, hey, just too bad for God? It seems to me that only women and mothers can be stupid enough to believe that and that—whatever stupid women and mothers *want* to call it—it is Goddess worship, plain and simple. Blasphemy.

Anyway, Muhammad, having been granted permission to wage war against the Koreish launched his first attack in 623 when he was fifty-three years old. He equipped an expedition of twelve men and placed at its head Abdallah bin Jahsh, presenting him with sealed instructions he was not to open until he had reached the desert: “Go in the Name of God and with the blessings of God to Nakhla and there await the Koreish caravans. Force none of your men to accompany you. Fulfill my commands with those who follow you of their own free will.” Jahsh spied a small Koreish caravan accompanied by four merchants. In the middle of the night, as the full moon ushered in the sacred month (Rajab, in this case), the warriors attacked and bound the merchants. The caravan, laden with leather, raisins and wine fell into the hands of the robbers whose arrival back in Medina was met with consternation. It was an unforgivable transgression of Arab tribal law to wage war in one of the sacred months. This led to the sura verse:

They ask you about the Sacred Month and if it is permitted to wage war in it. It is a great sin to fight in the Sacred Month, but in the eyes of God, it is a much greater sin to shut

men out from the path of God and from God's House, the Kaaba.

(I can't vouch for the accuracy of the transcription: those suras contained in the *biographies* of Muhammad get pretty mangled over the centuries. I repeat, these are *not* Scripture.) From this point on, Islam becomes a strange mixture of piety and banditry—which looks very strange from a Judeo-Christian “Thou shalt not steal” perspective, but which was pretty much the status quo for tribal Arabs. Arab warfare was as concerned with looting an enemy's caravans as it was with meeting him on the battlefield...if not *more* concerned.

Next came the battle of Badr, where the Prophet—having bribed the Mecca-friendly tribes in the area to turn a blind eye—led three hundred men to Badr to intercept a large Koreish caravan returning from Syria. Abu Sofyan, who was leading the caravan, was no stranger to desert intrigue and noticed date stones in the camel dung along his route as he approached Badr (only in Medina were dates plentiful enough to feed to camels). He changed his route and sent messengers ahead to Mecca where the Koreish raised an army of a thousand in pretty short order—which was really at the upper range of what Arabs could even *conceive of* in an armed force (just so ardent were they to rid themselves of the Muslims). So, instead of a caravan, Muhammad and his Muslims were met by an armed force three times their size. The strange ballet of Arab battle was enacted. First poets rode in front of each army, reciting their poems of warfare, ridiculing their enemies.

[Sorry. That requires a short digression. Poetry was the life's blood of the Arab, on the order of the Celtic Bards. Powerfully magical. A particularly scathing and satirical poem could undermine a man's honour in a way that no sword could. At the same time, a poet was viewed as a thoroughly disreputable and low form of life: a profession for human weasels. It was Muhammad's greatest fear, as the suras were revealed to him, that he was becoming a poet and the perception that he was a poet persisted for many years: “Your verses are very beautiful”, “Your rhythm technique has created a new epoch in our literature.” To which Muhammad could only, wearily, reply, “I am not a poet and these are not my poems. They are the words of God which come from my mouth.” In answer to the accusation that Muhammad wrote the suras himself, God repeatedly invites the accusers to “bring forth a sura like it, if ye be men of truth.” The language of the Koran is still regarded as the most perfect incarnation of the Arabic tongue and its poetry—er “poetry”—is so integral to it that the *printed* Koran is regarded as a commentary and only the *recited* version—in Arabic—is considered scriptural. “*Iqra!*” “Recite!”]

Then individual nobles rode out to challenge their opposite numbers—in the case of the Muslims, Ali, Hamza and Obaida. Who won 3-1: three Koreish dead, one Muslim dead. Seriously. This was how an Arab battle of the seventh century was conducted. A decisive win by the hand-picked nobles over the hand-picked nobles was *usually* as far as it got. However, in this case, the Koreish—being infinitely *greater* nobles than the rag-tag Muslims and with, consequently, a greater loss of face at stake—took the loss really badly and, against Arab tradition, launched small band after small band against the three hundred Muslims. One-by-one, the best soldiers of Mecca met their deaths at the hands of Muhammad's thoroughly disciplined followers who just stayed in one body and met each attack as it came. Final score: Muslims 70 Koreish 14 .

Chasing the disgraced Koreish from the field, the Muslims acquired 150 camels, 10 horses, 70 prisoners (to be ransomed for a tidy sum), as well as weapons and clothing.

As a reward Ali was given Muhammad's daughter, Fatima, for his wife.

One result of the battle of Badr was that Muhammad became less convinced of the wisdom of the treaty he had signed with the Jews of Medina—now that he had seen that God's favour tended to more-than-balance-out the odds against the Muslims. As he told his followers, “Not you, but the angels of God fought our victory today.” Poetry figured here, as well—as many of the Jewish youths of Medina delighted in taunting the Prophet with their satirical verses.

*The Prophet was more sensitive to verses of ridicule, to loose humour and to disrespect than he was to open revolt and resistance...the Prophet did not persecute or execute many people and those who were so punished were, more often than not, poets and jokers. “The satire of the poet is more painful than the lance of the enemy,” Muhammad once said, for he was without a sense of humour.*

*Medina became an arena of terror. All blood-ties, all bonds of friendship were broken. Men were murdered without anyone daring to avenge them. No one thought of opposing the terror for now the Prophet was building the Nation of God. The Prophet was never unjust in his judgements. His blows were brutal, but they only hit the guilty.*

*It was not accidental that the majority of the punishment, murders and acts of terror were directed against the Jews. Slowly but steadily, the relationship between Muhammad and the three Jewish tribes of Medina grew worse. It became more and more apparent that there was no place in the Nation of God for the Jews (permit me a small interpolation: HAH!). For their part, the Jews were prepared to submit to the new state of affairs, but their adherence to their own faith was steadfast. Haughtily, they looked down upon the wild prophet of the heathen. Versed in Talmudic dialectics, they refuted Muhammad's arguments with ease.*

Let me interrupt to say that the Jews wouldn't have had to retreat to the exotic confines of the *Talmud* to refute Muhammad. His knowledge of the Torah and the Gospels themselves was abysmal. Reportedly, he believed that the Torah's Joseph—the second youngest son of Jacob and father to Manasseh and Ephraim—and the Synoptic Gospels' Joseph—the father of Jesus—were the same Joseph. In defence of Muhammad he never claimed that the ideas and conclusions he had, personally, drawn from his own cursory knowledge of the Torah and the Gospels—gleaned in conversation with Jews and Christians—were scriptural. He admitted, quite readily, that he was just a man and that his own sayings—later collected as the *Hasid*—were just the sayings of a man, however devout. It was only as a conduit for the Word of God—for the actual suras of the Koran—that he claimed divine inspiration and—further confessed—that he was as much of a completely human bystander to the suras revelation as were his hearers. I haven't read the *Hasid*, nor have I any intention of doing so. As, likewise, I have no intention of reading the *Talmud* or the *Confessions of St. Augustine*. I find Scripture itself to be more than sufficiently daunting a challenge—and a feast for the intellect—without bothering myself about someone else's fallible and human opinions of what it is that those Scriptures are saying.

*How could thirteen pages go by that fast? This might be a five-parter, folks. Next issue: the Battle of Mt. Ohod, the Battle of the Ditch and Muhammad's Return to Mecca (and, hopefully, a few words about The Mothers of the Faithful—Muhammad's wives—and Aisha, indisputably, his favourite wife)*

Essay

## Islam, My Islam

In the aftermath of the Battle of Bade, the Prophet ceased dressing his hair in the Jewish manner and was advised by the archangel Gabriel to change the direction of the qibla (the prostrations in prayer) from Jerusalem to Mecca. He seized on a relatively minor incident to bring hostilities with the Banu Qainoqa (one of the Jewish tribes of Medina) to a head, laying siege to their fortresses. When the other two Jewish tribes refused to come to their aid, they were easily overcome and banished by the Prophet (after he had seized their property—including the weapons whose crafting had been their livelihood—and distributed it among the faithful). He made the offer that they could remain in Medmā and have their property restored to them if they would profess Islam. Not for the last time in the history of the Muslim faith, the Jews—to a man—declined the offer.

When one of the two remaining tribes, the Banu Nadhir, were also banished they “were permitted to take only their naked bodies and the ancient faith of their fathers into banishment.” In their case only two members of the entire numerous tribe professed Islam and were richly rewarded by the Prophet.

*In November 624, Muhammad sent his adopted son, Zaid, into the desert together with one hundred soldiers in order that they might attack a caravan and secure its wealth. Zaid was singularly successful and at Qarada, not far from Mecca, he attacked the autumn caravan of the Koreish. The merchants fled and the entire caravan fell into the hands of the Muslims.*

*Gold and silver in the amount of two hundred thousand dollars was secured by the pious and the sum, after one fifth had been given to the Prophet, was divided among the faithful.'*

*Muhammad's prestige among the tribes of the desert was unlimited. At first it had been feared that all Mecca would appear at the gates of Medina to seek vengeance. Month after month passed and nothing stirred in the direction of the Kqaba. Apparently one could plunder the Meccan caravans without fear of retribution.*

*At the expiration of five months after this robbery had occurred, a stranger rode through the streets of Medina and requested to be brought before the Prophet. It was a messenger from his Uncle Abbas, the leader of the Hashim. The sly banker, who was fully informed as to all which took place in Mecca, wished to assure his own future and had sent an important message to his nephew who had gradually risen to power*

*Abu Sofyan, accompanied by three thousand warriors, was on his way to Medina.*

*The great robbery was to be followed by a great revenge.*

Three thousand warriors was, to say the least, an unheard-of size of force in the Arab world—and the fact that they were led by Abu Sofyan, the undisputed leader of the Koreish (upon the death of Abu Djal) indicated the seriousness of the threat. The faithful gathered in the courtyard of the mosque, where Muhammad told them of his dream:

*"I saw myself" he told them, "clad in an invulnerable coat of mail. My sword was broken at the hilt, but nevertheless I was able to kill a ram." "What does this dream signify?" asked the faithful "We must remain in the city," replied the Prophet. "She is our coat of mail and though poorly armed we can defeat the enemy."*

*But the faithful, who were accustomed to success and victory, were not at all pleased with the plan. "Why should we allow our fields to be destroyed?" they asked. "Why should we not confront the enemy as is worthy of men? Does not God safeguard our weapons?" The enthusiasm of his men was so great that the Prophet was forced to accede to their demands. Having prayed, he put on his coat of mail and reviewed his army in the great square of Medina.*

A thousand Muslim warriors departed that night for Mt. Ohod to meet the Koreish.

*When the faithful saw the superior forces of the Koreish, they said, 'The messenger of God war right, we would do better to defend ourselves within the city.' Then Muhammad arose and declared, "When the messenger of God has put on his coat of mail, he will not take it off"*

*When the morning dawned, Abdallah ben Obajy, the leader of the munafiqun, and three hundred of his hypocrites arose; ben Obayy said, "The Prophet has acted upon the advice of children; we cannot follow him. "And they left the army and returned to Medina.*

*On the morning of the next day, three thousand Meccans confronted the seven hundred faithful. On this occasion the army of Mecca was again unorganized and without discipline. For this reason it had brought Hind and many other fashionable Koreishite ladies along to encourage their warriors. The women called out for revenge and were more bloodthirsty than the men.*

*Their songs were to the effect that if the soldiers were this time to take refuge again in flight they would not be permitted to rest at the sides of their wives.*

Mt. Ohod ended as a defeat for Muhammad and the Muslims. On the cusp of victory, they had begun looting the camp of the Koreish warriors only to have the Koreish army rallied by Kahlid ben el

Walid's cavalry and the Muslims themselves put to flight—barely able to hold their ground before the tent of the Prophet. The Muslim cause seemed lost.

*A miracle happened. Instead of following the enemy with his victorious army, instead of pressing on to Medina and destroying Islam for all times, Abu Soan remained on Mt. Ohod [and] declared that he would return in a year to complete his victory.*

*The Meccan women fell upon the bodies of the fallen Muslims like a horde of wild hyena. The Oriental intoxication of victory began. Lips, ears, noses and the privates were cut off from the bodies. Hind, the wife of Abu Sofyan, even tore the liver out of the corpse of Hamza and ate it before the eyes of the astonished Meccans. Then she climbed on top of Mt. Ohod and cried out into the darkness, "We have paid you back for the day of Badr I could no longer endure the pain caused by the loss of my father my brother and my son. My heart has been lightened. Hamza healed my heart when I tore the liver out of his body."*

In the aftermath of the Battle of Mt. Ohod, the Hypocrites and the Banu Nadhir entered into a conspiracy against the Prophet which came to nothing. It was at this point, as mentioned earlier, that the Banu Nadhir were exiled from Medina.

That left only the Banu Qoraidha, of the original three Jewish tribes in Medina.

Piety and a hunger for booty now dominated life in Medina, the two bound inextricably together. The infidels had been exiled and the military strength which had failed against the Meccan army proved more than sufficient to impoverish the surrounding nomadic Bedouin tribes. The Word of God now superseded the Arab blood loyalty which had sheltered Muhammad in Mecca. Piety and booty. Distributing looted goods to the faithful solidified their faith and attracted converts. The pious city of the Prophet slowly began to change and become more worldly and affluent.

*And so it came about that a series of precepts which were born of the need of the hour were established and were destined to place the minor Babylon under the yoke of stricter moxi4r. These laws were always revealed at a propitious moment. This assured to Muhammad the consent of the sensible ones.*

*When, for example, one of the faithful was carried away by a suddenly awakened lust for gambling and lost his entire fortune, which he had earned on the battle fields, to some infidel, Muhammad assembled the faithful, told them of the sad incident and then forbade all gambling for the future. On another occasion, when one of the faithful appeared at prayer completely intoxicated and disturbed the Prophet in his sermon, Muhammad forbade the use of alcohol. In this manner Muhammad arranged the life of his city. The laws, which were to assure these regulations, remained for all times and ruled the life of the Muslims. Later they formed the entire spiritual picture of Islam. V*

As for Muhammad...

*Neither power nor wealth changed the Prophet True, each campaign and each battle brought him in one-fifth of the booty, for it was his prayers and not the courage of the soldiers which brought about victories, but even that one-fifth was distributed among the poor or used to reward the particularly pious and courageous.*

*He did not change his own manner of living. As in the earlier times of his poverty, deprivations and persecution, the Prophet arose at the break of day, cleaned the courtyard, mended his own clothes and said his morning prayers. When pious students arrived, he spoke to them about the faith, alms were distributed and future campaign discussed. Daily the Prophet in his worn-out clothes held court in the yard of the mosque and rendered his decisions as the, highest authority in matters both worldly and spiritual.*

It is worth noting, I think, particularly in this day and age when so much is made—by bloodthirsty Arabs and deluded “Muslims”—of the more militant suras in the Koran that, by this point, the characteristics of the sums changed dramatically. At this point the Koran...

*...no longer contained flaming threats and avowals, now it merely revealed laws. The wind of the law was clear and objective. Unchanged were the power of the expression, the force of the iron sentences, unchanged the visits of the Archangel who brought the words of God to Muhammad in short, terse verses. In time the Archangel became a daily manifestation for Muhammad He appeared, visible to the Prophet alone, in assemblies, in the house, or on a ride through the desert. Sometimes the angel assumed the form of a man, that of a friend of the Prophets, Dahki ci Kelbi. The Prophet recognized the Archangel in every form, he spoke with him, received his commands and revealed the laws in glowing verses to the pious faithful.*

Meanwhile, the newly-exiled Banu Nadhir tribe had sought and found asylum and protection in the prosperous colony of Khaibar, a group of oases owned and controlled by Jews who were described as noble and courageous warriors. By all accounts, they were more than glad to have the Banu Nadhir as guests and gave them land and palms, built houses for them and promised them protection. For, as first emerges at this point in the biography of Muhammad, the Banu Nadhir were direct descendants of Aaron, the older brother of Moses and the first High Priest of the Jewish people.

(I think it worth noting, as an aside, that DNA “imaging” has proven that the genuine descendants of Aaron—those with ancient links to the Aaronic priesthood—even today, have the “purest” DNA of any yet discovered, more points of commonality, etc.)

Needless to say, if you want to really irritate a colony of noble and courageous Jewish warriors in seventh century Arabia, treating descendants of Aaron with a profound level of disrespect is a good place to start.

*The inhabitants of Khaibar sent out messengers in all directions, to all the Jewish tribes as well as to others with whom they were friendly. They spread the news of the treacherous master of Medina, who had come to the city as a guest, had begged shelter and protection and had then exiled his hosts, robbed them of their possessions, and broken the pacts which he himself had proposed to them.*

When you just, you know, write it out cold, like that, the Jews have a point, no?

*The Arabs, Bedouins and Jews listened attentively, nodded their heads, and blamed the Prophet for his conduct. But when the messengers began to speak of revenge and war they shrugged their shoulders and said: “We are poor simple Bedouins. Why should we be concerned with your trouble? If we are to risk our lives, our camels and our horses, then promise us a portion of the booty and pay us a part of that portion in advance.” The hatred of the pious people of Khaibar was so great that they pledged their ‘date crops and sacrificed their money in order, to secure the aid of the people of the desert.*

But the Khaibar weren’t content with just themselves and their Jewish allies and the Bedouins of neighbouring tribes. And so it was

*...a holy Jew, Khoyray, and with him Kinana ben Khakayk, Handja ibn Kais and the hanif Abu Amir, mounted their horses and rode to Mecca. Upon their arrival, they went to Abu Sofyan and said, “O Abu Sofyan, your faith is better than the faith of Muhammad, and your sword is stronger than his. Let us fight together against Muhammad for we hate him as much as you do. “And Abu Sofyan concluded an alliance with the Jews. ..From that moment on gold poured into the desert. The tribes arose and swore by all their old gods that they would destroy Muhammad.*

*It was an enormous army that set forth for Medina. Abu Sofyan led ten thousand men.*

Meanwhile, in Medina

*Muhammad heard of the approach of the large army through his followers who were secretly distributed throughout the desert. The news struck terror in the hearts of the people of Medina. They forgot the beautiful slaves and thought no longer of the forbidden or permitted pleasures of life. They thought only of the great army which was larger than all of the previous Arabian armies put together Experienced warriors, great bandits, even Muhammad himself were frightened. Muhammad knew that the city of God could not be vanquished but at the same time he thought of his own words: "First tie your camel to a tree and then entrust it to Gods care." But where the tree was to which the camel was to be tied Muhammad did not know. All the means of war, all the defence methods which were known to the Arabs would, be powerless against the gigantic army. It would be impossible to confront the enemy in open battle. One could fight in the narrow streets or seek shelter in the fortresses, but none of these means seemed to indicate salvation. Looking down from the fortresses, the city of Medina was entirely unprotected. There were no walls of fortification and one could only depend upon the natural protection of the hillsides, rocks, and precipices. Three sides of the city were protected in this fashion, but on the fourth side Medina lay wide open and bare to the enemy attack. Obviously the army could have approached the city from the fourth side and no one knew how the city could defend itself Fear, anguish and desperation reigned in Medina.*

The "tree" to which Medina's "camel" needed to be tied came in the unexpected form of a Persian slave named Selman who had lived both in Persia and in Byzantium, and who had seen, first-hand, the army of the Emperor of Byzantium march in Iran, had watched the Zoroasirians besiege the ramparts of the Roman Empire. As he listened to Muhammad's plan for the defence of Medina, he inquired if the plan was the Word of God or Muhammad's own. It was a distinction the Prophet was never shy in acknowledging and about which he never lacked absolute clarity. In this case, the plan was entirely his own. Given that, Selman suggested digging a ditch—or, rather, The Ditch—from one of Medina's sheltering hills to another: straight across the only road leading into Medina. With everyone working day and night, this was accomplished and the scene was set for the Battle of The Ditch.

*Slowly and confidently the army often thousand made its approach. Soon it saw the fortresses of Medina and began to tremble with delight at the thought of victory and plunder Abu Soff'an rode ahead and examined the ground, when suddenly, from a distance, he saw something strange and confusing When he had come closer he saw a wide ditch.*

*As if petrified he stood in front of the ditch. He was obviously shaken by the enemy move. Behind its leader, the army often thousand stared as well and was equally puzzled How was one to cross the ditch?*

*The soldiers looked at one another, shook their heads and were speechless. A ditch had never before been provided for in Arabian warfare. The army was hypnotized by the ditch just like a chicken by a chalk line.*

*Still indecisive, the tents were put up... what were ten thousand to do against a ditch? For them war meant fighting in an open field. Anything else was incomprehensible. Day after day, Jews, Meccans and Bedouins appeared at the edge of the ditch. They hurled insults at the army of the pious with all their might "What sort of warriors are you, " they thundered, "if you hide behind a ditch? Is this a war worthy of the Arabs? Did our fathers or our grandfathers fight like this? You are cowardly dogs and no Arabs! Come over here and show us what you can do!"*

The Muslims didn't budge.

*Now and again, a daring pagan attempted to climb over the ditch. They permitted him to cross only to kill him with much pride and ceremony. The days passed by with insults and the exchange of an occasional arrow. It was soon obvious that the huge army was filled with discontent, and there were good reasons for this. Confident of a swift and certain victory, Abu*

*Sofyan had not hurried his campaign. He had waited until the pilgrims had left Mecca at the expiration of the Month of the Pilgrimage and until the harvest had been gathered in the fields of Medina. Now, when the siege had begun, he soon realized that the harvest was out of his reach and safely stored in Medina. The army of the ten thousand which had counted on the crops was without provisions. The Bedouins, who had gone to war at considerable expense in the hope of quick and rich rewards, were forced to see their camels grow thin and they themselves wasting their time. The previous enthusiasm began to cool considerably.*

Abu Sof'an, facing a debacle.

*..determined to ally himself with the last of the Jewish tribes in Medina, the Banu Qoraidha who lived in a large fortress outside of the city. The Qoraidha, who were subjects of Muhammad, readily agreed to break their oath since the Prophet had broken his against the two other Jewish tribes of Medina, and they promised to attack Muhammad's army from the rear Thereupon Aim Sofyan gave orders to prepare for the attack. The preparations lasted for days. When they had been completed, it happened that the day of the attack was a Saturday. The Banu Qoraidha and all the other Jewish tribes of the army declared that they could not possibly break the centuries- old laws of their fathers and take upon themselves the sin of fighting on a Sabbath. When Abu Sof'an tried to move the Jews to participate in the attack the Jews of Khaibar announced that, in their opinion, the whole campaign was a failure and that they for one had no desire of calling down the wrath of the Prophet upon their brothers in Medina by participating in the attack. Other tribes, who apparently had been influenced by Muhammad's secret agents, became equally disinterested. Conditions continued as they were for a few more days, a few skirmishes took place, and then the Bedouins were fed up.*

*One day, heavy clouds covered the heavens, rain began to fall in torrents and a violent hurricane from the desert upset the tents of the nomads. The Bedouins attributed this to Muhammad's magical power They had no desire to, nor could they, fight against magic, particularly the magic of a coward. There was nothing for Abu Sofyan to do but withdraw with honour. He wrote a letter to Muhammad; accused him of cowardice and treachery against the old established traditions of war and swore that at the proper time he would return to take bloody vengeance. Then he got. On his camel and gave orders for the return march.*

This took place on 15 April 627.

If the fate of the Banu Nadhir had seemed more arduous than that of the Banu Qainoqa, the fate of the Banu Qorhaida—now abandoned by Abu Sofyan and his army often thousand—would make the fate of both their former tribes-mates seem like a tea party by comparison. Muhammad the bloodthirsty Arab was about to supersede Muhammad the Messenger of God for the last time:

*Now the hour had come for the last Jewish tribe in Medina, the Banu Qoraidha. Muhammad had learned of their negotiations with the army of the Koreish and he was determined to settle with them. On the day on which Abu Sofyan gave up the siege of Medina, Muhammad and his soldiers marched to the fortress of the Qoraidha. Another siege began.*

*The Jews were unable to make any armed resistance. They had retreated to their stronghold and waited for what was to come. At the end of twenty-five days they surrendered unconditionally to the Prophet. They had hoped that they would be permitted to leave the city, as in the case of their brother tribes. But the Prophet was not at all inclined to be merciful. It was only upon the request of the Aws, who had long been friendly with the Qoraidha, that he decided to place the decision in the hands of an arbiter The role was entrusted to a pious member of the Aws tribe, Sad ben Moadh.*

*Sad ben Moadh was a fat, full-blooded man given to choleric outbursts He passed for a friend of the Jews. He had been injured in a skirmish which had taken place behind the ditch and now lay gravely wounded. The wound pained him and Sad knew that his days were numbered.*

*Because of their alliance with the Koreish, he felt that the Jews alone were responsible for his death. With great care, the heavy, mortally wounded Sad was carried out of his tent, placed upon a donkey and surrounded with pillows. In this fashion he was led to the place where the decision was to be given. When he arrived, he demanded that the parties concerned agree unconditionally to his terms. The Jews were the first to swear and they did so gladly. Sad was an old friend upon whom they could count.*

*The dying man propped himself up in his saddle and delivered his judgment: "All the men of the Banu Qoraidha are to be executed and the women and children sold into slavery. "Muhammad did not protest against the verdict. It was exactly in accordance with his wishes. On the other hand he promised mercy to those who would become converted to Islam.*

*On the morning of the next day a deep grave was dug in the marketplace. The old cruel Orient was to intoxicate itself with blood in the center of the city of Medina. Islam showed its claws. One by one, the Jews were brought to the market place in chains, made to stand at the edge of the grave, and decapitated. Although the Jews of Medina had not known how to live courageously, they did know how to die bravely. Not a single one of the Banu Qoraidha betrayed his faith in order to save his life. They died silently and courageously. They saw their brothers being slain before their eyes and knew that their own heads were soon to follow:*

*Soon the grave was full. Blood ran over the marketplace. The Prophet and the leaders of Islam stood at one side. They watched the executions and said nothing. Worlds are born in blood. The day drew to a close and still Jews were brought to the place in chains. Soon it was night and the Prophet gave orders for torches to be brought so that the faithful could see the blood of the enemy being shed on the marketplace. In the middle of the blood-covered city, his face strangely lighted by the burning torches, stood Muhammad, the master, the messenger of God.*

*Among the Qoraidha there was a Jew named Zobayr who had once saved the life of the great Moslem warrior Thabit. Thabit recognized him among those condemned to death. "You were good to me and saved my life, O Zobayr," Thabit said to the Jew. "I will now reward the good which you did to me. "He went to the Prophet and begged for Zobayr's life and asked that his family be permitted to retain their possessions. Since Thabit belonged to the tribe of the Aws and was a mighty warrior as well as a pious Muslim, Muhammad granted his request. Overjoyed, the warrior ran to Zobayr and brought him the good news. But the Jew said, "Lead me to the place of execution for I would like to follow my brothers who died there and those who are about to die. I do not wish to have my life spared by the blood-thirsty man who has slain all around me. The pail of my life has run empty and I am impatient to be reunited with my friends. "Having spoken, the old Jew went to the place of execution where he was decapitated by Au, for the cousin and the son-in-law of the Prophet acted as executioner on that bloody day. Zobayr the Jew was not forgotten by later generations. His actions were considered as exemplary of martyrdom by the Arab people and all the faithful. Among the people of the desert his memory is honored to this day for Islam was the first faith in which theologians and the church fathers were permitted to praise and admire the heroism of people not of their own faith.*

*This was the end of the Jews of Medina. Their faults had not been numerous. They protected themselves as well as they could, sought peace and were afraid of the power of the enemy. They had invented cruel jokes at the expense of the Prophet, sung impudent songs about him, listened to him only to contradict, and adhered rigidly to the faith which they brought with them from their old home. It was that which brought about their destruction. The Prophet could no longer tolerate their presence in the city where the word of Allah and his prophet reigned supreme. The Banu Qoraidha knew how to die courageously. Much of their cowardice in life was compensated by their death.*

*Medina, the city of the Prophet, was now the unified city of the faith where, no longer touched by the rude ridicule of the unbelievers, Muhammad could govern the great community of the Moslems.*

In the aftermath of the Battle of The Ditch and the subsequent slaughter of the Banu Qoraidha—with the last of the immediate impediments to his absolute rule over Medina—now removed, Muhammad came recognize what he—evidently—saw as the largest impediment to the wider acceptance of Islam.

*Something lay between the hearts of the people and the words of the Prophet. This something was Mecca. Mecca had been conquered, beaten, and humbled, and still it remained the queen of the desert, the greatest among all the cities. The heart of the desert still throbbed for the holy city of Mecca.*

*What was Muhammad for Mecca? A despot who, in a treacherous and sly manner had assumed power in the distant province of Medina. Due to his astute cowardice, he had succeeded in defying the punitive expeditions of the Meccans and forcing his erroneous doctrines upon the city by means of brutal terror. Consequently they allowed him to remain in his desert oasis and did not bother with him any more than they did with the other local rulers who had come into power by chance. However, he made himself unpleasantly noticeable through his constant campaigns, which disturbed the peace of the country, harmed trade; and endangered the caravans. One had to be doubly careful and to increase the price of the wares to cover the risk This was Mecca's opinion of the ruler of Medina.*

*But the opinions of the Bedouins, the opinion of the simple people of the desert, was even worse. For them, Muhammad was covered with a dark and unremovable stain. He was a pariah, a man from whom his own tribe, his own city, his own family, had turned away. And the city was not an unimportant colony, the tribe was not an unimportant, unknown tribe; the city was Mecca, the queen of cities, and the tribe was the Koreish, the noblest tribe of Arabia. His native city had banished the Prophet, had vomited him out, consequently, thought the Bedouins, there must be something wrong about his teaching, about his person. The respect for the great, holy city of the Kaaba was probably the only spiritual property which was ineradicably planted in the souls of the Bedouins. For centuries it had been the Bedouins custom to make pilgrimages to the Kaaba, and for centuries Mecca had been the central point of the world. He was accustomed to do that which Mecca did, and to condemn that which Mecca condemned Now a man had come who fought Mecca and this man wooed the heart of the Bedouins. The Bedouins regarded him with distrust.*

It was at this point that, either on his own or through the inspiration of God or the archangel Gabriel (the distinction, to me, is an important one upon which—again, to me—the future of Islam as it is practiced in the present day would hinge), Muhammad made a conscious choice to fuse Mecca and Islam into one entity insofar as he was capable of doing so, by announcing to the faithful of Medina—in the year 628—that he and fifteen hundred of his most devout followers would make the hajj from Medina to Mecca in that year.

*'It was a master stroke. The heretic who had violated the sacred months, who had fought the holiest of cities for years, now appeared as a contrite penitent and directed his steps towards the gates of the proud city which had once expelled him,*

*Only the holiest, the most fanatic of his followers, accompanied him. The adventurous, the war-like robbers, remained in Medina, for a holy pilgrimage which gave no promise of booty had no interest for them.*

When word arrived in Mecca that Muhammad and fifteen hundred men were on their way from Medina, an army was quickly raised and led by Khalid ben al Walid to intercept the Prophet. To the Meccans' surprise they found—with the prescribed sacrificial animals—only fifteen hundred holy pilgrims, unarmed and humbly asking permission to enter the Sanctuary.

Permission was denied and—to the amazement of his followers—the Prophet accepted this. He remained at the oasis of Hodaibiya (appropriately lying half inside and half outside the sacred precincts) ‘requesting only that a representative of the Koreish be sent to negotiate peace. After some delay, Soheil bin Arm, a minor Koreish functionary, was sent. The treaty they negotiated—between the Koreish and “Muhammad bin Abdallah (Soheil wouldn’t permit him to describe himself in the document as “the Messenger of God”)—specified:

*War shall not be waged for ten years between them. During this time the members of both parties are not to be endangered by each other. They may not fight one another. If any member of the Koreish goes over to Muhammad, then Muhammad is obligated to return him to the Koreish. On the other hand, if one of Muhammad’s followers goes over to the Koreish, then these are not obligated to return him. An honest understanding is to exist between both parties which excludes robbery and thief. The tribes of the country are to be permitted to join Muhammad or the Koreish at their own discretion. This year Muhammad may neither enter the sanctuary nor the holy’ city of Mecca. In the next year, Muhammad and his people may come unarmed to Mecca and, in the absence of the Koreish, perform their worship.”*

The pilgrims, as a compromise, sacrificed their animals at the oasis and then turned back to Medina. As Omar later said, “Only a miracle prevented the Muslims from deserting the Prophet on the Day of Hodaibiya,” so great was their shame at Muhammad’s humility and deference before the Koreish’s minor functionary.

Muhammad alone knew that the signing of the treaty spelled the end of the Koreish’s hold over Mecca.

In the two years which followed the signing of the treaty, more men were converted to Islam than had been, the case since the beginning of the Prophet’s mission.

The many tribes of Arabia made use of their—now contractually-sanctioned—right to declare themselves openly for or against Muhammad. Long caravans appeared at Medina, made their confession of faith and received the blessing of the Prophet. Muhammad carried out the terms of the treaty to the letter. So much so, that it was finally the Koreish who begged him not to take it too literally:

*Abu Busir of the tribe of the Taqif who lived in Mecca one day discovered the desire for adventure and the love of God within himself and fled to Medina. The Meccans learned of this and sent two warriors to Medina with the request that Abu Busir be returned to them in accordance with the terms of the treaty. Without hesitation, Muhammad granted their request and surrendered the fugitive. On the way, however the captive managed to slay one of his guards and to escape into the desert. By means of begging and robbing, he lived in the desert where he was joined by others who, like him, had fled from Mecca and had been surrendered by the Prophet.*

*The slaves and the poor of the city of Mecca now fled in greater numbers to Medina where there was no poverty or slavery for the faithful. Under the leadership of Abu Busir, they made up a dangerous company of about seventy men. This band now sought out the great caravan route between Mecca and Syria as its arena and since its members were poor and had nothing to lose, they fell upon the great caravans in the name of Allah, robbed the property of the Meccans and spread fear and terror about them. The Meccans saw that they were being robbed of the fruits of their treaty. Once again the trade of Mecca was endangered. Abu Busir was both brave and sly, he knew how to hide in the rugged mountains and defied his pursuers. Muhammad merely shrugged his shoulders, shook his head, and declared that he could do nothing against the free Muslims who, according to the treaty, were not permitted to belong to his community. Finally, in order to restore peace in the desert, the Meccans were forced to ask Muhammad to revise the treaty of Hodaibiya and to take up the refugees officially in his community. To this Muhammad agreed, and from that day on the attacks and pillages ceased.*

Now certain that he was fated to be the absolute ruler of the entire Arabian Peninsula, Muhammad set his sights on the countries and empires in his immediate vicinity, dispatching six messengers to the six greatest rulers of the neighbouring lands: The Emperor of Byzantium, the Emperor of Iran, the King of Abyssinia, the Governor of Egypt, the King of Hira and the Duke of Yamana. The new sense of inevitability which accompanied this awareness of his imminent preeminence over all he surveyed brought about a resurgence of statesmanlike softening in the prophet's approach to warfare. He publicly declared:

*“Do not use trickery or treachery in the field. Do not kill children.” “When in combat with the army of the enemy, do not oppress the peaceful inhabitants of the enemy country. Spare the feeble among the women and be compassionate to the sucklings and the sick Do not destroy the houses of the inhabitants and do not damage their gardens, fields, and palm trees.”*

If I wasn't certain that it was a waste of time, I'd like to send an engraved copy of that to Yasser Arafat, along with a copy of Abu Bakr's instructions to the Muslim commander of the faithful when, during his reign as Caliph, he sent them against the Christian Empire of Byzantium:

*“Do not oppress the people and do not excite them unnecessarily. Only do that which is good and right and success will reward you. When you meet an enemy, then fight him courageously, but if you win the battle do not kill women or children, spare the fields and the houses for men have erected them. If you conclude a treaty, then keep it. In the land of the Christians you will meet pious men on your way, who serve God in the churches and convents. Do not harm them and do not destroy the churches and convents.”*

Even when settling his score against the Khaibar, the colony which had united Jews and the Koreish in the Battle of The Ditch, Muhammad—this time—only conquered them militarily, seized their lands and (after extracting from them a promise of half their income for the Muslim State treasury) gave them back all of their property. A Draconian measure, to be sure, but in light of the fate of the Banu Qoraidha, the Jews of Khaibar probably figured that half of their income wasn't such a bad deal, all things considered. The universal (universal in the Arabian Peninsula, anyway) Muslim State was largely financed in this fashion after 62k: on prohibitive taxes levied against Jews and Christians and other non-Muslims.

On the one hand, they paid a lot more tax, on the other hand they weren't required to serve in the army of the faithful. You know: take it or take it (nothing new for the Jews there). “I guess we'll take it.”

There still remained the (now) minor problem of the Koreish, which Muhammad addressed in three stages. First, after his treaty-protected hajj in the year 629 (he and his followers were granted three days within the Sanctuary on their own), the Prophet married Maimuna bint Hares, the favourite aunt of Khalid ben al Walid, the brilliant Koreish cavalry commander who had handed Muhammad Islam's Only military defeat at Badr. Khalid's best friend, in turn, was Amr ben el Asi, the only other military commander who posed a threat to Muhammad and Islam.

Together with his new Uncle-in-Law, Muhammad, Khalid and his friend Amr rode out of the city of Mecca, united in blood fellowship and (consequently) unshakeable allies.

Second, Muhammad waited for a pretext to break the Treaty of Hodaibiya, which came when a handful of Meccans attacked some Muslim allies in the desert. Insignificant in itself, but it allowed Muhammad to announce his military campaign against Mecca.

Now it was the Koreish who were isolated, the historical tide and momentum having turned against them. Small wonder that the Koreish decided to send someone higher than a mere functionary for this particular set of negotiations. Or, rather, “negotiations”. The Koreish elected to send their leader this time: Abu Sofyan.

*...The rich banker thought that his peaceful appearance in Medina would suffice to reawaken the former respect for the house of the Ommaya in the breasts of Muhammad and all the fugitives. A handshake, a courteous smile, a few pleasant words would surely be sufficient. Abu Sofran felt like a noble lord who, in temporary embarrassment, had to turn to a simple peasant for aid.*

*Having arrived in Medina, Abu Sofyan was kept waiting uneasily for hours before he was led into the presence of Muhammad. The Prophet sat in the courtyard of the mosque. He hardly returned the greeting of the fashionable Ommaya.*

*Sofyan began to make a long speech, suggested that the friendship between Medina and Mecca be augmented, excused himself in the name of the city for the painful hostile occurrence and declared himself ready to revise the treaty of Hodaibiya, or what was more, even to accede to some of the Prophet's demands.*

*The Prophet looked at Abu Sofran for a time, slowly arose and, without saying a word, left the mosque.*

*Abu Sofyan began to realize that the name of the Ommaya was not a welcome one in Medina.*

*Heavy at heart, Abu Sofyan decided to continue his labours. He had enough friends and blood relatives in Medina. They were surely calmer than the obstinate prophet. They would in all probability be more receptive to sensible words.*

*Abu Sofyan now ran from one person to another, knocked on every door recalled old friendships and relationships, but on all sides he met with a cool reception. His own daughter, who now belonged to the harem of the Prophet, showed him, "the unclean idolater" "the door Abu Bakr his one-time friend and equal, had no word left for him. But Omar told him abruptly and frankly: "By God, if I had nothing but a few ants to command, I would never cease fighting you. "Even Ali, who could never deny anyone anything, rejected him, saying: "Muhammad has come to a decision and we can do nothing about it." There was no room for doubt in Abu Sofyan's mind as to what that decision might be. He saddled his camel and rode to Mecca. When, exhausted from his trip, he had returned home and had told his wife, Hind, the results of his mission, she listened to him quietly. But when he wished to lay down beside her, she pushed him out of bed with her fret crying: "I will not share my bed with a coward."*

*Fear and confusion reigned in Mecca. The merchants were split up into numerous parties. They tried to convince themselves that Muhammad was not as yet ready that he had no intention of marching against Mecca, and that, above all else, he would not dare touch the holy Kaaba. They were still discussing and pondering in this fashion when Muhammad had already taken up his position behind the hills near Mecca.*

*Ten thousand marched through the desert and their leader was the messenger of God.*

*The army traveled through uninhabited, empty places and yet the Prophet would not permit them to light a fire, to beat a drum or to sing pious songs. Noiselessly, silently, like a train of shadows, the ten thousand moved through the desert.*

*Halfway, Muhammad spied a rider behind a hilltop. Filled with amazement, Muhammad recognized his uncle, El Abbas [who] knelt down and became converted to Islam. El Abbas had delayed long enough until God had finally made him see clearly as to his nephew's mission. For this reason Muhammad despised him thoroughly. "You are the last of the emigrants," he said ironically.*

*Unmoved, he marched forward until he could finally see the square sanctuary of the Kaaba in the distance. For the first time, the army of the Prophet came to a halt, bivouac fires were lighted, for now everyone in Mecca was to know: the army of the Prophet lies at the door.*

*Humbly Abu Sofyan rode to the camp of the prophet. The first to recognize him was Omar. Omar took hold of him by the collar dragged him into the presence of Muhammad and cried: "O messenger of God, here is Abu Sofyan who, not protected by any treaty has fallen into our hands through the help of God. Permit me to slit his throat." Muhammad gave orders that Abu Sofyan was to be kept safely and brought before him again on the next day.*

*When he had again appeared before the Prophet, he was received with the words: "Woe to you, Abu Soj5'an, do you not realize that there is no god but God?" The proud member of the Ommaya fell at the feet of Muhammad and said: "O Muhammad, you are dearer to me than father and mother. How mild, how gentle, how noble you are! I really believe that God is the only god for otherwise the others might have been of some help." "Woe to you, Abu Sofyan," Muhammad replied, "do you not acknowledge that I am the messenger of God?" This was decidedly too much for old Abu Sofyan: to be called upon to acknowledge Muhammad publicly. Again the Ommaya fell on his knees and spoke: "O Muhammad, you are dearer to me than all which I possess, I love you more than father and mother but as far as your being a prophet is concerned, my spirit is not convinced of that."*

*Omar who stood next to the Prophet, cried out: "There is no better argument than the sword to convince stubborn unbelievers. Thereupon he drew his sword from its sheath, turned to Abu Sofyan and said: "Accept the truth or I will sever your head from your body." Then Abu Sofyan knelt down, became converted to Islam, and recited the act of faith: "Achadou an la illah ii Allah, achadou anna Muhammadon Rasul Allah" (I believe that there is no god but God, I believe that Muhammad is His Messenger).*

*Abu Sofran hurried back to Mecca, assembled the Koreish, and told them what he had seen and experienced. The fashionable bankers were depressed. Only Hind, who had been present at the assembly, arose and with her face distorted with anger snatched her husband's beard and cried: "Kill this dirty, useless worm who brings shame upon us." Only a few of the Koreish were inclined to fight.*

*The rest joyfully accepted the terms of peace which Abu Sofyan had brought them from Muhammad. The terms were: "Muhammad will occupy the city of Mecca for all time. But the Koreish who remain peacefully in their houses when the Prophet makes his entrance may be sure of their lives."*

*On the next day, the triumphal march into Mecca began. Only a small company of heathen led by the son of Abu Jahi offered any resistance, and they were conquered with ease. The way to Mecca, the way to the most brilliant of the cities, to the favourite treasure of Allah, was open. The Medinese had begun to celebrate their victory, and the ansari Sad ben Abada shouted out: "Today is the day of the battle, today the sanctuary will be defiled."*

*No one doubted but that the day of the great revenge had come, that the richest among the cities of Arabia was to be pillaged, that the enemies of the Prophet were to be destroyed, and that with this, the great act of the combining of all Arabia would be complete. But Muhammad and the oldest among the mohajirun thought differently. They themselves had come from Mecca. Their love belonged to the city. Every stone, every street, every corner of Mecca was familiar to them and dear because of their many memories. Suddenly they all felt that they were Koreishites again, and the pride of the ancient race awakened in them. Never had the noble city of Mecca been pillaged by strangers, and not even now was a strange army to leave the city laden with plunder. In the long years of their exile the mohajirun had retained something which no emigration before or after them had retained, their love for their native city.*

*With wise forethought, Muhammad had only permitted the mohajirun, Meccans by birth, to lead the army on that day. On the day following that in which the enemy had been conquered the messenger of God put on the robes of a pilgrim, mounted a snow-white camel and,*

*accompanied by Abu Bakr rode towards Mecca. When he had reached the outskirts of the city, the first rays of the sun began to appear. They surrounded Muhammad's head like a halo. The streets of Mecca lay dead and empty of men. The inhabitants had hidden in their houses in fear No one knew the plans of the Prophet. No one knew f he would spare the fortresses.*

*Muhammad rode through the streets of Mecca. To his right rose the house of Khadya in which he had spent the happiest years of his life. Unseeing he rode past it. He rode straight ahead to the great courtyard of the Kaaba. And there Muhammad performed the deed for which he had once left home, family, and the holy courtyard of the Kaaba itself Seven times he circled the Kaaba, seven times he reverently touched the holy stone with his staff And then there happened to Muhammad, the messenger of God, the greatest event of his entire life. He got down from his camel, and with his head held high he began to break the idols of stone and wood with his staff The Muslims followed his example. Soon the mighty Hobal, the three moon virgins, and all the three hundred and sixty idols lay in the dust. The deed, which Muhammad had announced years before, had been accomplished.*

*As is usual, the newly made converts were the most active against the old gods. Khalid ben el Walid and Amr ben el Asi raced with their riders through the entire sanctuary. They forced their way into the temples and the sacred fields of the Arabs, smashed the statues of the gods, and killed the few priests who still resisted. Soon nowhere in Mecca nor in any other portion of the sacred territory was a single idol to be found. Even the statues of Abraham and Ishmael were destroyed, and the picture of the Virgin Mary as well, out of "respect for their sanctity, "as Muhammad said. An artfully carved wooden dove was broken with Muhammad's own hands.*

*The signal to commence the pillage did not follow the destruction of the gods as had been expected. Their property was not taken from the Koreish, a fact which displeased even some of the mohajirun. When they had been driven out of Mecca, their property had been seized by the Meccans. Now after the final siege, they felt they were at least entitled to the return of their confiscated property. But Muhammad forbade that as well. He himself did not demand the return of any of his former property. He did not enter into the house of Khadya. During his entire stay in Mecca he lived in a tent.*

Next: Muhammad's wives, the Mothers of the Faithful, Aisha, his favourite wife. Islam after the death of Prophet. Modern-Islam and an examination of the conflict in the Middle East.

Essay

## Islam, My Islam

*Should God punish men for their perverse doings, He would not leave on earth a moving thing! But, to an appointed term doth he respite them; and when their term is come, they shall not delay or advance it an hour.*  
Sura "The Bee" 16:63

Upon the Prophet's return to Medina, word spread quickly of his conquest of Mecca and of the Koreish's capitulation and conversion to Islam. With this capitulation and this conversion, 628-29 became known as the Year of Delegations. The whole of Arabia—knowing that there was no group large enough to stand against the Prophet and his followers—sent delegations from their leadership to Medina to pledge their loyalty to the Prophet's cause.

Muhammad sat daily in the courtyard of the mosque in Medina receiving petitioners, giving commands and ruling over the people of the desert. Islam was now a theocratic socialist state in which

all of the followers were equal, were taxed equally and fulfilled the same duties (Jews and Christians, the People of the Book, as mentioned in the last installment, were taxed more heavily than Muslims but were not required to fight in the army of the faithful). Everywhere in Arabia, idols and statues were destroyed. Taxes paid to tax collectors were often—in Robin Hood fashion—distributed to the poor on the spot. Fights, thefts, personal injury disputes and the like were dealt with by family elders under civil law, *adat*, the ancient Arab tribal customs, while religious police enforced the *shariat* or religious laws, ensuring that no pork was sold in the markets, that adulterers were stoned to death, drunkards were whipped publicly and so on. The biographies of the Prophet reflect the schismatic seeds which were planted by the dichotomous realities now under his dominion: the ancient traditions of civil law versus the religious law; the original *ansar* and *mohajirun* versus the late converts to the faith, the veterans of Ohod and Bath versus the civilians.

*He used none of the wealth which now poured into his treasury for himself On the other hand, he order that the members of the tribes of the Hashim and the Abdelmottalibs, who has stood by him in parlous times, were to have free access to the State treasury—that is, to the treasury of the messenger of God. He was also accustomed to give lavish gifts to his other friends, and the ansar and mohajirun received country places, money and cattle. Begging from the Prophet had become a constant habit on the part of most of the participants in the battles of Badr and Ohod.*

*It is true that all the Muslims were equal. But the ansar and mohajirun, who were now assembled in Medina, made up the recognized aristocracy of the new State. Their hearts and brains were full of the words and deeds of the Prophet. They knew his every foot-step, repeated all his sayings, and were adept in exchanging their excellent memories for coin of the realm. They were the parasites in the State of God and after the Prophet c death they made up a closed, pious caste the members of which lived in true sense of the word by their memories, and they protected their well- earned material zealously. The treasury of the caliphs often suffered under their pious demands. As a result, most of these parasites left large fortunes behind them.*

It was the irrefutable pre-eminence of the Prophet which allowed these dichotomies to exist—and to move forward in tandem—within the Muslim state: both the Meccan-centred, Kaaba-centred tribal worship of the *hajj* alongside the monotheism represented by the One God, by the Koran and by the universal acceptance in the Arabian Lands Muhammad as God’s Last Messenger. Bloodthirsty Arabs and genuine Muslims—after the conquest of Mecca and the destruction of the three hundred and sixty idols— were united in belief in Muhammad: the latter out of sincere religious conviction and the inspiration of faith and the former out of the irrefutable evidence .of Muhammad’s temporal power, his efficacy as a military and political ruler to whom all neighbouring military and political powers came to pay homage, acknowledging their subservience to him. This on-going duality of practical, worldly considerations wedded to subtler and more esoteric concerns of the spirit within Islam were amply demonstrated when

the Pentagon released the videotape of Osama Bin Laden in mid-December of 2001 wherein he declaims, “When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse.” To say the least, this is an alien viewpoint to the Judeo-Christian mind and spirit whose own experiences (including their experiences with Islam itself) have inculcated a profound suspicion of the “strong horse” whether that “horse” was the Babylonians, Persians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the various Caesars, Herod, Pontius Pilate or the legions under their command. Only in Islam is faith and temporal power unashamedly united as two sides of the same coin. To the Christian, temporal power is reserved for Christ alone upon his promised return. Which is not far from the Judaic viewpoint, differing only insofar as the Orthodox Christian view holds that the Messiah will return and Judaism’s conviction that *Meschiach hasn’t come yet*. But, I’m getting ahead of myself.

In the year 630, Muhammad—having heard rumours that the Christian Byzantine Emperor was contemplating a military campaign to wipe out Islam and annex the Arabian lands—mounted his own expedition of thirty thousand warriors. Upon reaching Thabouk, on the borderland of the Byzantine Empire, Muhammad declared, “There lies the land of Cham, Syria. Here is the boundary of Arabia.

Here we will await the enemy.” Twenty days later, no enemy had shown itself and, after conquering and looting a few bordertowns, the Muslims returned to Medina.

I think it worth noting that, at the time of this expedition, Byzantium was—in one sense—a world power which had emerged victorious from ten years of bloody conflict with Persia and extended across much of Africa, Europe and Asia. In another sense, it was just the latest fractious and fragmented example of caesaropapism—Christianity’s own version of temporal power wedded to spirituality, a church under the direct control of an Emperor—philosophically and endlessly at war with and within itself over the relentless and circuitous debate regarding the divine-versus-human nature of the Christ. The schism du jour of the seventh century was primarily between the Orthodox Catholic view and that of the Monophysites (which held that Christ was entirely divine even though he had taken on human form). At the time that Muhammad was patiently awaiting the arrival of some military force from the Byzantine Emperor, the Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople was attempting to convert that same Emperor (Heraclius) to the idea that the Christ and the Son worked divine and human deeds by one divine-human operation (energeia). This united the Orthodox and the Monophysites in Egypt, but also drew attack. As a fall-back position, Sergius attempted to bypass the whole question of whether or not there was one or more energeia at work within Christ and to achieve unanimity on the question that in Christ there was only one thelema (will). Six years after the death of Muhammad, the Emperor Heraclius issued an edict containing Sergius’ views, forbidding the discussion of whether there were one or two energies at work within Christ and declaring that Christ had one will. Clearly, as the Christian world fragmented along the lines of these hair-splitting sophistries, the Arab world and the Muslim world were uniting into a single monolithic force.

Less than two years after the expedition to the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire, Muhammad contracted the illness which would prove fatal. This is my favourite telling of his last days, from a 1964 translation of Ibn Ishaq’s biography, edited by Michael Edwardes for the Folio Society of London:

*The malady began thus. He had given orders for an expedition to set out to the borders of Syria; that night, his manumitted slave recorded, “The Apostle of God awoke me in the middle of the night and said, ‘Jam commanded to implore pardon for the dead in the cemetery!’ ‘So I went there with him, and when he stood among the dead, he exclaimed, ‘Peace be upon you, tenants of these graves! May the state you are in be better than that which lies in store for mankind! Rebellions are setting in like waves of darkness. They will follow each other, and the last will be worse than the first. ‘Then he turned to me and said, ‘I have been offered a choice between the treasures of this world and everlasting life, or paradise and the meeting with my Lord. I have chosen the second. ‘I replied, ‘Thou art my father and my mother; take the treasures of this world now and paradise afterwards. ‘But he continued, ‘No. I have chosen to meet my Lord. ‘After that, the malady of the Apostle began, and God took him away”*

*According to Aisha, “The Apostle of God returned from the cemetery to me. I had a headache and complained ‘My head! My head!’ And he replied, ‘No, Aisha. My head!’ Then he said, ‘Wouldst thou be distressed to die before me, that I might stand over thee and enshroud thee, and pray for thee, and bury thee?’ ‘But I exclaimed, ‘If that were to happen, I can see thee no sooner bury me than return to my house, to celebrate thy wedding with some other woman!’ The Apostle smiled, and, though the malady began to develop, he continued to make the round of his wives until, in the house of Maymuna, it overcame him. Then he called his wives to ask their permission to spend in my house such time as he was ill, and permission was granted to him.”*

#### Part IV

I’m going to interrupt the telling of the last days of the Prophet to address the matter of his thirteen wives (fourteen, if you include Khadija, who died before his mission had been fully undertaken). Polygamy—and particularly polygamy on such a scale—is certain to raise the hackles of feminists

everywhere, which is one of the reasons that I've chosen this late point in the recounting of the early history of Islam to address the issue. On the one hand, the Prophet's wives, particularly Aisha, play a role of great significance in Islam. On the other hand, their role is a minor one when compared to that of, say, God or of the archangel Gabriel, or the Koran and the secular-humanist-feminist sensibility which so widely infects our present society can be catered to (in my view) only so far before proportion and perspective become so skewed as to obliterate what I see as the Genuine Meaning of God's Revelation through his Last Messenger and Seal of Prophets. I wanted the important masculine qualities of that revelation to be fully addressed before giving the minor feminine chords their due: in complete violation of our degraded western feminist approach to any subject—which is to always trumpet and magnify whatever meagre feminine accomplishment can be attached to any story and only then to address its central, masculine considerations. First, an overview of the Prophet's marital situation—to which Aisha referred (to Muhammad's rare amusement) in the excerpt above:

*At the eastern entrance to the mosque in Medina there were nine lowly clay huts arranged in a semi-circle. The doors of the huts consisted of dark curtains. Some of the huts were enclosed with small verandahs. The curtains protected the life and activities in the huts from the gaze of the curious.*

*It was in these huts that the "mothers of the faithful," the numerous wives of the Prophet, lived. Muhammad had more wives than were allowed by the laws of Islam, for only four wives were permitted to each of the faithful. The Prophet, whose life was filled with work and prayer was allowed to have as many wives as his strength permitted inasmuch as he was a favorite of God. Other Prophets like Solomon, David and Abraham, had enjoyed a similar privilege. Solomon had a hundred wives. God allowed him to have them, for superhuman virility is the sign of the Prophet. Muhammad was the seal of the prophecy. His strength was incommensurable. But Muhammad was an ascetic and although his strength was greater than that of Solomon, he only had fourteen wives.*

*Muhammad was married to fourteen wives. Fourteen women had the title, "mother of the faithful." "But countless were the number of women who came to Muhammad and asked for his love. To all of them Muhammad gave his love, for his heart was filled with sympathy and great was his inclination for the weakness of women.*

*One desire burned in Muhammad's heart, and drove him from one woman to another; from one slave to the next. Muhammad wished for a son who would be worthy of his father inheritance. A son who could take over God's state and complete Muhammad's work. But his wish was never fulfilled and until he was an old man Muhammad wandered through the flower garden of his harem, sought out beautiful slaves, embraced countless women and prayed to God, the Creator of man. But no son was given to him. The last of the Prophets was not to have any heirs.*

*If Aisha was the favourite wife of the Prophet, then Sanda was certainly the least beloved. She was a widow of Mecca and Muhammad had married her two months after Khadija's death merely because an Arab cannot remain unmarried without damaging his reputation. He never loved Sanda and it is possible that he would have divorced her had it not been for the fact that she was very intelligent. One night a week was spent by Muhammad in Sanda hut. He did not enjoy it and merely did so because he thought it was his duty. When Sanda learned of Muhammad's love for Aisha, she did an amazing thing and probably something which had never occurred before. She officially gave over her night to Aisha. She gained a good deal through this. She remained in her hut until the end of her life, regularly received presents from the Prophet and was looked upon aka "mother of the faithful" Muhammad knew how to be grateful. "Even on the day of the resurrection she will be my wife," Muhammad said of Sanda.*

*Khasar bint Omar the daughter of Omar, was also not among the favourite wives of Muhammad. She had been married to a Muslim warrior. After the death of her husband, Omar was on the lookout for a suitable marriage for his daughter. Despite his great power,*

he could not force anyone to marry his daughter for she was both old and ugly. Omar felt humiliated and did not know what to do. When Muhammad heard of this, he had pity on his friend and did what but few men would have done, he married the daughter because of his friendship to her father. He was also a good husband to her visited her regularly, gave her presents and did not neglect the nights which were allotted to her.

On the other hand, his love for Zainab was both gentle and genuine. She had had a very romantic past. Zainab had been the wife of Zaid, the former slave and adopted son of Muhammad. Muhammad had seen her and was pleased by her appearance, her seriousness and her piety. He visited her a number of times and talked with her. One day Zaid came to Muhammad and said, "O Prophet, I am but a simple Muslim but you are the messenger of God. Your deeds are greater than mine and your wish is stronger than mine. Take my wife for you need her more than I do." And the slave Zaid divorced his wife and gave her to the Prophet. Zainab was pious and very beautiful. She loved the Prophet because he was a Prophet, and did not wish to accept any money or presents from him. Before she had married Zaid, she had been a shoemaker and had sold her wares in the bazaars. Even as "mother of the faithful" she did not stop her work. The money she made was divided among the poor of the city. After Muhammad's death, when all the wives of the Prophet were presented with gold by the caliphs, she alone remained poor and without demands. The Caliph Omar gave her a huge fortune which she distributed among the poor. Each of the wives of the Prophet were entitled to choose something from the treasury of Islam, but Zainab took nothing but a lovely dress in which she wished to be buried. When she died she was carried on Muhammad's bier to her grave, for next to Aisha, she was Muhammad's favourite wife.

Muhammad's wives were numerous and he loved them all ardently. He devoted much of his time to his harem and there are many provisions in the Koran concerning the wives of the Prophet. For example, they had to hide their faces modestly behind veils in the presence of strange men. At first this fashion was copied by the upper classes and then came into general usage. This was the origin of the Muslim practice of wearing veils. The wives of the Prophet were also forbidden to remarry after his death.

The harem was made up of the nine huts around the mosque. Muhammad himself did not possess a hut. Even in the days of his grandeur when he ruled over all Arabia, he did not have a house of his own. His nights were regularly and systematically planned. Each wife knew which night the Prophet would spend with her. Only a new wife had the right to receive Muhammad three nights in succession.

Whenever he brought a present to one of his wives, a similar gift was given to all the members of the harem. On the other hand, he did not spoil his wives and it was considered a great event when, returning from a successful battle, he gave each of them eighty measures of figs, corn, and wheat. He did not permit gossip or jealousy among his wives and they were forbidden by means of severe punishments.

Aisha was not exempt from these punitive measures, for Muhammad was just to both his subjects and his wives. He was also quick to defend and protect any woman who had been dealt with unjustly.

On one occasion Muhammad set out against a rebellious Jewish tribe. He destroyed the tribe and brought back with him a pretty Jewish maiden. The girl, whose name was Safiya, became his eleventh wife. The harem was annoyed upon the arrival of each of Muhammad's new wives and Aisha, the most temperamental of them all, did not cease insulting the Jewess Safiya because of her faith. One day Muhammad heard them quarrel and said to Safiya: "Safiya, say to this woman, my father's name was Aaron, my uncle was Moses, and who were your fathers? Heathen!" Thereupon he banished Aisha for two months.

*An Oriental conqueror battles the world with his sword, but he assures his possession of it by means of the tender ties of marriage. If an eastern people is to obey its ruler then it wishes to be related to him. Even in our day the harem of an Oriental ruler contains women from all the provinces of his country. The people feel themselves related by blood with the children of the ruler; and this assures unity within the country. A similar fate was not spared Muhammad. The noblest families and tribes sent their prettiest women to him so that he might marry them.*

*Once Muhammad received the news that the head of the royal tribe Kindit wished to send him his daughter for a wife. The nobler an Arab is the longer his name. One can have some idea of the nobility of this particular bride from her father's name which was: Noman ibn Abi Djadu Aswad ben Kharits ben Djadu ben Akul el Merar. The daughter of this famous man was considered one of the most beautiful of all the Arab women. Asma was brought to Medina with much pomp. The marriage was celebrated with all due ceremony and Asma moved into one of the nine huts. Although Asma was very beautiful she was stupid and the inhabitants of the harem, who were jealous of each new competitor; knew how to benefit by it. Shortly before the bridal night, one of Muhammad's wives came to Asma, admired her beauty and, being very friendly, gave her some advice. Among other things she said: "If you wish to find approval in the eyes of the messenger of God, go say to him when he enters your hut: 'God protect me from you. Only in this manner can you be sure of his love.'" We have said that Asma was as stupid as she was beautiful. She followed the advice given her and when Muhammad entered her hut she said: "God protect me from you." She then lifted her veil and looked at the Prophet. "May God protect me from you as well," replied the Prophet and, leaving the hut, he sent her a letter of divorce. In spite of her fashionable parents, he remained steadfast and refused to forgive Asma. It has been said that Muhammad often sent back his brides on their bridal night because of similar tricks perpetrated by his wives.*

*At the height of his power; when he ruled over all Arabia, Muhammad was subjected to a veritable assault of women. His last marriage was celebrated two months before his death. If a general conquered a distant province, or if some ruler wished to show Muhammad his respect, he would send him a number of beautiful slaves in addition to other treasures. Muhammad would either present them to his friends or keep them for himself. In the year 7 of the Hegira, when the Christian governor of Egypt had heard of the Prophet, because he was afraid and also as a precautionary measure, he sent him a thousand bars of gold, twenty pieces of Egyptian linen, a white donkey, some honey, a eunuch with whom the Prophet could do nothing, and two beautiful Egyptian slaves who were immediately converted to Islam.*

*The Prophet took one of them but did not marry her. She was a light-skinned, curly-haired Copt, Maria. Muhammad loved her passionately, she became his favourite concubine and he visited her frequently despite the objections of his wives. Maria was the only one among all the women who fulfilled his dearest wish, she bore him a son—Ibrahim, the heir of his empire. But his happiness was short-lived for the boy died when he was one year old.*

*Years passed by. The youthful prowess of the Prophet began to wane. When he was sixty, the Prophet found it difficult to maintain the schedule of visits to his wives. Muhammad was a wise man and he had pity upon his wives. He knew that women ranging from seventeen to twenty years of age could not love a sixty-year-old man wholeheartedly, even if he was a Prophet. In his wisdom and mildness, he decided to extend freedom to his wives. He assembled them about him and revealed the words of God in the 28th and 29th verses of sura 33, "The Confederates":*

*O Prophet! Say to thy wives: If ye desire this present life and its braveries, come then, I will provide for you, and dismiss you with an honorable dismissal. But if ye desire God and His Apostle, and a home in the next life, then, truly, hath God prepared for those of you who are virtuous, a great reward.*

*'Reflect upon the words of God,' said the Prophet, "and answer according to your conscience." All the women replied: "We love God, His messenger and that which comes after death." Only one of the women, Fatima of the tribe of Kilab, preferred the joys of her youth. The Prophet gave her many presents and dismissed her. Later on she became so poor that she was forced to collect camel dung to be used for fuel. She died in dire poverty and was called Chkyka, the miserable one.*

*The "mothers of the faithful," the first wives of the Prophet, lived modestly and in retirement. Little provision was made for their person and nearly every comfort was lacking in their huts. There was not even a place where they could satisfy their needs, so that they were often forced to retire to the desert at night for this purpose. It was only during the last years of his life that the Prophet caused conveniences to be erected, for he suspected that their nocturnal excursions were for purposes other than those they claimed.*

The Prophet's deeply-rooted suspicion of what might or might not transpire when a wife goes out into the desert to answer a call of nature had its origin in a particular episode, which we will see momentarily.

*The wives of the Prophet owned nothing and they were overjoyed at the smallest gift. Their entire fortune consisted of twelve ounces of gold which the Prophet had paid for them.*

*Later, when the Prophet was dead and Islam has already encircled an entire world, the women were richly provided with gold. The treasuries of the caliphs were constantly at their disposal. The widow's pensions were small fortunes and more money was offered for the lowly huts than had ever been possessed by all Arabia. So, for example, the caliph Walid paid fifty thousand gold dirhems to the heirs of Zainab for her hut, a huge fortune in the eyes of the old world. The Jewess Safiya left a fortune of one hundred thousand gold dirhems.*

*All the treasures of the orient were now at the disposal of the Prophet's wives. Their relatives "were given the highest positions in Islam. Selma, who at first did not wish to marry the Prophet because she had children for whom Muhammad would have had to provide, lived to see Ali appoint her sons as governors of entire provinces. For generations, the blood relatives of the wives of the Prophet together with his own relatives, made up the aristocracy of Islam. The wives themselves were given all honours up to the time of their death and not a single caliph dared deny them any wish.*

*In this fashion posterity honoured the women who had loved God and His messenger more than they did all the joys of existence, the women who lived in narrow huts in which the Prophet spent his nights, and who never had wheaten bread to eat for two successive days.*

Moving now from an overview of the Prophet's marital situation, I anticipate the feminist ballistic level to escalate several notches in addressing the circumstances under which the marriage to his favourite wife, Aisha (who is always so designated despite the fact that it is a centerpiece of polygamous marriage in Islam that each wife is to be treated equally and that no favouritism is to be shown) took place:

*The nicest—that is to say, the least lowly of the huts—belonged to the favourite wife of the Prophet, the daughter of Abu Bakr the friend and well-wisher of Muhammad, the beautiful Aisha. Aisha was six years old when Muhammad had first seen her in Mecca and he could not take his eyes off her. This was shortly after the death of Khadya who at that time was Muhammad's only wife. Abu Bakr who had understood the enraptured look on the face of his friend, promised to give his daughter to him when she would be old enough for marriage and love. But Muhammad's rapture was so great that after three years, he married the nine-year-old Aisha in Medina. He himself was fifty years old at that time.*

*“I sat,” recounted Aisha, “on a rocking chair and I was playing with other girls. My mother called me. I went although I did not know why she had called me. My mother took me by the hand and led me to the door of the house. My heart began to beat but gradually I again became quiet. I washed my face and hair and my mother dressed me up and led me into the house where there were many women. They received me with good wishes and they also decorated me. When they were finished, they gave me over to the Prophet.”*

*Aisha was the favourite wife of the Prophet, and of the many who were his, she was the only one who had come to him as a virgin. Following the ancient Arabian custom, he had paid her father Abu Bakr twelve ounces of gold. Later on this was also the price Muhammad was willing to pay for a wife. He never paid more. During the first year of the great flight it was impossible for Muhammad to raise twelve ounces of gold. But since tradition had to be maintained, the father of the bride, Abu Bakr, lent the gold to his friend Muhammad who in turn solemnly offered it as the purchase price for Aisha. Memories of the first hard years in Medina were connected with Aisha in Muhammad’s mind. In spite of his power, Muhammad had still been poor at that time and he had never even thought of amassing a fortune. For this reason his marriage was a poor one. The marriage feast consisted of milk, the marriage bed was a sheep stall, and the nine-year-old bride’s dowry, two shirts, two simple silver bracelets and a little silver money. For poverty was the virtue of the Prophet. “In the first years of our marriage,” said Aisha, “it happened that for months we never lit a fire, for our food was water and dates. Now and again someone would send us some meat. Wheat bread was never seen two days in succession in the house of the Prophet.”*

*When Aisha married she was still a child and she had brought her toys with her to the house of her husband. She played with dolls and amazed the faithful, for dolls are representations of human beings. They are strictly forbidden in Islam. But Aisha was permitted to do much which was forbidden to others of the faithful. ‘he was very pretty, witty and playful, liked to wear gold rings and anointed her hair so much that the ointment oftentimes ran down her forehead.*

The central episode in Ibn Ishaq’s biography of Muhammad which concerns Aisha takes up a whole chapter, under the (somewhat) odd—but, to me, entirely suitable—title of “Aisha and the History of the World”. It takes place when Aisha is a teenager—anywhere from twelve to sixteen years old, depending on whose math you’re using:

*According to Aisha, “When the Apostle of God was about to depart on a journey, he used to throw lots to decide which of his wives he would take with him. Before an expedition against the Banu Mustaliq, my lot came out, so the Apostle of God took me with him. In those days women used to eat only the necessities of life, and did not become strong and heavy on meat. When my camel was ready, I would seat myself in the howdah, which my attendants would then lift on to the back of the camel; then they would attach it to the beast and we could set off.*

*“During our return from the Mustaliq expedition we paused to rest for a night. Before the company set off again, I withdrew for a moment, but I was wearing a string of Yemeni beads and when I returned I found they had fallen from my neck. Although the people were about to start I went back to the place where I had been and searched until I found them. The attendants who were in the habit of saddling my camel had meanwhile done so and had taken up the howdah (thinking that I was in it as usual) and tied it upon the camel; then they had led the camel off. When I returned to the camp not a soul was there, so I wrapped myself in my cloak and laid myself down, for I knew that they would miss me and come to seek me.*

*“While I was thus reclining, Sufi van—who had fallen behind the company for some reason, and had not spent the night with them—passed by and observed me. He exclaimed, “To God we belong, and to Him we must return! This is the wife of the Apostle of God!” and he brought his camel near and said, “Mount!” He withdrew a little and I mounted, then he took*

*hold of the camel head and advanced rapidly, being anxious to overtake the company; but we neither overtook them, nor did they miss me, until they again encamped. When Sufwan arrived, leading me on his camel, slander was uttered against me although I knew nothing of it.*

What is omitted (in my view, rather significantly) from this version of the story is that Muhammad had taken another wife or a concubine from among the captives of the Mustaliq campaign, who occupied his attentions on the return journey as Aisha had done on the outbound part of the expedition.. leaving Aisha, presumably, largely abandoned and to her own devices. It seems to me not altogether unlikely that the Prophet's teenaged wife had gotten up to some kind of mischief as a result. Adultery with Sufwan seems an extremely remote possibility, given that the punishment in Islam is death by stoning. At the same time, in the vast expanse of the desert, how did Sufwan happen upon little Aisha in the midst of an abandoned camp? What was he doing, lagging so far behind the others? Leaving that aside, I don't think it possible to underestimate the significance of Aisha's own words: ". . .for I knew that they would miss me and come to seek me," in searching out an ulterior motive on the part of a vain, teenaged wife who has been abandoned by her husband for the company of another.

*"I became very ill when we arrived in Medina and so I still did not hear the slanders, but they were communicated to the Apostle as well as to my parents. They did not speak of it to me, but I observed the absence of that kindness which the Apostle of God used always to show me when I was ill. This I thought strange on his part. However I knew nothing of the matter until I had recovered from my illness, after more than twenty days.*

*"At that time we still lived like true Arabs and had no privies in our houses as the Persians did, because we despised and disliked such luxuries. Instead, 'we went out to an open plain in Medina, the women going at night. Thus I walked out one night, and the woman who walked with me stumbled over the hem of her skirt and cursed, saying 'Let Auf perish!' 'By God! 'I exclaimed. 'That seems to me an evil wish, since it concerns a Believer who has fought at Badr. 'The woman asked, 'Has not the news reached thee, o daughter of Abu Bakr?' 'and when I asked what news, she told me of the slanders. I could scarce believe it and fled to the house of my mother, weeping so that I thought my heart would break. I said to my mother 'May God forgive thee; the people slander me and you have said nothing of it to me! 'and she replied, 'Do not be unhappy. There are but few handsome women—who are loved by their husbands, and have rivals—who escape false imputations and slander'*

*"Meanwhile, unknown to me, the Apostle of God addressed the people, gloried and praised God, and said, 'How do you dare to insult me by insulting my family, and by saying things about them which are not true? By God, I know nothing but good of them. '[The lies were spread by some of the Khazraj and the sister of another wife of the Apostle.] When the Apostle of God had finished, Usayd, one of the Aws, rose and said, 'If the slanders are spoken by the Aws, we shall silence them; and if they be spoken by our brothers, the Khazraj, say the word and we shall punish them!'* Then one Sad b. Ubada, who had hitherto seemed a true Believer said, 'You lie. By God, you have suggested this punishment only because you know the slanderers are of the Khazraj; had they been of your tribe you would not have suggested it.' Usayd retorted, 'You lie, by God! You are a Hypocrite and give your support to the Hypocrites!' Then the people assailed each other, and it would have taken little for evil to come to pass between the two tribes.

*"The Apostle of God now consulted Ali and Usama, and Usama spoke only what was good, saying, 'O Apostle of God. We know only good of Aisha, and thou knowest only good of her, and these are merely false and idle rumours! 'But Ali said, 'There are many women! Thou canst take another! Ask her slave and she will tell thee the truth. 'So the Apostle of God summoned my slave to examine her Au rose and struck the woman a violent blow, and said, 'Tell the truth to the Apostle of God and she replied, 'I know only what is good; and I cannot*

*say ill of Aisha, save that one day I was kneading my dough and asked her to watch it, but she fell asleep and a sheep came and ate it up.’”*

Considering that this version of events was, presumably, being related by Aisha to Ibn Ishaq or one of his predecessors decades after the fact (Aisha outlived the Prophet by almost fifty years), you have to admire the scrupulous bits of detail like the sheep eating her slave’s dough. Although it would take many years for the full impact of Ali’s lack of faith in Aisha’s virtue to be felt in Islam, the fact that he didn’t support her version of events effectively doomed his chances at being Muhammad’s successor, despite the fact that Muhammad himself had declared him to be “my satrap, my vizier” when Ali was only ten. Here the seeds were planted for the schism between Shiite Muslims (who believed—and still believe to this day—in the intended succession through Ali and his sons) and Sunni Muslims (who believe in the succession through the Caliphs, beginning with Abu Bakr, coincidentally—or not-so-coincidentally, depending on your viewpoint—Aisha’s father).

Meanwhile, back at the Muslim version of *As The World Turns*:

*“After this, the Apostle came to me, while both my parents were with me; and I wept. He sat down, gloried and praised God, and then said, ‘Thou must have heard what the people are saying. Fear God! If thou hast done wrong, then repent, for God accepts the repentance of his servants. ‘While he spoke thus, my tears ceased to flow. I waited for my parents to reply to the Apostle, but neither of them spoke; and I entertained too low an opinion of myself to hope that God would reveal verses of the Koran about me. But I hoped the Apostle might have a vision in his sleep, in which God would expose the liars, or justify me, or tell the Apostle the truth. When I saw that my parents did not speak, I asked, ‘Will you not reply to the Apostle of God?’ They said, ‘We know not what to say to him!’*

*“When I saw my parents thus estranged from me my tears flowed once more, and I cried, ‘I shall never repent to God for what I am accused of because God knoweth I should be repenting something which did not occur, and thus I should speak untruth. But if I deny the charges, you will not believe me.’*

*“And the Apostle of God had not yet left us when he lost consciousness, as always happened before a revelation; then I neither feared nor cared, for I knew that I was innocent, and that God would do no injustice to me. But my parents seemed about to die for fear lest God might send a revelation confirming the words of the slanderers.*

*“The Apostle of God came back to consciousness and sat up, and the perspiration trickled like pearls from his forehead, although it was a winter day. Then he wiped it away, and said, ‘Allah has revealed thy innocence, and I replied, ‘God be praised!’ After that, he went out to the people and recited to them verses of the Koran revealed to him by God, and he ordered the slanderers to be scourged.”*

*Sufwan, who had been slandered with Aisha, met one of the worst slanderers, the poet Hassan, and struck him with his sword. Another man, Thabit, hastened to assist Hassan, grasping Sufwan, and tying his hands to his neck with a rope; he then took him to the dwelling of one of the Khazraj, where Abdullah b. Rawaha met them. He asked, “What is this?” and Thabit replied, “Are you displeased? He struck Hassan with a sword and, by God, he might have killed him. “Abdullah asked, “Does the Apostle of God know of this?” and when Thabit said he did not, Abdullah told him, “You have been presumptuous! Let the man go.”*

*When the Apostle heard of this, he had Sufwan and Hassan brought before him, and Sufwan explained, “He offended and mocked me; anger overcame me, and I struck him. “ Then the Apostle said to Hassan, “Why do you malign my people when God has given them enlightenment? I think you deserved the blow “However the Apostle soothed the poet by presenting him with a fortress in Medina, and a Coptic slave girl. Then Hassan composed verses complimentary to the chastity and beauty of Aisha.*

Quite a roller-coaster ride for all concerned. I consider myself a pretty dispassionate individual, but you can't help but have great empathy for this weepy-eyed teenager whose parents are, if not "hanging her out to dry" at least not exactly putting their necks on the line on her behalf. It does seem significant to me that Muhammad—who made no secret of his complete antipathy for poets of all kinds, and particularly for those who offend and mock others with their verses—effectively rewarded Hassan with a fortress and a Coptic slave girl for casting aspersions on Aisha's virtue. Or, perhaps more accurately, who bribed the poet with these materialisms to change his tune on the same subject. In both instances, describing either possibility as "significant" dramatically understates the case, in my view.

[Parenthetically, on a subject related only tangentially to the above, I think it also worth noting that Islamic tradition holds that it was Aisha who introduced the idea of Muslim women "taking the veil" and by the same tradition that it was at her instigation that all of the Prophet's wives began to do so, covering themselves from head-to-toe in public so as to prevent any eyes but those of the Prophet from beholding their unadorned beauty. Given Aisha's own well-documented adolescent vanity, it would not surprise to find that she did so specifically to try and win back Muhammad's favour and to assist in the restoration of his faith in her wifely honour and virtue. Whether her purpose was accomplished or not, it is irrefutable that the prestige which attached itself to the Prophet's wives covering themselves in this fashion quickly gained favour with the aristocratic ladies of Arabia as a sign of a husband's high station in life and persists in all areas of the Muslim world as a demarcation between the upper and lower classes. So, unfortunately for feminists everywhere who insist on seeing the veil—and the burqa—as a sign of patriarchal dictatorship, neither is likely to disappear from the Muslim world anytime soon. Because of the prestige attached to being a "woman of cover," attempting to legislate against the veil or the burqa has about as much chance of success as would an attempt to pass a law in New York City which would forbid a woman wearing any article of clothing that costs more than twenty dollars. In other words? Forgedaboutit.]

Okay, now that you have a little better idea who Aisha is, we can return to Muhammad's last days as the fatal illness continues to sap him of his strength:

#### Part V

*At the time of his illness, Aisiw said, "The Apostle of God came walking between two men, with his head wrapped in a cloth, and he walked slowly till he entered my house. Then the Apostle fainted, and his malady became worse. He said, 'Pour seven leather bags of cold water from the well over me, that I may go out to the people, and give them my last injunctions. 'So we seated him in a tub and poured water over him till he said, 'Enough! Enough!'"*

*The Apostle went out with his head bandaged, and sat upon the pulpit. The first words he spoke were words of prayer for those who had fallen at Uhud; for them he implored pardon and again prayed at some length. Then he said, "God has given one of His servants the choice between this world and the next, and he has chosen to be with God. "Abu Bakr understood these words and knew that he meant himself so he wept, saying, "Nay. We shall give our own lives and those of our children for thine." But the Apostle said, "Look to these doors which open into the mosque, and close them all save those which lead to the house of Abu Bakr because I have known no better companion than he."*

*While the Apostle was sick the people delayed the expedition he had commanded, but he said, "Carry out the expedition to the Syrian border "and the people hastened their preparations.*

*He commanded the Emigrants to treat the Helpers well, saying, "Other groups increase, but the Helpers must remain the same in number and cannot increase. They were my asylum and gave me shelter Be kind to those who are kind to them, and punish those who injure them. "Then the Apostle entered his house, and the sickness overcame him so that he fainted.*

*The wives of the Apostle gathered to consult, and all agreed that they ought to pour medicine into his mouth. The uncle of the Apostle, al-Abbas, offered to pour it himself. When the Apostle recovered from his swoon he asked, "Who has done this to me?" and they replied, "Thy uncle!" He said, "This is a medicine brought by women from Abyssinia. Why have you done this?" Then his uncle replied, "We feared thy having pleurisy," and the Apostle said, "That is a disease with which God the most high and glorious has not afflicted me! Let no one remain in this house without swallowing some of this medicine, except my uncle." Accordingly even Maymuna swallowed some—although she was fasting at the time—because the Apostle swore that all must taste it as a punishment for what they had done to him.*

*According to Aisha, "When the Apostle had become very ill, he said, 'Order Abu Bakr to pray with the people!' And I replied, 'Abu Bakr is a tender-hearted man with a weak voice, and he weeps much when he reads the Koran. But he said, 'Order him to pray with the people!' I objected only to spare my father, because I knew the people would never wish another man to stand in the Prophet's place, and would blame my father for any evil which might occur."*

Speaking as someone who tries as much as possible to steer a middle course between Shia and Sunni Islam—in much the same way that I try to recognize the validity of both Protestant and Catholic Christianity—while still keeping a critical eye on the texts which support both views, I must confess that I have always found Aisha's recollections of events of the Prophet's last days... opportune (to use a charitable term for it). It seems to me of no small value to the Sunni version of events that those last conversations with the Prophet, to which only Aisha was privy within the confines of her hut, favour—so vehemently—the perception of the Prophet being possessed of an ardent inclination towards Aisha's father. I'm not saying it wasn't so, but my suspicions are somewhat aroused. Had the Prophet actually been that emphatic in his declaration, it seems likely to me that—not only wouldn't the sixteen-year-old Aisha have had the nerve to object to the Prophet's order, but that she would, in fact, have flown to the Prophet's Mosque as fast as her little sixteen-year-old feet would have carried her to have the order implemented. The sexagenarian Aisha, on the other hand, long grown used to her every utterance and whim being "carved in stone" in Islam (a subject on which both Shia and Sunni texts fall strangely mute, apart from acknowledging that, yes, Aisha implemented hundreds of different shariat laws, of which only a small percentage were not revoked after her death) would probably have remembered the episode as having occurred in just that fashion, decades after the death of both the Prophet and her father, the first Caliph.

*On the Monday on which God took His Apostle he went out to the people at their morning prayers. The curtain at Aisha door was tied, the door opened, and the Apostle of God came out and stood in the doorway. When the Muslims caught sight of him they were almost diverted from their prayers through joy at his presence. He signaled them to continue their devotions, and smiled with pleasure as he watched them pray; never had the watchers seen him wear a more beautiful expression than then. After the prayers he addressed the people in a voice loud enough to be heard outside the door of the mosque. He said, "The fire is kindled, and confusion descends like darkness. But ye have nothing to reproach me for I have allowed only what the Koran allows, and have forbidden what the Koran forbids." When the Apostle had finished speaking Abu Bakr said, "Apostle of God! I see thou hast risen this morning, by the favour and grace of God, in the state of health we love to see thee in!" Then the people went to their homes, satisfied that the Apostle was recovered from his illness.*

*But al-Abbas had said that morning to Ali, "I swear by God that I have seen death in the face of the Apostle. And he was not mistaken.*

*Aisha said, "When the Apostle of God returned that morning from the mosque he rested on my lap." Usama, in command of the Syrian expedition, had camped outside Medina, but when he heard the Apostle was dangerously ill he went down to Medina with his army. "When I went in to the Apostle he had already lost the power of speech and said nothing; but he lifted his hands to heaven and then again lowered them, and I knew he was praying for me."*

*According to Aisha, “a man of the family of Abu Bakr happened to enter with a fresh toothpick in his hand and the Apostle of God looked at it in such a way that I knew he wanted it. I asked, ‘Shall I give thee this toothpick?’ and he replied, ‘Yes’. So I took it and chewed it until it became soft and gave it to him. He rubbed it against his teeth, more sharply than I had ever seen him do, and then he laid it down again. Then I found that he was becoming heavily in my lap, and I looked at him and saw that his eyes were turned upwards; and he said, ‘Nay! Rather the companion in paradise!’ I had often heard the Apostle say, ‘God takes no Prophet away without giving him a choice,’ and when he died his last words were, ‘Rather the companion in paradise’. Then I thought, ‘He has not chosen our companionship. ‘And I said to him, ‘The choice was thine, and I swear by Him who sent thee that thou hast chosen what is right. ‘Then the Apostle of God died, at noon on Monday.*

*“The Apostle died on my breast, despite my foolishness and youth. I placed his head on a cushion, and then I rose and began to strike my face and beat my breast with the other women.”*

And then.. .and then.. .when I read Aisha’s confession of the Prophet’s last words, knowing what a toll that would exact on *any* wife—let alone a teenager who had been the undisputed favourite of God’s Last Messenger and Seal of Prophets—my faith in her is restored, at the very least to the extent of acknowledging that Aisha was a woman unlike other women, even granting her self-admitted foolishness and youth.

In the immediate aftermath of the end of the Age of Prophets:

*Now Omar rose before the people and said, “Some Hypocrites say that the Apostle of God is dead! He has not died, but has departed to his Lord, just as Moses left his people for forty days, and returned to them when it was rumoured he was dead. By God! The Apostle will return just as Moses did, and the hands and feet of the men who have said that the Apostle is dead will be cut off!”*

*Abu Bakr arrived, and alighted at the door of the mosque while Omar was talking thus. But he took no notice, and went in to see the body of the Apostle in the house of Aisha. It was laid out and shrouded with a striped mantle. This he removed from the face of the Apostle and, kissing it, said, “Thou art to me as my father and mother! Thou hast tasted the death which God decreed for thee; but after it, no death will ever come to thee again.” Then he covered the face of the Apostle and went out. He went to Omar and said, “Gently! Listen to me!” but Omar paid no attention, and continued his speech.*

*When Abu Bakr saw that he would not listen he himself turned to the people, who left Omar and came to him. Then he gave praise to God and said, “Let all who adored Muhammad know that Muhammad is dead, and let all who adore God know that God is eternal and never dies.” Then he recited the verse “Muhammad is but an Apostle. Other Apostles have passed away before him. If he die or be slain will ye turn back? He who turns back does no injury to God; and God will surely reward those who give thanks. “And it was as if the people had never heard this verse until Abu Bakr recited it then.*

*Omar told thereafter how “When God had caused His Apostle to die, the Helpers disagreed with the Emigrants about what should next be done, and they gathered to discuss it. I said to Abu Bakr ‘Let us go to our brethren the Helpers,’ and we went, and sat down with them. Then their orator pronounced the Confession of Faith, uttered due praise to God, and said, ‘We are the Helpers of God and the army of Islam, and you Emigrants are apart of us. ‘And they intended thus to take dominion away from us. When he ceased to speak I prepared to reply and had already thought out an oration which pleased me when Abu Bakr said, ‘Gently, Omar! ‘And I was unwilling to anger him. -*

*“Then he spoke and he was more learned and dignified than I. There was not a sentiment I had intended to use which he did not express in the same or even in a better way than I could*

*have done. He said, 'Whatever good qualities you claim, you are possessed of! But the Arabs concede supremacy only to us of the Koreish, who are the centre of the Arab world by heredity and position. I propose to you one of these two men as leader and you may pay homage to whichever you prefer! 'Then he took hold of my hand and that of Abu Ubayda. This was the only sentiment in his speech which displeased me, for I would rather have had my head struck off than govern over a man so great as Abu Bakr.*

*"Then a Helper rose and said, 'Let there be one Amir selected from the Helpers, and one from the Emigrants, 'and many voices were raised and there was confusion. So, fearing dissension, I cried to Abu Bakr to stretch out his own hand and I paid him homage. Then all paid him homage."*

And—evidently—in just so effortless a fashion, the succession of the Prophet was decided, not on the basis of piety, not on the basis of the close friendship to the Prophet of the would-be successor, but rather on the basis of the pre-eminence of the Koreish, as the centre of the Arab world by heredity and position. This is the reason, in the last installment, that I questioned whether the merging of Islam with Mecca was the choice of the Prophet on his own or if he was directed to do so by God. I suspect the former since—as can be seen here—practically at the moment of Muhammad's death, the Koreish were again the preeminent concern in the Arab lands which had previously united solely (and now, it began to appear, only ostensibly) under the Prophet's leadership. With the first and second Caliphs, Abu Bakr and Omar, this posed no great problem, since they could claim, like Muhammad, to have a foot in both camps. They were of Mecca and they were, likewise, of Islam. By choice, their allegiance to the latter superseded their allegiance to the former. Very shortly, however, as the succession of the Caliphs continued, this was not to be the case.

*Finally, Abu Bakr spoke again. He said, "I am appointed to govern you, although I am not the best of you. If I act well you must aid me, and if I act unjustly you must correct me. Truth is faithfulness and falsehood is treachery! No nation has failed to fight for God but God has punished it with abasement; nor has wickedness become widespread without God sending calamity. Obey me as long as I obey God and His Prophet! But should I rebel against God and His Prophet you will owe me no obedience! Rise to your prayers and may God have mercy on you!"*

*On Tuesday, after allegiance had been paid to Abu Bakr the people made preparations for the burial of the Apostle of God, Ali, al-Abbas and his sons al-Fadl and Qutham, with Usama and Shuqran, took it upon themselves to wash the corpse. Au leaned the body against his own breast, while al-Abbas, al-Fadl and Qutham helped to turn him. Usama and Shuqran poured the water whilst Ali washed him. Ali said, "Thou art my father and my mother! How beautiful thou art, alive and dead! "And there was nothing distasteful, as with other dead bodies, in the corpse of the Apostle of God,*

*Aisha said, "When they were about to wash the Apostle, they disagreed and said, 'By God! We do not know whether we ought to strip the Apostle of God as corpses are usually stripped or whether to wash him in his clothes. 'As they are discussing, God sent sleep upon them so that there was not a man among them who did not slumber; and they heard a voice which they knew not, saying, 'Wash the Prophet in his garments!' They rose and washed the Apostle of God in his shirt, pouring water over it, and rubbing it with their hands, so that the shirt was between their hands and the body" After the washing had been completed, the Apostle was wrapped in three garments.*

*When the body had been arranged and laid out on the couch in his own house the Muslims knew not where to bury him. One said, "Let us bury him in his mosque. "Another said, "Let us bury him with his companions. "And Abu Bakr said, "I have heard the Apostle of God say that every Prophet should be buried on the spot where he died "Accordingly the bed on which the Apostle had been resting was lifted up, and the grave dug under it. But there was doubt about the form of the grave.*

*Abu Ubayda was accustomed to dig graves plainly, according to the fashion of Mecca, but Abu the grave digger of Medina, dug them in a vaulted shape. Al-Abbas therefore called two men, and said to one of them, "Go to Abu Ubayda," and to the other "Go to Abu Talha. " He added, "God, choose for Thy Apostle. "Abu Ubayda could not be found, but the man who went to Abu Talha found him and brought him; so he dug the grave of the Apostle in the Medina fashion.*

*Then the men entered in throngs to pray for him. When they had completed their devotions the women came in; and when they had finished the children came. Yet no one had directed the people to visit the corpse of the Apostle of God.*

*The Apostle of God was buried in the middle of the night on Wednesday. Aisha said, "We knew nothing about the burial of the Apostle until we heard the sound of pickaxes in the middle of the night." Those who went down into the grave of the Apostle were the same men as washed the corpse. When the Apostle had been laid in the grave and it was to be built up, his freed slave, Shuqran, took a wrapper which the Apostle had used often and worn out; and, burying it in the grave, he said, "No one shall wear it after thee. "It remained interred with the Apostle.*

*According to Aisha, the Apostle had said when he was dying, "The curse of God is on a nation which makes the graves of its Prophets into places of worship. "But, he knew that his own followers would do this.*

Abu Bakr became the successor to the Prophet, Ruler of the Faithful, Shadow of God on Earth, Governor of the Messenger of God and became the first to hold these exalted titles as Caliph of Islam. Abu Bakr ruled for only two years. Not long, but long enough to launch successful military campaigns against Iran, Iraq and Byzantium.

... Continued next issue.

essay

## Islam, My Islam

*In March of the year 633, less than a year after the death of the Prophet, the army of the first caliph crossed the boundaries of Iran. The leader of this army was Khalid benel Walid and he commanded eighteen thousand men. In Iraq he fought against the army of the Persian governor, Hormuzd. This so-called "chain battle" ended in a victory for Islam. in less than a year half of Mesopotamia belonged to the caliphs.*

*The second Syrian campaign followed. Again Khalid led the army and vanquished the superior army of Byzantium at Jarmuk. The knowledge of this mighty victory reached Abu Bakr as he upon his deathbed. Abu Bakr had only ruled for two years and everything he had done was merely carrying out the plans and intentions of the Prophet. "Muhammad's shadow fell upon the earth through Abu Bakr" said the biographers of the latter. The only thing he did of his own accord was the creation of the form of the state and that, after all, was also in keeping with Muhammad idea. Islam was to be an elective monarchy. Abu Bakr knowing how to exclude Ali and his people, ordered that Omar the most energetic of the Muslims, was to be his successor*

*Omar was the St. Paul of Islam. He gave to the idea of a State of God definite outlines and far reaching form. Finance, government, justice, all the elements which Muhammad had merely indicated, were created and developed by Omar. Surrounded by the mohajirun and the ansar in Medina, Omar ruled over a gigantic empire. His active past when he had been a smuggler, merchant and soldier was of great use to him now. He was versed in questions of government and he decided everything himself even the smallest matter. He ruled for ten years, without rest or pause. His armies moved victoriously into the land of the unbelievers. At Kadissia, in the heart of Iraq, decisive battle took place between*

*Persia and Islam. The battle raged for three days. On the fourth night, "the night of woe," the Arabs won the upper hand. When they were about to pursue Persians, one of the Muslims cut off the trunk of the Persian lead-elephant. The pain transported the animal into a frenzy and it charged the Persians and was followed by all the other elephants. A panic burst forth in the ranks of the Persian troops. Rustem, the regent of the Persian kingdom, was slain in battle and the tiger skin ornamented with diamonds, the imperial standard Iran, fell into the hands of the victors.*

*The way to Persia lay open. The fires of Zoroaster burned for but a few years longer. The waves of Islam put them out. In the year 651, deserted by all, Jesdegerd III, the last emperor of Iran, fell at the hands of an assassin. "For us the Arabs were nothing but beggars and vagabonds. God willed that we were to know them as warriors," were supposedly his last words.*

*The victory of Islam over Syria and Palestine was even more rapid than that over Persia. It was only with great difficulty that the old Emperor Heraclius could defend the Holy Land of the Christians and the city of Jerusalem. The Muslims advanced on all sides. In the year 636, the sick dying emperor left the Holy City. He carried the Holy Cross with him and no longer thought rescue. Only a few years later, Omar, dressed in poor clothing and mounted on an old red-haired camel, and surrounded by victorious generals bedecked with gold, entered into Jerusalem. On his right rode the Patriarch of Jerusalem and Omar gave orders that he was to protect the Christians. As a matter of fact, not a single inhabitant of the city of Jerusalem was killed because his faith.*

*When the crusaders vanquished the city centuries later not a single Muslim, woman or child, spared. A terrible blood bath crowned the victory of the crusaders. When Jerusalem had been conquered by Islam, Omar built a great mosque on the site of the old temple. This became the third holiest mosque in Islam.*

This, of course, is the Dome of the Rock, the al-Aqsa mosque which dominates Jerusalem's Temple Mount and has done so since sixty years after the death of Muhammad. Noah Richier, in his review of Kana Makiya's novel, *The Rock* (Pantheon, 347 pages, \$40 Canadian) ("Upon this rock he built his book," *National Post*, 3 January 2002) writes (without giving his sources): "The mosque was built over the ruins of Solomon's temple, razed by the Romans under Titus in AD 70. The site, an indication of Christian contempt for Jews at the time was a garbage heap, one that had deliberately been allowed to accumulate for several hundred years. Ka'b [al Ahbar, a Jewish convert to Islam '...an authentic but little-known historical figure who accompanied the victorious Caliph Omar to Jerusalem from Medina,'] Makiya writes, was able to determine the exact location the Rock ['...the site of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac, of Adam's landing in the world and of Muhammad's ascension from it; it is the place, in the mythologies of all three great religions, where Heaven and Earth 'meet...'] by finding the most injurious refuse of all, the place where women's menstrual rags had been discarded."

*The conquest of Egypt was equally rapid. Amr ben el Asi, the poet, diplomat, and satirist, advanced with four thousand men into the valley of the Nile. The population received him with shouts of joy for he brought them liberation from the sectarian conflicts and from the burden of taxes. Alexandria alone made an attempt at resistance. When Heraclius had died and the Byzantine court began to quarrel bitterly about his heir, the cunning Arabian poet was able to enter the brilliant capital of the great Alexander victoriously.*

*The conqueror of Alexandria, the proud Amr sent long reports of the brilliance of his victory to the barbaric desert city of Medina. He wrote: "I have conquered a mighty city with twelve thousand amusement places and forty thousand Jews."*

*The vast amounts of gold and wealth which now poured in from all sides to the court of the caliph changed nothing in his patriarchal mode of living. Omar was not penurious. As a matter of fact he enabled the new aristocracy of Medina to enjoy an excellent and carefree existence. Pensions and grants were distributed among the faithful. The caliph himself was satisfied with the bare necessities of life. The puritanical teachings of Muhammad had taken root in his soul. So, for example, the only reason why he deposed the great warrior Khalid ben el Walid who had won many victories for Islam, was because he did not lead a moral life. When he heard that Saad, the conqueror of Persia, wished to*

*build himself a castle at Kufa, he wrote to him. "I have heard that you wish to build a palace like those of Chosroes. Have you perhaps the intention of placing a guard at the doors of your palace so that the petitioners who come to you may be kept out?" When this letter was received, the palace was destroyed. If a general, who had just won some important siege, appeared bedecked with some of the precious jewels that were part of the conquered booty, the caliph would pick up a stone from the ground and throw it at the general in anger. Discipline, modesty and prayer were to be the virtues of the new State.*

*In politics, Omar applied the inflexible principle of tadfil, the pre-eminence of the pious ansar and mohajirun over the rest of the community of the faithful. Only those who had lived side by side with the Prophet were worthy of ruling the new State. Under the caliphate of Omar the widespread family of the ansar and, the mohajirun became the government clique of the new State. Generals, prayer leaders and provincial governors came from their ranks, they received the major portion of the booty and they regarded the State of God as the sole domain of the auxiliaries of the messenger of God. Those in search of wealth and booty who had joined up with Muhammad, anyone who had participated in the desert pillaging under Muhammads leadership, or those who had been wounded at Badr or Ohod, could now lead a parasitical life protected by pious memories.*

*God, wealth, and rewards of all sorts were the wages of the pious. The ancient ideas of the Arabian aristocracy were completely changed. The noble families of Mecca which had failed to join the Prophet at the proper time were ground into the dust. The community of the pious ruled over the gigantic state, over the wealth, and over the army. The believing Medinese looked with contempt at the newly-converted gentlemen of Mecca, the former enemies of Badr and Ohod. Apparently the power of Mecca had been crushed for all time. In addition, the pious of Medina had the greatest of advantages, they could choose the leader of the new State, the caliph, out of their own ranks. Slowly the members of the ruling caste of Medina were changed into parasites living on the State treasury. Only a few realized how great a responsibility rested upon their shoulders upon the death of the Prophet. Most of them knew that they could now secure rich reward for the sacrifices they had once made. Omar was one of the few who continued to lead Islam along the way of the Prophet and to develop the idea which had once excited Muhammad.*

*When Omar became the victim of an attack by a Christian worker in 644, he did not name his successor but upheld the idea of an elective monarchy. Six of the oldest associates of the Prophet were to elect a new caliph out of their ranks.*

*The choice of the six wise men was not a happy one. They elected Osman, the son-in-law of the prophet. Osman was old, pious, easily influenced and thoroughly unsuited for executive duties. However, he merits attention because it was due to him that the Koran was brought into its final shape. He collected the verses of the divine book and deleted much which the inhabitants of Medina would have liked to have preached as God's words. Many of his fellow citizens disliked him because of this.*

To say that the biographies of Muhammad are rife with understatement of this kind would be something of an understatement in itself. If true, this seems an admission that the Koran, after the death of Muhammad, suffered the same fate which many suras of the Koran level at the Jewish Torah—that the scriptures were "sold for a mean price." Or that, at the very least, the text is corrupt through significant omissions dictated by this singular figure in Islam's history. Presumably, deleting verses from a divinely-inspired work like the Koran goes far beyond the likes and dislikes of the citizenry of Medina. They "liked" various verses that Osman deleted and "disliked" him for doing so? Matching understatement with understatement: it will certainly be interesting to discover what Osman chose to excise of the Word of God when all is revealed on the Last Day.

*Old Osman was the tragic turning point of Islam. He too believed in the idea of a State of God, in the eternal equality of men, and in the governing of the puritanical, pious Republic of God by the pupils of the Prophet. And yet it is his fault that the State of God did not retain its original character for hundred of years.*

*Osman came from a fashionable house in Mecca. He was a blood relative of the Ommaya and, like the Prophet, loved Mecca, the city of his birth. And his love for Mecca culminated in his love for his ancient and noble family. When his reign began, more and more of his down-trodden, poor and disdained relatives came from Mecca to Medina. They were all pure, full-blooded Ommayas. The old man could not withstand the influence of his relatives and he believed them when they said that they were convinced Muslims.*

*Under the protection of Osman, the Ommaya once again dared to appear in public. They were sorry for their sins. The caliph could not help himself and appointed his nephews as governors of the provinces and gave them other political power. This meant his decline. The pious executive caste in Medina felt the ground slipping away from under them. The worst enemies of the Prophet, the sons of Hind, had come into power. The pious mohajirun and the ansar did not wish to share their rule over Islam with them. It was almost as bad as sliding back to heathendom that, only a few years after his death, the Prophet ' bitterest enemies should have leading positions in Islam. A storm of indignation arose in Medina and destroyed the caliph.*

*When Osman had been elected it had been expected that he would make the usual speech of acceptance. Many people had come together in the mosque and respectfully made way for the venerable Osman as he went up to the pulpit. Osman remained there for half an hour looked at the crowd and did not say a word. Finally the faithful became impatient and after prolonged hesitation, the feeble old man in the pulpit brought forth a daring sentence: "Every beginning is difficult." Much to the surprise of the crowds, he left the pulpit after having said these words, and went home.*

*It now appeared that not only the beginning was difficult for old Osman but that his end would be more so. One day a number of Bedouins appeared before his house and reviled him because he had permitted the Ommaya to come into power. They then entered into his room and pressed him to abdicate. Although Osman was a weak person, he knew how to keep his dignity. Without paying any attention to the intruders he kept on reading in the Koran. Without any further ado he was murdered. The few Meccans who tried to defend him were forced to flee from the city.*

*The pious clique of Medina now gave the office of caliph to their worthiest representative, Au, the cousin of the Prophet, the leader among the faithful. And so for the first and last time, the dream of the Hashim was fulfilled in Islam. A cousin of the Prophet received Muhammad inheritance. Three times Au had been prevented from ascending the throne but he had never ceased looking upon himself as the rightful heir. The caliphs, who had taken the throne from him, sought to indemnify him richly. His wealth was great and the more it grew the larger was the number of the followers who gathered around him. Now, when it was a question of safeguarding their power against the Meccan usurpers, the faithful crowded around him. In the provinces of the new empire where Ali had sent the most pious of the Medinese as governors, he was refused recognition. Aisha, the mother of the faithful, set out against him at the head of a large army. Civil war became an actuality in Islam. In a bloody conflict, known as the "battle of the camels," All came out victoriously over the rebels. Aisha was taken prisoner and brought to Medina with all honours.*

That's pretty much the extent of the detail you can find on Aisha's attempt to defeat All for the caliphate. Clearly, however, she had come a long way from the teenager who had lost her necklace in the sand.

*When All was ready to take over the office of the caliphate, a new name appeared on the horizon of Arabian politics. The name was that of Moawia ibn Abu Sofran, the governor of Syria. Everything that the pious executive caste in Medina hated was personified in Moawia. He was a Meccan, and Ommaya, and the son of Abu Sofyan and Hind. It was only through Osman weakness that he had secured a leading position in the government. His piety was more than questionable, and his hatred of the Medinese limitless. On the other hand, Moawia was a born aristocrat who was accustomed to rule as well as to the cunning of ruling. He incorporated in himself all the traits of the Koreish and was now reaching out his greedy hands toward the throne of the caliphate.*

*The courageous and pious Ali was not an equal match for him. Near Sifia on the Euphrates, Moawia met the army of the ansar and the mohajirun. The army of Ali was far superior to that of the insurgent. The battle lasted for three days and Ali was victorious. Thereupon the army of Moawia bound copies of the verses of the Koran to their lances and this evidence of piety was enough to bring the army of the pious to a halt. Ali did not dare to wage war against the word of God. He consented to negotiations and came out second best. On the great battlefield of Sifia the idea of the State of God was defeated through the trickery of an Ommaya.*

*Once more the idea of the Prophet attempted to oppose the sober world of politics. On the battle field of Sifia, a party of the very holiest to whom the idea of a just State of God was sacred, separated itself from the army of Ali. "We wish to set out upon the path of God," they said, and they were known as Kharidjites, that is, the wanderers. In the turmoil of the civil war they were soon the only ones who retained the pure faith. In spirit and in deed they were the direct descendants of the Prophet.*

It is at this point that the text betrays itself as Sunni by nature, the centerpiece of which is always that being a direct descendant of the Prophet is invariably more a matter of spirit, self-declaration, piety and intent. As opposed to, you know, being an actual descendant of the Prophet. Don't take my word for it. See for yourself the blithe and remote disinterest with which the Sunni text deals with the subsequent demise of Muhammad's chosen successor, the one he called "my satrap, my vizier" ["satrap" from the Greek and Latin satrapes, literally "protector of the dominion" and "vizier" from the Arabic wazir, "a high executive officer in a country or Empire"]:

*On 21 January, 661, Caliph Alifell at the hands of a fanatic. Without difficulty Moawia took over the caliphate, the leadership over the world of the hated Hashimites. It is one of the most ironic facts in history that it was the house of the Ommaya, the most bitter opponents of Muhammad, which drew the greatest amount of profit out of the work of the Prophet. For with the ascent of the Ommaya the caliphate became hereditary.*

*Three movements sought to save the idea of a free State of God. First it was the Kharidjites, the noblest among the faithful, then the pious clique of Medina which was greedy for power and finally, the direct heirs of the Prophet, the descendants of Ali. All three movements were drowned in blood by the first two caliphs of the Ommaya. The democratic puritans of Islam, the last representatives of the pure faith, the Kharidjites, fought fanatically. They were decisively opposed and finally almost completely annihilated. Only a few succeeded in preserving the idea which had led them on for future generations.*

*An equally tragic fate awaited the fellow-fighters of the Prophet. In the moment, when the army of the new caliph was approaching Medina, they regained their courage. Honourable old men, mohajirun and ansar, threw themselves into the fray with youthful ardour. Suddenly they all recalled the time when the Prophet led the battles in person. Rarely had anyone fought with such fanatical energy and hatred as at the gates of Medina. The old men had perhaps forgotten the art of living honourably but they did know how to die heroically. The steps of the great courtyard of the Prophet's mosque became more and more covered with the blood of the oldest friends of the messenger of God. Despite the heroic defence, the caliph was victorious. His riders used the mosque as a stable for their horses.*

Is it just me, or does it seem more than a little odd that a text written by a Muslim would deal so... disinterestedly...with the son of Muhammad's sworn enemy using the Prophet's Mosque as a stable? If that doesn't seem odd to you, then what about the short shrift which is given

*The grandchildren of the Prophet, the sons of Ali, Hasan and Hosain, also fell in the hopeless battle with the Ommaya. The host of the Alides was destroyed, the schia Au—the party of Ali—was excluded from the throne for all time. However they never desisted throughout the entire history of Islam to fight for their rights. Even today the name of Moawia or that of Jesid, his successor is considered the worst possible curse on the lips of a pious Shiite.*

And what about on the lips of a pious Sunni Muslim? is the question that leaps to my mind. Here, it seems to me, is revealed that peculiarly bloodthirsty Arab capacity for maintaining loyalty to Islam and

to the murderous Koreish simultaneously, reflecting—again——Osama bin Laden’s bland assertion that “When people tee a strong horse and a weak -horse, by nature they will like the strong horse.” While part of them aligns itself with Muhammad and with Islam—the “strong horse” which prevailed in his lifetime over the entirety of the Arabian Peninsula—even so does the unscrupulous and bloodthirsty Arab nature peek through, aligning itself with the son of Abu Sofyan and Hind, Moawia ibn Aba Sofyan who, in his turn, became the “strong horse” and the first Islamic/Koreish hereditary emperor, the caliph, whose life—and whose successors’ lives—was filled with wealth, palaces, pompous ceremonies, feasts, orgies, wine and beautiful women as the Shadow of God on Earth, the Governor of the Messenger of God.

The really interesting thing, to me, is that for all practical purposes the history of Islam stops with the assumption of power of the Ommaya. Clearly, there are many stories to be told but the eradication of Ali and his sons and the usurping of their place by Moawia meant that there are really no further developments in Islam until the year 750 when the Ommayans were supplanted by the Abbasides—the descendants of Muhammad’s uncle, El Abbas. You know, the one Muhammad found completely reprehensible and who had converted to Islam at the last possible moment before the fall of Mecca? Arguably, there were no significant developments even years later when Turkish tribes—whose leaders ultimately took the caliphate for themselves—forced their way into the Muslim empire. Nor were there any significant developments when the caliphate was taken away by the Mongols (“Chulagu, the Mongolian wolf of the steppes, conquered Baghdad, pulled the mantle of the Prophet from the shoulders of the caliph and trod the relic into the ground.”) In this I see, again, God’s sense of humour: If all that remained of the Islam which had been introduced into the Arabian Peninsula by God’s Last Messenger and Seal of Prophets—besides the five pillars (acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty and Muhammad’s prophethood, prayer, the *zakat*, the *hajj*, fasting in the sacred month) and the Koran—was a taste for enormous piles of loot, rich surroundings, wine, women, song, brutal conquest, a vague ecumenical tolerance for Jews and Christians and a respect for libraries and universities, well (I picture God saying) we hardly need a Jesus or a Muhammad to run the show, now do we? Hey, Muslims, have I got a caliph for you! His name is Genghis. Genghis? Show these nice Muslims how you do it in the *real* Orient! Nor were there any significant developments as the Turks fashioned themselves into the Ottoman empire and took the caliphate back from the Mongols. In fact, the only really significant event in the history of Islam—from the time that Moawia ascended the throne of the caliph and made it a hereditary position—in my view, was the *dissolution* of the caliphate by Mustapha Kemal, better known as Atatürk (“Father of the Turks”) in 1924. To quote from a recent article by Alexander Rose:

*Atatürk overthrew the pitiful remnants of the Caliph and Empire after the Great War and almost single-handedly designed, founded and governed a modern, secular state. When he had finished, there were few signs of religion left in Turkey that were not strictly supervised by his Ministry of Religious Affairs. The radical madrassas [the same brand of Islamic religious schools which proved a breeding ground for the Taliban—“talib” literally means “students”] were shut down, mullahs were subject to civil control and Islam was officially disestablished. As a result, and despite several impositions of martial law and the appearance of Islamic [political] parties, Turkey remains a secular, Western-minded democracy with a Muslim population. In fact it is the only such state in existence.*

As I’ve mentioned elsewhere, my interest in Islam—like my interest in Judaism and Christianity—is almost exclusively confined to its foundational sacred text. I have (at best) only a cursory interest in the histories of the three great monotheistic religions. I have read bits and pieces about Atatürk—it became one of those names that I kept running across for a week or so after reading Mr. Rose’s article—but nothing particularly “in-depth”. It does seem to me, however, that it might be worth a more thorough examination of how...*exactly*... Turkey was able to achieve the daunting task which now confronts much of Europe and (to a lesser extent) North America: the assimilation of a significant fundamentalist Islamic population into a modern secular state without jeopardizing or disenfranchising the unique Islamic character of that population or infringing on theirs or anyone else’s basic freedoms. That is, if Turkey and 20th-century Turkish history aren’t *dominating* discussions in the European Union (er—is Turkey even *in* the EU?) on what to do—and what *not* to do—to smooth cooperation between Brussels, the European governments and the Nation of Islam, then I think the EU is missing a good bet. But, then, it wouldn’t be the first time, would it? Of course, it might also require a certain

open-mindedness about Draconian measures if that was what was required and prove to be a non-starter in a largely leftist-liberal-socialistic world with a surpassing fondness for good omelets inextricably bound up with a pathological squeamishness about *ever! under any circumstances!* breaking an egg. A letter by George Gavlas in the *National Post* indicates that Atatürk's victory was "paid for by the British, French and Americans in exchange for oil exploration concessions... His victory included [the] slaughter of Christians, mostly Greek and Armenian, and expulsion of the rest. But the fact that both his victory and stay in power were funded from Christendom (the U.S. Secretary of State was on loan from and returned to Standard Oil) may have played a part in his secularizing of the government, much as the House of Saud pretends to keep a lid on it today." "It" referring to Wahabite Islam? The wholesale slaughter of religious groups—genocide—is not something I would include in the making of national "omelets"—or a viable means of accommodating Wahabite Islamic constituencies within that national "omelet". Leaving those courses of action entirely to one side, is there anything we can learn from Turkey? Hard for me to judge, since the only other lengthy article on Turkey that I have in front of me was written by Norman Stone of *The Spectator*—with a decidedly secular tone;

*A notion has gone the rounds that Islam was persecuted in Turkey. Not so. Kemal Ataturk was very careful never to criticize it in public, though in his cups he apparently said that there was something wrong with a religion that allowed the pattern of the day to be dictated, down to the smallest details of personal hygiene, by a Bedouin from a millennium-and-a-half-earlier.*

Leaving aside that Muhammad was a Meccan and not a Bedouin:

*He [Ataturk] did suppress the Muslim brotherhoods—the tarikats—on the grounds that they were centres of obscurantism (all those women wrapped in black, like umbrellas); only one survived—the Mevievis, which was the least puritanical. It was against the law for clergymen of any denomination to appear in clerical garb in public, unless they were setting about their business, and even the papal nuncios dressed in suits.*

If by "setting about their business," Mr. Stone means "conducting actual religious services within the confines of a place of worship," then I think that's a particularly useful requirement, effectively eliminating the possibility of using the "mystique" of clerical garb to weigh in the balance in political street demonstrations and other non-religious activities.

Amir Taheri made a few very useful observations which, I believe, can assist in understanding how this problem of accommodating fundamentalist Islam has so few precedents to be used as guidelines:

*Islam represents the second largest religious community in the European Union and North America. This is a new situation in history. For the first time, large number of Muslims have voluntarily opted to live under non-Muslim rule. There is no historic model for co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims in a society where Muslims do not hold exclusive political power (there are models for the reverse case, where non-Muslims lived under Muslim authority). Under Islamic law, travelling to lands not ruled by Muslims was forbidden (haram) except to ransom Muslim hostages. The reason is that lands ruled by non-Muslims are regarded as "House of War" (Dar al Harb) that must be fought until they submit to Muslim rule. Later, travelling for trade was allowed but still regarded as "reprehensible" (makruh)*

Short interpolation: Islam divides all human behaviours into *fardh* (mandatory, unavoidable), *sunna* (good, but optional), *mubach* (indifferent acts, bringing neither reward nor punishment) *makruh* (reprehensible, but not forbidden) and *haram* (sin, forbidden). When Islam was at its height one distinguished, as an example, whether the wearing of gold rings was *sunna* or *mubach* and when a copious meal ceased being *mubach* and became *makruh*.

*The current consensus among Muslim jurists is that Muslims can live in lands ruled by non-Muslims provided they use their presence to further the cause of Islam.*

*The Egyptian theologian Muhammad Ghazzali has put it this way: "Muslims can live under non-Muslim rule as long as they do not forget that they are Allah's missionaries, and, if needed, His soldiers." More radical Islamists go further. "I would rather die than settle in a Western state," bin*

Laden says. "It is a shame for Muslims to settle in non-Muslim societies and suffer that indignity unless they use their presence to further the cause of Islam and speed up the end of the infidel's rule."

In other words, Muslims may live in non-Muslim societies only as Islam's Fifth Column in the context for global domination.

All this, of course, leads to divided loyalties, theopolitical schizophrenia and ethical confusion. Thus the first task of Muslim communities in the West is to decide the terms under which they live in countries where they have chosen to settle. These terms cannot be agreed upon in a religious context. It is unlikely a majority of Westerners will convert to Islam any time soon, although there is no reason why peaceful attempts at persuading them should not continue. At the same time, the Ottoman system of millah, under which different religious communities could live under their respective separate laws, cannot be imposed in the west today. Terms can only be spelled out in a secular political context. Western societies are democracies where power belongs to the people, not to any divinity.

This requires, to me, a hair-splitting disagreement with the secular Mr. Tahieri. The British Crown rules *Dei gratia Regina* (the initials D.G.R. on British Commonwealth coins) "By God's grace, Queen." The United States' pledge of allegiance includes the words "one nation, indivisible, under God, having liberty and justice for all". The American "In God we Trust" is displayed prominently on all U.S. currency (and is a Koranic phrase, by the way) and God is mentioned as having pre-eminent sovereignty in both the American and Canadian constitutions (despite the best efforts of those fun-loving socialists, the NDP, to remove His name). The establishment of God's sovereignty over a democratic nation then allows all remaining power, all free will decisions, to reside in "We, the people" by God's implicit permission. To the doubtful among you, I'll point out that the instinctive American reaction to the horror of 11 September was to sing—spontaneously and *en masse*—"God Bless America" rather than the *official* national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner".

Thus, the Muslim citizens of the Western states can, and to some extent already do, have a share of political power. Muslims in the West should accept democracy, not as an ideology but as a method of government, and regard secularism not as an enemy but as the chief guarantor of their rights as a minority. That would require an end to an ethic that, rather than being concerned with right and wrong, divides the world into Muslim and non-Muslim... Muslims in the West should clearly and unequivocally demarcate themselves from those who have reduced Islam to the level of an ideology in pursuit of political power. We in the Muslim world have a new word for them, "mutuaslim," which means "those who twist Islam for their own ends."

Mr. Tahieri presents himself as almost too easy a target. From the standpoint of an Orthodox Muslim he is far more guilty of the charge than they are. It is he who desires to reduce Islam, the prescribed way of life "in the path of God" to a mere ideology submissive to secular political power. In those countries where Orthodox Muslims are in the minority, the majority is always going to supersede Muslim beliefs and aspirations simply by out-voting them. Since there is no precedent in Islam's 1400 year history for submitting itself to the dictates of the collective joint will of Muslims aligned with non-Muslims, it is Mr. Tahieri and those Muslims who share the secular Western sensibility to which he (self-evidently) leans who "twist Islam for their own ends." Personally? I share Mr. Tahieri's faith in democracy, so long as it is enacted under God's explicitly acknowledged sovereignty (knowing the malignant opposition this sentiment engenders, I suspect that God contents himself with even the most minimal of acknowledgements of that sovereignty: His name being retained in Canada's constitution) since I believe that democracy is the only political system under which each individual man's free will, his *God-given* free will, *remains* free—and because democracy will always progress on the side of individual's right to make free choices. As an example, I support a "woman's right to choose," even though I think abortion is self-evidently wrong. That is, I wholeheartedly endorse any man or any woman's fundamental human right to go to hell in the handcart of his or her own choosing.

Western Islam should train its own imams (prayer leaders), rather than accept the employees of various despotic Muslim governments with their hidden agendas. Western Islam should also make a distinct contribution to developing Islam's canon law and culture in general. This is all the more imperative because the bulk of original research in all aspects of Islam, both as faith and as civilization, now takes place in the West. Rather than listening to semi-literate mullahs and muftis in

*Tehran, Cairo or Mecca, Western Islam must encourage and develop its scholarship and “export” a modern, humane and progressive narrative to the rest of the Muslim world.*

I think the mullahs and muftis of Tehran, Cairo and Mecca saw ample evidence with the Second Vatican Council—and the resulting convulsions within Christianity’s largest traditional bastion—of what a great religion subjects itself to when the “New World tail” is allowed to wag the “Old World dog” in just the fashion Mr. Tahieri describes. Whatever problems I see in modern Islam (and I see no shortage of problems in modern Islam) I don’t think the solution is to found in fashioning some variation on North American Muslims In Touch With Their Inner Child Saving the Gay Whales.

*Those Muslims who wish to demarcate themselves from the mutuaslim must stop contributing to bogus charities set up for terrorist purposes and forbid fundraising for them at their mosques and places of business and education.*

Some Hon. Members: “Hear, hear.”

*Gender apartheid should be abandoned not only because it is wrong but also because such a move will demarcate them from the mutuaslim. Today women have virtually no presence in the leadership of Islamic societies and associations in the West. And this in spite of the fact that three Muslim countries have already had female prime ministers.*

On the contrary. I believe that capitulating to knee-jerk feminism would *define* them as *mutuaslim*: that is, as North American Muslims in Touch With Their Inner Child Who See Men and Women as Interchangeable Saving the Gay Whales.

*“And it is for the women to act as they (the husbands) act by them, in all fairness; but the men are a step above them.”* (sura “The Cow” 2:228)

*“Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God hath gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they make from their substance for them.”* (sura “Women” 4:38)

Which brings us to Wahabism.

The antithesis of the success of the Turkish experiment would have to be the 18th century Islamic innovation known as Wahabism, which has been described by reporter Isabel Vincent as a “harsh and puritanical subset of Sunni Islam that originated in Saudi Arabia. The sect is named for Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahab, a reformer whose descendants worked to unify the Saudi kingdom.” According to Earle W. Waugh, a professor of religion at the University of Alberta, “Wahabism rejected other types of Islam and its reformist leaders imposed a puritanical order on the tribes they conquered. Unlike other Muslims, the Wahabis said they would base society strictly on the Koran.” To whatever extent it was unlikely (in the extreme) that this might be achieved in the 18th century, it is (speaking as a frequent reader of the Koran) a complete impossibility in the 21st. There are just far too many developments in our civilization which were undreamt of in the 7th century, the time to which Wahabism seeks to return the Nation of Islam. To pretend that suras of the Koran directly address such disparate concepts as, say, trade unionism, in vitro fertilization, cloning, land expropriation by civil authorities, televised courtroom trials, et al is to, in my opinion, stretch the interpretation of religious texts to the breaking point and beyond—and places an unwarranted and disastrous level of power in the hands of those doing the interpreting, in my view, the inescapable problem and a recipe for implicit disaster in any theocratic government structure. It would be comparable to trying to run the state of Israel purely on the basis of the Law of Moses as outlined in the Torah—an approach to day-to-day living which has long been abandoned by all but the most devout, ultra-Orthodox Jews—or the Vatican attempting to ban Catholics from participating in any behaviour unless it is specifically stated in one or more of the Gospel accounts that Jesus had participated in the same behaviour. To be fair, the Koran is far more wide-ranging and specific in its guidelines and is (consequently) more open to the imposition of this kind of society-wide interpretation than is either the Torah or the Gospels, but, as I say, that degree is miniscule when measured against the myriad complexities of modern life. Since my own life far more closely resembles that of a Wahabite Muslim than it does a typical North American, I am not unsympathetic to the idealism which I believe underlies Wahabism. In a real sense, al-Wahab was the Martin Luther of Islam, restoring the purity of the original impulse of the faith and taking a resolute and courageous stand against the centuries of impurity with which Islam had become

infected. Wahabism was, I'm sure—in the context of the 1700s—a breath of fresh air when compared with the decadent excesses into which the caliphate had undoubtedly degenerated by that time. Essad Bey's biography of Muhammad—which I have quoted so extensively in this series of articles—proved to be, in fact, a Wahab propagandist vehicle (albeit only in the last six pages), a fact which assumed greater significance only when I reread it after 11 September in preparation for writing these essays:

*Abd el Wahab declared war upon official Islam. He fought the sultan-caliph and the learned additions to and the lying alterations made upon the unique words of the Prophet. He believed in the Koran, held to the words of the Prophet and defended the pure, unspoiled, basic idea of Islam. At his side stood the dynasty of Ibn Saad [Ibn Saud] a noble Arabian family who created a Wahabite state in Nejd with Darija as its residence. The State of the Wahabites declared war on the ruler of the faithful, the Sultan of the Osmans [the Ottomans]. This declaration of war resembled that of Muhammad against the Emperor of Byzantium. A dwarf confronting a giant. After a few preliminary victories—the Wahabites even occupied Mecca for a time—the army of the Turks became victorious and it had not been expected otherwise.*

This sort of revisionism really is mother's milk for Islamic demagogues. I'd be willing to bet that the victory of the Turks actually came as a very big surprise to all concerned on the Wahabite side of the conflict and that, up until the Turks prevailed, the Wahabites, seeing themselves as favoured by God, firmly expected to steamroll their opponents, no matter how many of them there were, echoing the military victories of the Prophet, Abu Bakr and, particularly, Omar.

*Ibn Saad was decapitated in Stambul [Istanbul] as a rebel and a heretic. But his heirs, together with the rest of the Wahabites, founded a small principality in Nejd in which the original, unchanged teachings of the Prophet were elevated to maxims of state. Of course no one in the world of Islam bothered about the State of the Wahabites, about their true teaching, and about the spirit of the Islamic basic ideas which they revived. For two hundred years nothing was heard of them except that they lived according to their teaching and maintained their community unimpaired.*

*When the world war was over, the caliph had been driven away and Islam had fallen into a faint, there suddenly and unexpectedly arose out of the deserts of Arabia, out of the distant er-Riad [Riyadh], Abd el Asis ibn Saad, the master of the Wahabites, who called himself King of Nejd. No one knew who Ibn Saad was.*

*He is the only Muslim ruler in the world who has maintained the pure word of the Prophet, who has given it new life and new strength.*

I'm trying to keep these interpolations to a minimum but, since this is really one of the touchstones of this series of articles, I'm interrupting again. This is, from what I can see, a uniquely Arabic approach to religion. In 1936 (the copyright date of the book) it would be hard to imagine even the most radical, the most *extreme* Jewish or Christian partisan of any Jewish or Christian sect *daring* to describe a flesh-and-blood human being, a contemporary, as the “only Jewish figure in the world who has maintained the pure word of Moses” or “the only Christian ruler who has maintained the pure word of Jesus Christ”. And yet this kind of demagoguery (a term I never use lightly) is commonplace in Islam. In fact, as the rest of this excerpt (I think) plainly shows, describing it as demagoguery actually verges on *understatement!*

*When Ibn Saad was still a boy, the dynasty to which he had belonged had been expelled out of er-Riad by the neighbouring race of the Raschid. Young Saad collected a troop of twenty men, travelled through the desert to er-Riad, stole his way into the palace of the Raschid, and slew the sleeping sultan and so regained the power over Nejd for himself and his tribe. With this act, his rise began which, in the course of time, made him ruler over two-thirds of Arabia, protector of the holy places and the most important man of present-day Islam.*

*Together with the faithful Wahabites he attacked Mecca, drove out the shereef, occupied the Kaaba in 1925 and became the most popular man in Islam. Today, Abd el Asis ibn Saad is the ruler of Hijaz, Assyria and Nejd. He is the religious and spiritual leader of the Arabs.*

*Ibn Saad repeated the deeds of the Prophet. He recalls God's words to mankind. And these words proved themselves to be sufficiently alive to create and rule a state in the twentieth century as they did in the seventh. Ibn Saad created a religio-social brotherhood called Ichwan. This Ichwan movement*

*supports the Wahabite empire today. The teaching of Ichwan is pure Islam, just as the Prophet and the Kharidijites had preached it. Ibn Saad does nothing that the Prophet would not have done and fulfills all the duties which the Prophet fulfilled. Every luxury: music, theatre, coffee, even tobacco, are forbidden in the empire of the Wahabites. Every word of the Koran is law and the slightest misinterpretation is heresy. The equality of mankind in the eyes of God has been reintroduced practically. Monotheism is law. Adoration, even the veneration of the Kaaba, the holy stone, is forbidden to the Wahabites. The sober, straight, only way of truth, the way the Prophet trod, is known to them.*

*On this way Ichwan only knows of two things: prayer and exercise. Prayer and exercise, in which prayer is exercise and exercise is prayer, created the land of the Wahabites and gave life to the dying body of Islam.*

*The incomparable thing about the ascetic teaching of Ichwan is that it knows no intolerance. This accounts for its all-embracing position in the world of Islam. Shiites, sunni, even Jews and Christians are tolerated by Ichwan.*

“Even Jews and Christians.” As long as they don’t play music, try starting a theatre, buying coffee or using tobacco. But apart from that? “No intolerance”.

As I say, the book is copyrighted 1936. Evidently when God got an advance copy, He just couldn’t resist indulging his omnipotent sense of humour. Two years later, the House of Saud struck oil beneath the desert sands of Saudi Arabia (the only country on God’s green earth, so far as I know, which is named after one family), oil which, in time, would bring into the arid kingdom a tidal wave of wealth which would dwarf the totality of loot which had been accumulated by every caliph since Moawia. A snapshot of a number of members of the Saudi royal family—including Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz—is featured on the second page the *National Post* for 26 October 2001. I’m not sure how much *praying* Ibn Saad’s descendants are doing these days, but I feel safe in saying that the “exercise” half of Ichwan went out the window a few years back.

It is exactly the total humourlessness of (let us call a spade a spade) *extremist* Islam that so invites its deflation through humour and I am sufficiently grounded in my secular North American background to succumb to the temptation (it’s like shooting ducks in a barrel), even as my better nature (or what I regard as my better nature) recognizes (or believes that it recognizes) the sharper point concealed within God’s little jape. “You are not an heir of Muhammad, nor an heir of Abu Bakr, nor an heir of Omar. If you were the heir of the Prophet and his companions which you purport yourself to be, you would—no matter how much wealth was generated by your oil reserves—be living as a pauper. You would wash and mend your own clothes and live in a humble dwelling passing your days ‘striving in the path of God’. The mere *idea* of possessing anything beyond a few simple necessities would be abhorrent, anathematic to you. And you would give every penny of your indescribable wealth to the poor.”

The oil revenues which have swamped the Saudi royal family in unimaginable wealth through most of the last century and which will, presumably, continue to swamp the Saudi royal family through most of this century have only further emphasized the disparity between the reality of their self-evident nature as (let us again call a spade a spade) thoroughly corrupt and venal human detritus and the portrayal of Ibn Saud as an heir of the Prophet Muhammad. Far from having used its wealth to alleviate the plight of the poor, Saudi Arabia continues to be one of the poorest countries on the face of the earth with much of its population living—quite unnecessarily—at or below a subsistence level (which probably, my Islamic side tells me, just makes them better Muslims). What is more, the money which the House of Saud *does* expend in Saudi Arabia and in the Arab world at large goes toward (again, calling a spade a spade) “buying off” and otherwise attempting to financially deflect, divert and distract the fundamentalist Wahabite sect which they were initially responsible for financing (rather like a peculiar “what if”—“What if the Koreish had chosen to *finance* Muhammad and Islam instead of fighting against them?”—acted out in the real world) The Taliban, as an example, was largely a creation of American tax dollars and Saudi oil money. On the American side, the Taliban was a puppet ally and a proxy army in the regional war against the Soviets. On the Saudi side, the Taliban and the madrassas schools which spawned them constituted an attempt to “relocate” ideologically extreme Muslims (Osama bin Laden was one such exile) to the more remote parts—and, as far as the manifold Saudi Princes were concerned, the more remote the better—parts of the Islamic world, in the hopes of alleviating the pressure those forces were bringing to bear on the corrupt and despotic Saudi regime (by then) straining to maintain the transparent fiction that it represented the living incarnation

of pure, undiluted Islam while spending on hotel and restaurant gratuities what John D. Rockefeller used to make in an average week.

When God *does* tell a joke, I've noticed, it tends to get funnier and funnier and funnier as you go along. Of course, it depends on your sense of humour. It is estimated that 80% of the mosques in the United States are under the supervision of Wahabite imams, exported by the House of Saud. Wahabi mosques (according to one article I read) are recognizable because they are the most spectacular and ostentatious of the kind, financed as they invariably are by Saudi oil money. The levels of duplicity multiply. How could you pretend to be a genuine Wahabite imam—railing against all forms of base materialism—if you're leading prayers in an ostentatious mosque which the Prophet would have found profoundly and irretrievably repellent? The anticipated endgame—the pre-ordained “punch-line”—of course, is: how long will it be before all of this catches up with Crown Prince Abdullah and the greed-mongers of his extended family? How many Wahabite—genuinely ascetic Wahabite extremists—can you exile and how fast can you exile them? Particularly since 11 September has (to say the least) put something of a damper on the worldwide “demand” for extremist Muslim immigrants? How long can you distract even the average Muslim in your country from noticing that you have far, far, *far* more in common with Abu Sofyan and his wife Hind and the fat, smug Meccan merchants of the Koreish than with the Prophet and the *ansar* and the *mohajirun* of Medina? And how long can you keep them from, you know, *doing* something about it?

Of course it is somewhat inescapable at this point for anyone willing to open their eyes and look at the situation that the despotic corruption of the Koreish has very much prevailed in virtually all Muslim countries. Of all the free nations on the face of the earth (even Zimbabwe qualifies since there is at least the structural illusion of a democracy, which gives you an idea of how low the bar is set—Robert Mugabe can *step* over it) the Muslim world can boast of exactly zero members. All Muslim countries are run by fat, smug corrupt Meccan merchant-strongman types like Abu Sofyan. Complete and total dictatorships. What is even more repellent: every one of those venal, corrupt, merchant-strongmen, building palaces and monuments to his own ego, raking in piles of indescribable wealth while the population of his country starves beyond the gilded gates—Saddam Hussein, Bashar al-Assad, Muammar Gaddafi, King Mohammed—every one of them, I can practically guarantee you, sees himself as the One True Heir of the Mantle of the Prophet. Or, at the very least, as the successor to Abu Bakr or Omar. Or, at the point of greatest reduction, the latest incarnation of Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt and Syria who defended Acre against the Crusaders. This is, I believe, the principal reason that the Arab League and OPEC never really manage to agree on anything. Essentially, wherever the heads of state meet, it is a room full of Muhammad wannabe's: “Me! I'm the Heir to the Mantle of the Prophet! You must all follow me!” Each one proposes a different course of action, they all mouth platitudes about Arab and Muslim unity (“Me! Allah wants you all to unite and follow ME!”) after which—as Jonathan Kay, editorials editor of the *National Post* so aptly put it in a sidebar piece about the last meeting of the Arab League—“the sheiks key each others' Rolls-Royces in the parking lot.” (“If you will not follow me, you proto-infidel, then get a new paint-job!”). This is a point that I think often escapes the leaders of the world's democracies who keep waiting for *some* sort of consensus on *something—anything*—to emerge among the Arab nations, or at least, for some dominant faction to take shape. The Arabs—the Muslim world in toto—are also waiting for it to happen. Note the nature of Essad Bey's characterization of the career of Ibn Saad: “...his rise began which, in the course of time, made him ruler over two-thirds of Arabia, protector of the holy places and the most important man of present-day Islam.” This is what the Nation of Islam is always waiting to see, in the same way that fundamentalist Christians awake every morning anticipating the Rapture, the sudden transfiguration of themselves into a pure spirit state before the Throne of God. Having, historically, experienced this exponential “rise” with Muhammad and Abu Bakr and Omar, and to a lesser extent with other Sultans and caliphs and leaders, Islam always anticipates the rise of a great leader, behind whom all Muslims will unite to finish the work of the Prophet in converting all the nations of the earth to Islam. And those most inclined to that belief, those for whom that brand of thinking is a centerpiece of their faith, are the Wahabites and their offshoots and variations. 80% of the imams supervising prayers in the United States are firm adherents of this brand of Islam. Every Muslim leader who comes to prominence in the world, potentially—in the faith of the Wahabite—could be The One. The revolution in Iran which brought Khomeini to power in 1979, made him a potential candidate as Heir of the Mantle of the Prophet. Apart from yet another costly war with Iraq, it never spilled beyond the borders of its homeland and with Khomeini's death the potential subsided and Iran is now vacillating between the residue of that revolutionary Wahabite spirit of 1979 and the westernization that most of

the middle class now recognize as inevitable. Saddam Hussein attempted to make himself a prominent candidate for Heir of the Mantle of the Prophet (although Hussein would have to be considered the “least Islamic” of the Arab world’s dictators-for-life, for the Saddam Husseins of this world, a brass ring is a brass ring: *carpe diem*) through technological military strength. Very much in line with Osama bin Laden’s theory that people will always choose the strong horse over the weak horse, Hussein attempted to use his country’s oil wealth to purchase “strong horse” status. His theory being, presumably, that if you have the most advanced armaments and the largest army in the Arab world, the gravitational force of that weaponry will cause the rest of the Arab world to fall into line behind you and, *ipso facto*, the Muslim world will follow suit, drawing the Mantle of the Prophet to you. Another article by Alexander Rose in the *National Post*, 16 March of this year (“Iraq: How Big A Threat Is It?”) contains an amazing shopping list of all of Iraq’s known conventional armaments remaining after the Gulf War. The Gulf War, of course, was in many ways “make or break” for Saddam Hussein. If you are purporting yourself to be the Heir of the Mantle of the Prophet (or allowing your followers to proclaim you as such) or even attempting to engender the belief that you are the 20th century incarnation of Saladin, that you are a Mighty Slayer of the Jew and Christian Infidel, warfare with the Jew and Christian Infidel is where the rubber hits the road. Promising the “Mother of All Battles,” a virtual Armageddon and then having the festivities over with in four or five days—with yourself as the “Mother of All Losers”—certainly diminishes the likelihood of your being popularly hailed as the Heir of the Mantle of the Prophet. As happened to the Taliban in Afghanistan, from a Muslim standpoint, the evidence is irrefutable that you are not The One they’ve been waiting for. Of course, the fact that Saddam was not deposed or killed mitigates the result (potentially anyway) in Muslim eyes. An argument could be made that the Gulf War echoed the result of the Battle of Mt. Ohod, where the Koreish had Muhammad and his followers on the run and then when all seemed lost—through a miracle of God—the Muslims were spared, living to fight the second battle of Badr, which they won decisively. This perception/possibility brings with it its own set of pressures and limitations. One of the insidious implications of the 20th century “arms race” (which evolved into the Arms Race) for a country the size of Iraq is that each successive “generation” of weaponry trumps the previous generation and the lifespan of a generation of weapons can be measured in years, if not months, at this point. Iraq’s armaments are “state of the art”—for 1985. Which, by 2002 standards, means that they are dog-food. Ronald Reagan’s simple solution to the problem posed by the Soviet Empire was to outspend them on weapons technology, which worked and was a leading factor in the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. What is often overlooked is that the United States chose not to rest on its laurels but continued to develop and manufacture successive generations of weapons technology. Essentially the Pentagon chose to trump itself...every other year? Every year? Every six months?...with successive generations of weapons systems so that the United States now effectively outguns every other nation on the planet by a very, very, very wide margin. That is, metaphorically, the United States has a .357 magnum and every other country is using sharpened sticks. The lesson for Saddam Hussein was that you have to *use* a state-of-the-art weapons system *while it is* state-of-the-art. A delay of a year or even six months from the time you take delivery on it means that it is only effective against smaller opponents. Unless, of course, God actually does favour Saddam Hussein over “The Great Satan” in which case David and Goliath rules apply. But as I’ve written earlier in this series, I don’t think a theocracy or a socialist dictatorship is something God is going to side with against a vanguard democracy. I’ll be dealing with what I see as the military responsibilities of the Western Democracies in “Why Canada Slept,” which follows “Islam, My Islam.”

Why *did* George Bush, Sr. and Colin Powell leave Saddam Hussein in power?

There is certainly no shortage of conventional explanations—with twenty-twenty hindsight—ten years later on. But most of those explanations have a hollow secular ring to them. From an Islamic standpoint a hollow secular ring to an explanation will always arouse the suspicion that the Hand of God is in evidence. This, it seems to me, is one of the great failings of the Western Democracies: their inability to perceive that victory over a Muslim opponent must be absolute and irrefutable. A *partial* victory over a pretender to the Mantle of the Prophet can easily be portrayed and then widely accepted as a *partial* defeat—with the attendant Muslim assumption that *total* defeat for the infidel is just around the corner. *Inshallah*. “If God wills”.

This is no small point in my argument. As Jon Lee Anderson wrote in *The New Yorker* (“After the Revolution” January 28) regarding the Taliban’s takeover in Afghanistan:

*The mausoleum that adjoins the Ahmed Shah mosque, which is across the street from the governor's palace, has a special subterranean chamber that kafirs, or unbelievers, cannot enter. It houses the cloak that is believed to have belonged to the Prophet Muhammad. On April 4, 1996, when Mullah Omar was declared the Keeper of the Faithful, he took the cloak out of the chamber and, in a dramatic display of hubris, donned it before a crowd of spectators.*

The use of the term “hubris”—“wanton arrogance arising from overbearing pride”—by Mr. Anderson in this context is very Western and, most particularly, very Christian (although the legions of secular humanists—in whose number I imagine Jon Lee Anderson, as a *New Yorker* contributor, counts himself—will deny with their dying breath having *any* relationship to Christianity, the spiritual bonds of two thousand years are not so readily broken by the wilful worldly conceits of the Baby Boom and the invention of pop-up toasters—much as the secular humanist Baby Boom world fervently wishes that wishing would make it so). The Christianity which is “hardwired” into the spiritual makeup of Mr. Anderson evinces the involuntary horror which surges to the surface at the prospect of anyone, at any level pretending to be a peer of the pre-eminent incarnation of a given faith, which, for Christians and those of Christian descent is Jesus. This, to me, was one of the primary motivations behind God's use of the Cross: it discourages (to say the least) the pretence of co-equivalence with Jesus. To those who sought to follow in Jesus' footsteps—in the way that Mullah Omar attempts to do with Muhammad: to assume The Mantle, to be popularly deemed as being on the same plateau, to be perceived as co-equivalent (like John and James' mother asking that they be seated on the right and left hand of Jesus in the world to come)—to any man so tempted, Jesus said, “. . .let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” The Cross is what separates the men from the boys. *Before* the Cross, Jesus' ministry—to his contemporaries—must have looked like a pretty cushy gig. Itinerant preacher, out on the road, hanging out with the guys, hundreds of people mobbing you wherever you go, a lot of them chicks, dazzling everyone with miracles, pissing off the Scribes and the Pharisees. Not all that different from being a 1st-century Palestine rock star. No wonder the disciples—before the crucifixion—were always bickering about—and *nudging* Jesus about—“who would be the greatest of them”. As one of Robert Crumb's pseudo-spiritual scam artist characters put it, “*I'm* God. And *I* get all the chicks.” But the Cross puts the story of Jesus on a plateau so elevated above those sorts of petty worldly conceits as to render those conceits beneath notice, to render them spiritually disgraceful, and to tread them into the dust. Not just at the time, but two thousand years later: spiritually, going willingly to the Cross puts you way, way, way, way, way up *there*. Anything less puts you way, way, way, way, way down *here*. It would be inconceivable (just to cite the most obvious direct analogy) for the Pope to appear on his balcony at the Vatican with the Shroud of Turin draped over his head.

This perception, this chasm between the Prophet and his would-be successors doesn't exist in Islam. Because the Prophet Muhammad died peacefully on Aisha's breast, having achieved the conquest of most of the world that he knew, there is no “Cross equivalent” in Islam, no solitary, agonizing “road less travelled,” no Rubicon of faith and courage which one must needs traverse to establish one's spiritual *bona fides*. Islam is much like Second Temple Judaism in that respect. Before the Diaspora of 70 A.D. the Jews spent a great deal of time waiting and watching for Meschiach to come—the Davidic Messiah, the Branch of Jesse—who would restore Israel to the (let me go out on a limb here) *perceived* greatness of the Golden Age of King David and King Solomon. Like water, over time these things tend to seek their lowest level, and at the lowest level, Meschiach came to be perceived as “this really amazing Jew who will show up out of nowhere and unite everyone behind him and with the help of God and his Angels, kick every goy *tucchus* around the block without breaking a sweat. . . [this is the sensibility that I'm parodying with the Rabbi character. Superman, as conceived by Jerry Siegel, is very much cut from the “lowest common denominator” cloth of perceptions of what the nature of Meschiach would be]. . . so that we *Jews* get to be the ones on top and we *Jews* get to spit on any goy we want and we *Jews* get to be God and we *Jews* get all the chicks.” I'm exaggerating, but only slightly as any decent history of Sabbatai Svi—the seventeenth century Jew who was popularly acclaimed to be the Meschiach for a year or so—would clearly demonstrate. When he made his presence known, word swept through the ghettos of Europe and masses of Jews sold all of their possessions and began migrating to the Holy Land, on the way out rather gleefully telling their goy oppressors, “Now! *Now* you are going to get *yours*, you goyim, you. Our guy, the *real* guy has come and he is going to give you *such* a smack!” Gradually, this sentiment seems to have departed from Orthodox and Reformed Judaism—the restoration of the Chosen People to Jerusalem after two

thousand years having virtually eradicated it as a centerpiece of Judaic philosophy. In fact, so much does the Jerusalem restoration dominate the Jewish consciousness that popular rabbinical opinion of those verses of the Torah and passages in the Talmud which address the issue of the Meschiach (from what I understand) now favour the view that the Meschiach might be the city of Jerusalem *itself*. There also seems to be a large constituency that favours the view that Meschiach won't be an *individual*, but rather a specific *Age* when all of the promises will be fulfilled by many individuals, all possessing different missing parts of the puzzle which is our earthly existence.

But, again, these sorts of perceptions don't exist in Islam. In Islam, the Mantle of the Prophet has a very "up for grabs" quality about it. You can see this particularly in Arab street demonstrations which center on an individual. While it is going on, all of the participants appear to be both participating and observing. I'm sure that when Mullah Omar (who had appointed himself the title *Amir-ul-momineen*, King of all Believers) donned the ancient relic before the assembled crowd that a large demonstration ensued—large and *noisy*—with everyone chanting "Allahu Akhbar" ("God is Great"). On subsequent days did the demonstrations get larger and noisier? Did everyone seem to be abandoning Mullah Omar's rivals? Or were the rival factions still skulking at the periphery? When it comes to popular acclaim, Islam always has the *hajj* to compare it to: a period of a few days, annually, when millions of Muslims from around the world descend upon the sacred precincts. If anyone is ever going to be acknowledged to be the Heir to the Mantle of the Prophet, the "yardstick" against which his own followers will be measured and against which they will, undoubtedly, measure themselves will be the size and the enthusiasm of the crowds at the *hajj*. The crowds which surrounded the Ayatollah Khomeini after the Shah was deposed in 1979 and the crowds which assembled on the occasion of his funeral were the only ones in recent memory which seemed to achieve that level of size and enthusiasm and, in the Ayatollah's case, *frenzy*. Temporarily. And that part is, I think, key. The unwritten expectation would seem to dictate that the size and enthusiasm and *frenzy* of the crowds needs to get exponentially larger on an on-going basis. After all, whoever assumes the Mantle of the Prophet will be expected to conquer the entire world and convert every nation to Islam. Even as the Taliban positions were collapsing around him, Mullah Omar was issuing proclamations which were posted at a branch of the Foreign Ministry and all other government offices in his native language, Pashto: "You should strictly adopt the Islamic law of the Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him, in every aspect of life, including dress, especially the turban. Wearing the turban crooked is not acceptable to the *sunnah* [laws on dress and demeanour]. For 1,400 years we have been wearing the beard and turbans. Some people say these are new things but it is not true." He maintained his absolutism—the final arbiter of such questions as: is it allowable in Islam to wear your turban crooked?—even as it became inescapable to even his most devoted followers that he was definitely not The One.

It is, in my view, well worth the effort for the Western democracies to keep close tabs on any and all of these individuals who come to prominence—and to be prepared to strike them, quickly and decisively, to demonstrate that this individual is *not* the Heir of the Mantle of the Prophet, this individual is *not* favoured by God. As was the case with Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar. They weren't killed or captured, but they were—visibly and irrevocably—*deposed*. That's all it takes.

Yasser Arafat has been a going concern in this category for years and years, in my view—dangerously so. The man has more lives than a cat which, in light of what I've been discussing here, is a perception that you really don't want attaching itself to a Muslim leader. It's a little peculiar and it certainly has no direct metaphorical precedent in Islam (although I always picture Muhammad's greasy, weasel-y Uncle El Abbas as Yasser Arafat) still, the fact that Yasser Arafat always seems to land on his feet no matter what sort of peril he's in could, possibly, be misread by a people short on potential candidates for Heir of the Mantle of the Prophet. You'd really be scraping the bottom of the barrel, in my view, but the crowds which surrounded Arafat were always photogenically enthusiastic and Arafat, himself, was one of the first Muslim leaders to understand the value of manipulating the news media in creating and sustaining an image as a *potential* Heir to the Mantle of the Prophet. From the *National Post*, March 30:

*In 1998, one of Mr. Arafat's subordinates submitted to the Al Kuds newspaper an article comparing the PA chairman to Saladin, the 12th century Muslim conqueror who took Jerusalem from the Christians. When the editor published the article on Page 3 instead of Page 1, Mr. Arafat's thugs kidnapped and beat him.*

As I say, it's just a very different world from that of the Judeo-Christian.  
Pardon me? Oh, sure. By all means.  
Let's talk about the Middle East.

## Part VI

From Mark Steyn's April 18 column in the *National Post*:

*"The Jews are a peculiar people: things permitted to other nations are forbidden to the Jews," wrote America's great longshoreman philosopher Eric Hoffer after the 1967 war. "Other nations drive out thousands, even millions of people and there is no refugee problem...But everyone insists that Israel must take back every single Arab...Other nations when victorious on the battlefield dictate peace terms. But when Israel is victorious it must sue for peace. Everyone expects the Jews to be the only real Christians in this world." Thus, the massive population displacements in Europe at the end of the Second World War are forever, but those in Palestine—a mere three years later—must be corrected and reversed. On the Continent, losing wars comes with a territorial price: The Germans aren't going to be back in Danzig any time soon. But, in the Middle East, no matter how often the Arabs attack Israel and lose, their claims to their lost territory manage to be both inviolable but endlessly transferable.*

*So even the so-called "two-state solution" [Israel and "Palestine"] subscribes to an Arafatist view of the situation. Creating yet another fetid Arab dictatorship in the West Bank would be, technically, a "three-state solution" and, indeed, [would create] a second Palestinian state [next to the first,] Jordan, whose population has always been majority Palestinian. It was created in the original "two-state settlement" 80 years ago, when the British partitioned their new Mandate of Palestine, carving off the western three-quarters into a territory called "Transjordan" and keeping the surviving eastern quarter under the name "Palestine." They did this for two reasons: First, they needed to stop one of the Hashemite boys, Abdullah, from marching on Syria and the best that they could come up with was to halt him in Amman and suggest he serve as interim governor; but secondly, Churchill, as Colonial Secretary, thought the fairest way to fulfill Britain's pledges to both Arabs and Jews during the Great War was by confining Zionists to a Jewish National Home west of the Jordan and creating a separate Arab entity in Palestine, east of the Jordan. The only thing he got wrong was the names: If instead of inventing the designation "Transjordan," if he'd just called the eastern territory "Palestine" and the west "Israel" (or "Judah"), the Arafatist claim would be a much tougher sell.*

This, it seems to me, expresses much of the problem in the Middle East very succinctly. When Arafat or his underlings—as official spokesmen for the Palestinian Authority—speak of the "occupied territories," what most of the world assumes they are referring to is the West Bank and Gaza, land seized in the 1967 war. I think the evidence indicates that this is a false assumption. I think Yasser Arafat actually believes that the fact that the land which is now called Israel was once called "Palestine" at the time of the British partition means that the state of Israel is, in itself, in toto, an illegal occupation of Palestine. I think Yasser Arafat further believes that if he is just patient enough, eventually, the United Nations—under sufficient pressure from the European Union and the Muslim bloc—will be forced to, basically, ask Israel to leave. And if Israel, the entire State of Israel, will not leave willingly, that they will be forced out militarily by the whole world uniting behind Yasser Arafat's claim. Crazy? Of course! But then, I also believe that Yasser Arafat is certifiably insane and always has been. How else to explain his rejection in 2000 of the creation of a Palestinian State in the West Bank and control of much of Jerusalem *unless that is just plain not what he is talking about?* Again, Mark Steyn, this time from his column of 4 April:

*Any time we talk about the "occupied territories," we're doing what the appeasers did in the Thirties—allowing the aggressors to frame the debate. They're not "occupied," they're "disputed territories." The West Bank isn't "Palestinian". The last people to administer it lawfully were the British. Under the 1947 UN partition plan, it was designated as "land yet to be allocated". The Jordanian Army, under the only decent Arab general (Sir John Glubb), seized it in the first Muslim war against the Jews and held it until 1967. But, in legal and historical terms, it's not Jordanian or Israeli and it's certainly not "Palestinian." Nor, I submit, should it ever be.*

*The interesting thing about “Palestinians” is that so few of the West Bank Arabs thought of themselves as such before 1967. It post-dates the founding of the PLO: Palestine had a national liberation movement before it had a nationality. Likewise, because the Arab League designated Yasser Arafat as a head of state, we’ve spent 30 years trying to create a state for him to be head of. Most Arab nationalities—“Jordanian,” “Iraqi”—were created by the British Colonial Office in the Twenties and, although those languid Etonians came up with some evocative and colourful names for their hastily concocted jurisdictions, for the most part they’re comprehensive failures as nation states. It hardly seems worth adding another bogus polity to the list.*

Yes, exactly. As long as the Arab and Muslim worlds are wholly and completely dominated by Koreish-style dictatorships, it’s foolish in the extreme to just carve another one out in the West Bank. The purpose of Western Democracies (although often you wouldn’t know to look at it) is to assist in ending dictatorships and to assist in engendering democracy. The Palestinian Authority was formed with the express understanding that Yasser Arafat would serve as interim Chairman until Presidential elections could be held in 1999. 1999 was three years ago. An unsigned editorial under the title “Actually, the world is wrong” points up the ridiculousness of Europe’s approach to the Middle East:

*Scenario: After rejecting Israel’s offer of an independent Palestinian state, Yasser Arafat empties his jails of terrorists and initiates a campaign of occasional slaughter against civilians. Solution: To lessen Palestinian “frustration,” Israel must begin a political process with Mr. Arafat immediately.*

*Scenario: Palestinian suicide bombers armed and financed by Iran, Iraq and Syria blow themselves up in restaurants and Passover Seders at the rate of one a day. Solution: To lessen Palestinian “humiliation,” Israel must begin a political process with Mr. Arafat immediately. Also, Israel must take down “humiliating” anti-terrorist checkpoints.*

*Scenario: Israel conducts a largely successful military campaign in the West Bank and collects abundant evidence of Mr. Arafat’s complicity in terrorism; meanwhile terrorist attacks against Jews continue, but at a much-reduced rate. Solution: To lessen Palestinian “despair,” Israel must begin a political process with Mr. Arafat immediately. Israel must also end its military campaign and withdraw all its troops. Europe should threaten a trade boycott. Shimon Peres’ 1994 Nobel Peace Prize should be taken away—and given to Mr. Arafat, so he has two.*

If you guessed that I am going to jump (like a rookie with a hanging fastball that snuck out over the middle of the plate) all over the use of such *emotion-based terminology* as “frustration,” “humiliation” and “despair” to characterize the EU and the UN’s view of the Palestinian Authority’s situation, you guessed right. Next issue. But a few more facts, first:

As Norman Doidge pointed out in his column of 13 April:

*Spooked, America is unwilling to let Israel end Arafat’s reign of terror. Washington has retreated into approaching him with a kind of primitive behaviour therapy that says, “If he renounces terror” or “if he controls terror,” then we will talk to him. It is as though all that matters is to get him to say the right words, never mind his intentions; as if no distinction need be drawn between his strategic goal—the destruction of Israel—and a tactical willingness to say he opposes terror (when a lie serves his purpose).*

In everything that I have read about Yasser Arafat—and the clippings concerning him far outnumber all others in front of me as I work, here, on “Islam, My Islam”—the only instance that I can find of him denouncing violence is in his speech to the United Nations in 1988. As the record of the ensuing fourteen years more than amply demonstrates, this unique, solitary and isolated instance of Yasser Arafat paying lip service to peace has served him well, having (evidently) persuaded the predominantly liberal-left, quasi-socialist governments of the world to not only elevate him to his central rôle on the international stage as Israel’s “partner for peace” but also to award him the Nobel Peace Prize. Seldom has so much been bestowed upon any individual for so little—particularly given that, in every other action and assertion over a forty-year career Arafat has never so much as *pretended* to be anything but what he is: a gangster, a terrorist, the inventor of airplane high-jacking as a means of winning public attention, the former leader of Black September who masterminded the murder of the Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics and the 1973 murder of American Ambassador Cleo A. Noel, Jr., his deputy, George Curtis Moore and Belgian chargé d’affaires, Guy Eid during a hostage

taking at a reception at the Saudi embassy in Sudan (this one isn't discussed very much: the commandos demanded the release of Robert Kennedy's assassin Sirhan Sirhan and executed the hostages when President Nixon refused to negotiate) and, today, the autocratic dictator of the Palestinian Authority. It is a peculiarity of the secular liberal-left, quasi-socialists who dominate the world stage that they have an insatiable need to establish co-equivalency, most particularly where it does not exist. Israelis—having, some time ago, abandoned liberal-left, quasi-socialist fictions for the rather more useful pragmatism of common sense and its ability to assist in survival—thus require a counterpart (in the skewed perceptions of the secular, liberal-left, quasi-socialists) in what they call (with perfectly straight faces) “the peace process”: a counterpart, well, you know, a little more secular, liberal-left and quasi-socialist than the Israelis. Of course it is only the secular, liberal-left quasi-socialists who can then look at Yasser Arafat—a devout Muslim, whose politics (like the politics of all autocratic dictators) lies somewhere to the right of Francisco Franco, whose idea of socialism includes only himself and his immediate cronies—and say, “Yes, well, close enough.” The *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* quality that this imposes on the Israelis as a central reality of their national existence, quite frankly, boggles my mind as I'm quite sure that it boggles theirs on a regular basis. It is worth recalling—as the secular, liberal-left quasi socialists are loathe to do—that the problems of the Palestinians originated with the Arabs, not the Israelis. As Z. David Berlin puts it in an opinion piece in the *National Post* (“Would confederation offer a middle way for the Middle East?” 11 May) (the long answer to the question posed by the title, to me, is “no”).

*Palestinian nationalism grew not so much out of the 1967 Israeli occupation as because pan-Arabism itself turned out to be not very inclusive. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the displacement of local populations that went with it...*

I really have to interrupt at this point to mention that the population “displacements” were scarcely comparable. Basically, the Arab countries seized all property owned by their Jewish citizens and then expelled the Jews—who fled to Israel—and then advised the Arab populations in Israel, the Transjordanians, to get out of the way while they, the Arab countries, kicked Israel's ass, with the implicit promise that once Israel's ass had been properly kicked and all of the Jews driven into the Mediterranean, there would be more than enough fig trees, vineyards and other loot to go around for all the Transjordanians who had been inconvenienced. When *Israel*, instead, kicked the *Arabs'* asses, the Arab countries (Jordan particularly)—rather than opening their borders to the now-homeless Transjordanians—erected the refugee camps which still exist today and said, basically, Sit tight. We'll get 'em next time. Which of course they didn't. So for fifty-four years, these Transjordanians have been “sitting tight” in increasingly more permanent—fifty-four years *is* fifty-four years—refugee camps in the West Bank. It's also worth noting that most Arabs living today in the West Bank (or Gaza) did not get kicked out by Israel. They moved in—from Jordan, Egypt and, indirectly, every other Arab country you can name. Since 1994, more than 400,000 Arabs have entered the West Bank and Gaza.

*...did not inspire anything like the current frenzy. In fact, it was not until Black September, when the late King Hussein of Jordan clamped down on the Palestinians in his own country (about 70% of Jordan's population is Palestinian) that Palestinians began to realize their survival was of no great concern to the neighbouring Arab nations. This growing feeling of abandonment and helplessness was further exacerbated in June, 1976, when the Syrian ruler, Hafez Assad, launched a major offensive against the Palestinians hunkered down in Lebanon...Displaced Arab populations in refugee camps under Egyptian and Jordanian rule, often referred to as Arab Jews, became Palestinian by default.*

Essentially, Jordan—which was created largely to be a homeland for Palestinians—decided it had enough Palestinians of its own (thank you, very much) and decided to freeze out the Arabs that they had encouraged to abandon their homes and lands temporarily, *fifty-four years ago*. In the minds of the Jordanians, it was one thing to promise those displaced Arabs *Jewish* fig trees and vineyards and houses and lands and quite another to have to make good on the promise with *Jordanian* fig trees and vineyards and houses and lands (this brings to mind an observation that David Warren of *The Ottawa Citizen* quoted in a recent column as having been said to him by a Palestinian writer in Bethlehem, “With friends like these, who needs Israelis?”) Actually, Shimon Peres (presently Israeli defence minister, the Prime Minister who shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Arafat) came up with a plan in his

1995 book *The New Middle East* of a trilateral confederation of Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians with the state of Palestine to be established in the Gaza Strip and the joint administration of the West Bank by Israel, the PA and Jordan:

*One story going the rounds at the time was that Arafat had approached King Hussein with the joint project idea, suggesting that he and the King alternate as heads of the confederation. According to Peres, this chutzpah “put an end to the idea of a Palestinian Jordanian confederation.”*

No doubt. This is what continually amazes me about the secular liberal-left, quasi-socialist approach to the “peace process”. As I see it, *Jordan* owes the displaced Arabs a homeland. Call it Little Jordan, call it Palestine, rename Jordan Big Palestine if you want but I really fail to see where autonomy or a new state comes into the deal. What role will Arafat play? My personal opinion is that the vital role that Arafat will play in Middle East peace is this: you take Arafat out in the woods and you put a bullet in his head and leave him there so the birds and the wild animals can pick his carcass clean (call me sentimental if you want, but these are exactly the warm fuzzy kinds of thoughts that come to my mind. And it’s not just Arafat. I have the exact same thoughts about all other scumbag, terrorist, sky-jacking, athlete-murdering, diplomat-murdering, autocratic dictator despots). Once Yasser Arafat has fulfilled this vital role *then* you sit down and begin to negotiate with the Jordanians what part of Jordan the Jordanians are going to carve out of Jordan as a new homeland for the Transjordanians that Jordan encouraged to leave their homes back in 1948.

But, but—what about “Land for Peace”? I hear you whine (you secular, left-liberal, quasi-socialist, you). The answer to that, of course, is the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in May of 2000. As Charles Krauthammer of the Washington Post Writers Group puts it,

*Indeed, Israel had been in Lebanon for about 20 years. It was a classic defensive occupation. Israel laid claim to not an inch of Lebanese soil. It diverted not a drop of water. It had no interest in staying. It was there for one reason: to protect Israel’s northern frontier from various guerrillas—first Yasser Arafat’s PLO, then the Lebanese Shiite Party of God (Hezbollah) [a front for the despotic terrorist government of Syria]—using South Lebanon to attack Israel.*

*Yet for two decades, Israel was hectored to comply with United Nations resolutions demanding Israel’s withdrawal. In May, 2000 it complied. To ensure that there could be no possible residual territorial dispute, Israel asked the UN to draw the line demarcating the true Israeli-Lebanese border—the so-called Blue Line—then pulled back behind it.*

Land for peace, right? Wrong. Since May of 2000, Hezbollah’s attacks on the northern frontier of Israel have escalated to a level which exceeds that which prompted the Israeli invasion back in 1982. In fact, do you remember the Saudi Peace Plan that everyone was making such a fuss about a few months back? One of the key points of Prince Abdullah’s plan was a demand that Israel withdraw “from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories.” But, (as even the ordinarily sedate Mr. Krauthammer couldn’t help but italicize) *there are no remaining occupied Lebanese territories.*

At the time of Colin Powell’s latest swing through the Middle East, Steven Edwards had a few astute observations buried in an otherwise unexceptional article headlined “Arabs Keep Up Diplomatic Pressure.” Foremost among these a couple of quotes from unnamed UN diplomats. The first, a Western diplomat, saying, “It seems like the Arab countries can’t go 24 hours without putting something on the table.” Followed by an observation from unnamed Arab diplomats that much of their activity is to appease Arab public opinion, “The push for more and more resolutions is for domestic consumption. It is a way of showing something is being done. And there is always the chance that the Security Council will fall to its knees and move against Israel.” “Fall to its knees”. A singularly Koreish-like approach to international diplomacy.

*Pushed primarily by Arab and Muslim countries, the United Nations has spent more of the past 50 years on the Arab-Israeli conflict than on any other regional dispute.*

*The Security Council has ruled on the conflict in more than 250 resolutions, which are legally binding. The count for the General Assembly, where Arab and Muslim countries have little difficulty mustering support among developing countries for the Palestinian cause, is almost 1,000.*

I love this part:

*Pushing for resolutions, declarations and statements that slam or make demands on Israel and corner the United States has been the mainstay of Arab diplomatic activity through the vast UN system for years.*

*This week in Madrid, even the United Nations world conference on ageing found itself sidetracked when Egypt insisted delegates should accuse Israel of “genocide, subjugation and the daily agony that the Palestinians incur.”*

I suppose when you're busily typing all of these resolutions into your laptop, a Freudian slip or two is bound to slip in. “Incur” means “to bring on oneself”. I think the writer meant “endure”. Anyway, I think it's obvious that the dispute isn't really *about* anything anymore apart from making Israel into a scapegoat for the massive failures clearly evident in the Arab dictatorships in the Middle East. There is no concession which Israel could make that would end the violence perpetrated against it—or, for that matter, even curtail the mindlessly lunatic propaganda war being waged against it on a daily basis. As Prince Abdullah said when he unveiled the Saudi “peace plan” at the last meeting of the Arab League, “The time has come for Israel to put its trust in peace after it has gambled on war for decades without success.” Of course, this is the exact reverse of the reality of the last fifty-four years. It is the Arab countries, the Arab dictatorships which have gambled on war for decades and the Arab countries, the Arab dictatorships who have no success to show for their efforts. As Mark Steyn pointed out in a recent column, “Prince Abdullah has no interest in Palestinians: It's easier for a Palestinian to emigrate to Toronto and become a subject of the Queen than to emigrate to Riyadh and become a subject of King Fahd.” It's a telling point. The Saudi Peace Plan was basically the same as one the Saudis proposed in 1981 and again in 1991: withdraw to the pre-June 4, 1967 borders and the Arab world will make peace with you. What this presupposes is that the venal and corrupt Arab despots in their various palaces have any influence over their fanatical anti-Zionist, Wahabite minority populations. I don't think that they do, any more than Yasser Arafat could actually stop a single suicide bombing even if he were inclined to do so.

Right. Getting back to Yasser Arafat:

In the same way that the secular left-liberal quasi-socialists use Hemingway's Nobel Prize for Literature to convince themselves that Hemingway was a writer instead of a typist, this same group uses Yasser Arafat's Nobel Peace Prize to convince themselves that Arafat is a diplomat and a statesman. Even as the evidence continues to mount and to become irrefutable—that not only has Arafat been “inconsistent in his opposition to terrorism” (the official view of the White House and the State Department)—that he has, in fact, been a relentless *proponent* and *supporter* of terrorism still *The Washington Post* (immediately after the massacre of 26 Israelis at the Passover Seder) editorialized that we need “the leadership of the Palestinian Authority as well as its principal security services” as “the only available instruments for stopping Palestinian terrorism”. Charles Krauthammer's reaction:

*Good God. Instruments for stopping terrorism? They are instruments for aiding and abetting, equipping and financing, supporting and glorifying terrorism, which they call “martyrdom operations”. This is like arguing at the beginning of the Afghan war that we should not attack the Taliban because they were the only instrument in Afghanistan available for bringing al-Qaeda to heel. Sure. But they were allied with al-Qaeda, commingled with al-Qaeda and shared al-Qaeda's objectives. They had no intention of ever stopping al-Qaeda. That situation is precisely the same in Palestine.*

*Next issue: Getting very near the end (God willing). More on the Middle East, future prospects for the Nation of Islam and concluding thoughts on my own experiences with praying, fasting in Ramadan and paying the zakat*

essay

## Islam, My Islam

The success of the Israeli Defence Forces' Operation Defensive Shield in May aided substantially in shredding the tissue of lies which is the Palestinian Authority. The operation, which netted about 70% of the leading terrorist operatives and neutralized 80% of the bomb-making labs in the targeted West Bank Cities (about 4,500 Palestinians were detained in the operation. Of these 1,450 were formally arrested and charged after admitting involvement in terrorist activities. The IDF also seized 2,000 Kalashnikov rifles, 800 pistols, 388 sniper rifles, 93 machine guns, 9 rocket launchers, six mortars, 40 ammunition crates and 430 explosive charges). More significant (by far) was the seizure of documents linking Yasser Arafat directly to terrorist activities. "We've managed to translate and explain around a dozen documents, different documents of different types, which have shown the connection of the Palestinian Authority to terrorism," said Colonel Miri Eisin, a senior Israeli intelligence officer.

Although it is unwise to underestimate the ability of the secular left-liberal quasi-socialists to accommodate these new facts while simultaneously professing an undying faith in Yasser Arafat as the only possible "partner for peace" in the Middle East (this is, after all, the political faction that still housed a sizeable constituency of Stalin apologists as late as the 1960s) it does appear that the PA chairman's days as a pivotal figure on the world stage are drawing to a close. Certainly his credibility as a *Muslim* suffered a (perhaps mortal?) blow when he turned over to British and U.S. control the six terrorists he had been sheltering at his Ramallah headquarters in a deal to lift the Israeli siege on his compound. This recalled the decision which faced Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle, when the Koreish were pressuring him to surrender the Prophet to them. As I mentioned in discussing that situation earlier in this series of essays (relative to the U.S. promise of a reward of US \$25 million for the surrender of Osama bin Laden), surrendering a Muslim to the infidels is a real "non-starter" for both Arabs and Muslims. Upon his release, Arafat was forced to cancel a tour of the Jenin refugee camp because of concerns for his safety. At this point, despite his "nine lives," I think it's safe to say that Arafat has dropped off the radar screen as a potential Heir to the Mantle of the Prophet. However, in my view, he still merits close scrutiny—and I still recommend the precautionary measure of taking him out in the woods and putting a bullet in his head. I think the fears that the summary execution of Yasser Arafat would lead to his being seen as a martyr to the Palestinian cause are entirely unfounded. I view it as an extension of the sensible Israeli policy of "early retirement" for the homicidal elements within the PA, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade (if they are going to describe themselves as Martyrs, then I think they should be assisted in fulfilling that description). As Neill Lochery, director of the Centre for Israeli Studies at University College in London, put it in his article of 23 January:

*The vast majority of the Palestinian population is secular in nature, and is turned off by the prospect of an Islamic Fundamentalist Palestinian State—the ideological cornerstone of Hamas and Islamic Jihad's program. Support for Hamas has, in the main, been based on the growing dependency of segments of Palestinian society on the hospitals and schools run by it, which are sponsored by foreign donors. The hospitals often provide much better conditions than their counterparts run by the Palestinian Authority, which are funded by taxation. Money is, however, drying up, particularly in the post-Sept. 11 climate. With the United States, at last, launching serious investigations into international funding of radical Islamic groups, many wealthy Saudis are withdrawing contributions for fear of being exposed.*

I think the Western Democracies should try not to lose sight of the fact that the Islamic extremists—the Wahabites and their offshoots—are a minority within a minority. As Mr. Lochery goes on to say, "In reality, these groups enjoy core support of only around 10% of the population, the rest is merely an endorsement of their hawkish stand against Israel." 10% of the population supports the extremist groups which, I would guess, represents 10% of that 10% (those who support terrorism and suicide bombings as an appropriate method for achieving a political aim). In turn 10% of *that* 10% consists of those who actually own Kalashnikov rifles, machine guns, mortars and have used them or intend to use them against Israeli soldiers or citizens or who are actually engaged in the making of suicide bombs in the various West Bank underground factories and—who actually believe the ridiculous fatwas of many prominent Wahabite Muslim clerics declaring Israel to be a "a head-to-toe 'military society' in which even the babies are soldiers," thus "validating" the indiscriminate murder of women and children as "legitimate" targets of *jihad*. And then, of course, there is the 10% of *that* 10% who actually blow themselves up. My thesis is that, once you get down to the base level of people who seriously believe that babies are soldiers and that blowing yourself up next to women and children is a

legitimate form of warfare, you are no longer dealing with human beings, you are dealing with homicidal nutcases. *Armed* homicidal nutcases. Armed homicidal nutcases who constitute a minority within a minority within a minority. That is to say, a “handful” of armed homicidal nutcases. The only sensible reaction to a “handful” of armed homicidal nutcases is the one Israeli forces have been using: targeted killings. “Early retirement,” coupled with surgical incursions into the homicidal nutcase breeding grounds, incarceration and interrogation to separate the 1,450 terrorist participants from the 4,500 (relatively) harmless civilians. Contrary to conventional wisdom, I don’t believe that armed homicidal nutcases are able to breed that fast. When you are dealing with 10% of 10% of 10% of 10%, it’s basically a “grooming” operation: the way that apes comb through each other’s fur to get the lice and ticks out. Do they get all of the lice and ticks out? No. Do the lice and ticks come back? Certainly. Then what’s the point? The point is to keep the population of lice and ticks in your fur to a minimum. It’s time-consuming, it is a non-stop process, it is (I’m sure) no “day at the beach” for the lice and the ticks, but it is certainly worth doing and I would venture to say that the vast majority of anthropoids—even though they exist below the threshold of genuine sentience—agree with me. “99% of Apes Surveyed Agree: Constant Grooming Well Worth Effort, Time Involved.” In fact, I would argue that Arab sentience (far, far exceeding that of the apes) makes what the Israelis are doing even more worthwhile. As incoherent and insensible as the Wahabite Muslim extremists tend to be (as they have to be, since they are defending an indefensible viewpoint), still they are able to recognize that—if the IDF is able to penetrate the refugee camps at will and separate the “wheat from the chaff” of those they arrest (releasing the “wheat” and imprisoning the “chaff”)—as *sentient beings* it is going to become apparent to the “Palestinians” after a few of these incursions that it is high time to get out of the “lice and tick” business (as it were). The net effect of “grooming” is to bring forth less incoherent and less insensible representatives of the opposing viewpoint, to marginalise the incoherent and insensible Wahabite extremists. As is only appropriate since they are, inescapably, a minority of a minority of a minority. Constant “grooming,” coupled with a willingness to negotiate should (all things being equal) eventually produce a coherent and sensible viewpoint on the Muslim/Arab/Palestinian/Transjordanian/West Bank and Gaza side of the debate. And then negotiations can resume—or, rather, begin.

I say “begin” because I don’t think what we have had up ‘til now represents anything close to a sensible negotiation. On the contrary, I think most of the posturing that we have seen from the PA has been a relentless playing of (what I call) the “Jesus card”. The PA and Yasser Arafat portray themselves as martyrs (*istishad*). The reason for this, I believe, is that they know that the Israelis—owing to their experience with Jesus—are loathe to allow anyone to occupy the *rôle* of victim—or, rather, Victim. Remember that the complete destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. took place within the lifetime of that same generation of Jews who had witnessed the Crucifixion. The synchronistic occurrence of those two events is very much at the core of the Jewish experience, the mass Jewish consciousness (if you will). They lost their homeland and their city for two thousand years. Having gotten their homeland back for all of fifty years and their city for thirty-five years, there is a definite, justifiable and profound Jewish wariness about losing both again—particularly for what the Jews would regard as the same reason: martyrdom, or, rather, Martyrdom. I believe that this is the reason that every Israeli government since 1948 has been walking on eggshells when it comes to the use of force. Even on those occasions when the surrounding Arab nations have attacked and then been forced into an inglorious retreat, the Israeli military has always stopped well short—*well short*—of exhausting its own battlefield momentum. Had they chosen, they could’ve cut through their opponents like a hot knife through butter. But each time, they have exhibited remarkable, nearly superhuman, restraint: seizing only the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. That’s it! Even though, on each occasion, in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, they went through their opponents like a hot knife through butter. I believe The PA—seeing the “trump card” writing on the wall with the Israeli adoption of surgical incursions into the refugee camp/cities of the West Bank as their new foreign policy—have pulled out all the stops in their attempts to play the “Jesus Card.” Case in point:

An article by Stewart Bell, dated May 1st (a couple of days before Arafat turned over the six terrorists to British and U.S. control) mentions that Arafat, some humanitarian groups and a member of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) were complaining that the Israeli army was “starving the 72-year-old Palestinian leader”:

*Angered by suggestions it had tried to starve Yasser Arafat out of his presidential compound, the Israeli military has released a lengthy list of the groceries it shipped to the Palestinian leader during*

*his month under siege. The figures, presented to the foreign affairs and defence committees of the Knesset, show Mr. Arafat and his entourage consumed 13,200 pieces of pita bread, 420 cans of hummus, 423 cans of tuna, 720 bottles of Coke, 30 cans of coffee, 155 boxes of tea, 360 kilograms of sugar, 505 cans of sardines, 458 packages of cheese, 60 cartons of eggs.*

*In addition, 120 cartons of cigarettes and 270 packages of toilet paper were brought in, plus hundreds of kilograms of rice and fruits and vegetables, including 24 watermelons, 40 kilograms of grapes and 65 kilograms of lemons.*

*One box of Corn Flakes was also sent to Mr. Arafat.*

That “one box of Corn Flakes” cracks me up. So much for the “Jesus Card” on this one.

If you keep track of Yasser Arafat’s various pronouncements, there is a definite attempt at “linkage” between Christianity and Islam, the use of the “Jesus Card”. The Jews murdered Jesus! The Jews are murdering Palestinians! Let us join forces and drive the Jews into the Mediterranean! This, of course, takes place against a backdrop of the degraded estate to which Christianity has sunk, particularly in the last fifty years, a state of degradation of which Muslims, Arabs and “Palestinians” are either blindly ignorant or which they intentionally choose to ignore in the interests of forging the necessary temporary alliance. North Americans and Europeans, if they give Jesus or God even a passing thought in the course of the average day, rate both, in my view, at a level of interest somewhere below that of Levi jeans or the latest Star Wars epic which, themselves, are rated well below the level of importance of the Superbowl, the World Cup, if Madonna is pregnant or not and what Jennifer Lopez is going to wear to the Academy Awards. The reaction of Raymond J. de Souza, Rome correspondent for the *National Catholic Register* to the recent occupation of the Church of the Nativity by “Palestinian” gangsters, to me, neatly encapsulates the problem in an article entitled “Christianity turns the other cheek: Where is the outrage when a church is desecrated?”

*Christian pusillanimity reached absurd lows last Saturday night [11 May] when Italian mayors, gathered in Rome, took to the Colosseum to sing John Lennon’s Imagine. Italy, which is very proud of itself for being selected as the likely site of the next international peace conference on the Middle East, wanted to show its commitment to peace. The Christian martyrs of the Colosseum would have wept to see it.*

*The enemies of Christianity are justified in their laughter. The birthplace of Jesus Christ is overrun by terrorists, and in response, dozens of at least nominally Catholic politicians sing pop music’s most nihilistic anthem—imagine there’s no Heaven...no countries...no religion. Imagine no Christian resistance. It isn’t hard to do.*

*Never before in the centuries of wars and sackings that have drenched the Holy Land in blood has the basilica of the Nativity been occupied. And for good reason—potential occupiers knew that a ferocious response would certainly have followed. Today, the only penalty seems to be having to listen to John Lennon’s puerile philosophy set to music.*

The problem, of course, is that there is no such thing as Christendom such as Yasser Arafat envisions. The worldwide entity that he seeks to unite behind his cause is in the process of being taken over and eviscerated by women, as surely as colleges and universities and the entertainment field have been taken over and gutted by the left-liberal, quasi-socialist feminine sensibility. The Anglican Church has already fallen, Anglicans having been given the conventional feminist choice of “capitulate or leave”: accept women priests, homosexual priests and same-sex marriages or leave. Women are, by nature, pusillanimous creatures. United with their pusillanimous counterparts—women-with-penises—there is no conflict too large, no interest too vital that, in their view, it can’t be preserved by closing their eyes, linking arms and imagining that there are no countries, no religion, no Heaven, no Hell, dropping piteously to their knees and, with bottom lip a-tremble, singing along. This was, of course, the reality that the watershed moments of 11 September exposed most vividly. All of the left-liberal, quasi-socialist women and women-with-penises standing around with mouths agape and tears streaming down their cheeks. And those of us who believe—and who believed *prior* to 11 September—that there *is* such a thing as good and evil and that good *must* be eternally vigilant and *must* actively work to destroy evil wherever it exists were left looking at the “Kumbaya” brigade and going, Yes? And...? Do you want to add a couple of verses: “Imagine there’s no World Trade Center”? “Imagine there’s no Pentagon”? Of course, the “Kumbaya” brigade has been with us for some time: its ideological predecessors believed that Hitler could be negotiated with. Right up to September 1939 when the

German tanks rolled into Poland. At which point, I'm sure my ideological predecessors looked at the appeasers going, Yes? And...? At these critical junctures in the histories of the great democracies, left-liberal, quasi-socialist women and women-with-penises all have the same astute plan of action which they immediately institute: that is, they continue to stand there with their mouths agape and tears streaming down their cheeks.

I'm trying hard not to pre-empt my own concluding remarks to this series and much of the substance of "Why Canada Slept". However, suffice to say, I believe that it was a serious miscalculation on Yasser Arafat's part to think that Christendom with its feminist rot and infestation was in any position to take any kind of concerted action for or against *anyone* or even to make any kind of declaration apart from "Yes, dear. Whatever you say, dear. I apologize, dear." Although the Catholic church *appears* to the women and women-with-penises to be holding out against their best efforts (this can, I think, be attributed to the fact that—as was the case with colleges and universities—feminism accepts only *total* capitulation Not for too little is *Zero tolerance* a catchphrase of feminist origin: to women and women-with-penises there is only *one* way, *their* way and *their* way is absolute) the fact remains that its evisceration is far advanced. For all intents and purposes the Catholic church is now a secular feminist social engineering bastion, like the universities and colleges. All that is in doubt is the sequence in which the remaining dominos of its infrastructure will ultimately fall. Thus, its institutional reactions to even the most monumental of crises—and its hard to imagine a more monumental crisis in world Christendom than the takeover of the Church of the Nativity by gangsters—must needs be those of its constituent parts, women and women-with-penises: for now and evermore all the Catholic church will be equipped to do in a crisis is to stand there with its institutional mouth agape and institutional tears streaming down its cheeks.

This series is called "Islam, My Islam," but I think the issue of Israel holding the moral high ground in the Middle East is worth lingering over a bit. While I give equal weight to Judaism and Islam, when it comes to Israel and the Arab dictatorships, I favour the former over the latter, hands down. It is, to me, only common sense. Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and I would have to consider Israel (very much against overwhelming odds, I might add) to be a vanguard democracy. Like the United States, Israel pushes the boundaries of what is and what is not allowed within its borders, striving always to err on the side of greater freedom for all its citizens. Ed Morgan, a law professor at the University of Toronto, has written a couple of pieces on this very subject after the Israeli incursion into the Jenin refugee camp about a petition filed with the Supreme Court of Israel to halt the removal of bodies and how the Court filed a temporary injunction supporting the petition which it then overturned a couple of days later after a partial agreement had been reached between the petitioners and the Israeli government:

*The petition in question challenged the army's plans to bury Palestinian gunmen separately from civilians killed in the fighting. It was filed by Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, along with two Arab Israeli Knesset members, Mohammad Barakeh and Ahmed Tibi. The existence and strength of these Arab legal and political figures in the Israeli system is itself worthy of note given the negative, apartheid-like caricature of Israel so prevalent in international human rights circles. The ability of these activists to bring a challenge to military operations in the midst of a war is truly remarkable.*

*What is perhaps the most interesting aspect of all, however, is that this was not a futile effort by activists to dramatize their point; in fact, they won a major part of their case. Chief Justice Aaron Barak issued a court order denying the armed forces access to the town which they had just fought bitterly last week to gain.*

*The petitioners had claimed that the plans for cleaning up Jenin included house demolitions and interment of dead gunmen in a mass grave that would violate international law. Israel's most liberal jurist...ordered the military to halt pending a full hearing.*

*Two days later, after the army saw the judicial writing on the wall and agreed to bury the gunmen in accordance with Palestinian wishes, the court lifted the injunction. The panel of three judges included the religious appointee to Israel's Supreme Court, Justice Yitzhak Englard, who has endorsed a humanitarian rather than doctrinaire approach to issues of religion and the law. In a compromise ruling, the panel refused to interfere with the security assessment that the demolitions were necessary, but it did so only after it satisfied itself that the human rights issues of mass burial was resolved to the petitioners' satisfaction.*

*During the height of the Vietnam war, the U.S. courts came to a similar position toward the conduct of military operations, refusing to interfere with the strategic decisions of the armed forces in the war effort, but enjoining and punishing specific cases of human rights abuses.*

*Israel's struggle to protect legal rights and maintain a democracy under intense pressure is frequently ignored by its detractors, including those in the human rights movement itself. The most graphic example of this came last September in Durban [the U.N. Conference on Racism] when Azmi Bishara of the Knesset's Balad party, led a group of marchers carrying placards declaring Israel to be an apartheid state. As an elected Arab member of the Knesset, however, Bishara is living proof of the antithesis of his followers' claim.*

And this, on May 10, after Mr. Morgan had returned from a Canadian lawyers' mission to Israel and the West Bank:

*In recent years, and with increased intensity in recent weeks, the Israeli Supreme Court has gone where virtually no court has gone before. A collection of Jewish and Arab human rights organizations—the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, its Palestinian equivalent Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights and the broadly respected B'tselem human rights organization—have succeeded in engaging the Supreme Court in issues that most judicial bodies would shy away from. Starting in the 1980s, it has endorsed rights for gay spouses, gender equality in a large number of social contexts, anti-discrimination in housing for Arab Israelis, the rights of national security detainees to procedural safeguards and due process, the right of prisoners not to be subjected to physical abuse or torture, the right of long term residents not to be deported and an assortment of rights for religious minorities and non-Orthodox Jews.*

*One noteworthy case resulted in an agreement between the Israel Defense Forces and Adalah, allowing representatives of the International Red Cross to accompany army teams in evacuating Palestinian wounded and killed to local hospitals. The compromise struck a balance between, on one hand, the security concerns resulting from several well documented cases of terrorists hiding in ambulances and, on the other hand, the self-evident need to provide medical relief during the heat of battle.*

*Indeed, the Israeli judicial activism has an interestingly paradoxical quality: it provides an accessible and objective forum for rights enforcement against the government and provides the government with its best line of defence against the subjective and hostile interventions from abroad.*

Obviously, I disagree with “rights for gay spouses” and I would have to see an itemized list of “social contexts” for “gender equality” (I am very much in favour of women who are convicted of crimes serving the same sentences that men convicted of those crimes serve, as an example: something which is not apt to happen anytime soon) before saying “yay” or “nay”. Again, trying not to pre-empt my own concluding remarks, I believe that the “gay spouses” and “gender equality” nonsense will infect all of the non-Muslim world—at least in a legalistic sense—before non-Muslim society gets around to addressing the actual implications. Leaping before you look has always been the feminist way.

But we were discussing the use of the “Jesus Card” by Yasser Arafat and the PA. Regarding the Israeli military operation in Jenin, Shimon Peres (uncharacteristically for Israel's super-dove) heaped scorn on the Palestinian claims of a massacre.

*The story began with the so-called fact that 3,000 Palestinian civilians lost their lives. But now Palestinians are saying it is down to several hundred. To the best of our knowledge, seven civilian persons lost their lives in Jenin.*

In his own examination of this ridiculous inflation of casualty figures, Charles Krauthammer (“All this fuss for a phantom massacre”) cited the suicide bombings of the previous month in Jerusalem, Yagor, Haifa, Eilon Moreh and Netanya (total of 61 casualties, all civilians) and found himself, once more, driven to the use of italics: “These are massacres—actual, recent massacres. Massacres for which the evidence is hard. Massacres for which the perpetrators *claimed credit*. Where was the Security Council? Where was the Kofi Annan commission? Where was the world?”

Yes, exactly. *Claimed. Credit.* Not “accepted blame.” *Claimed. Credit.* Addressing all of the secular left-liberal, quasi-socialists in the crowd: Just for a change, just this once, how about *not*

treating those questions as rhetorical? *Where* was the Security Council? *Where* was the Kofi Annan commission? *Where* was the world? Still insist on seeing the two sides as co-equivalent?

Contrast the documented instances of Israel's Supreme Court seeking to protect human rights in that country with this eyewitness account filed from Hebron by Steward Bell under the headline, "‘Informants’ Meet Death on Peace St." (*National Post*, April 24):

*Down the road, the bloodied bodies of three Palestinians, accused of helping Israel were displayed for all to see in front of the Al-Ansaar Mosque—two of them strung by their feet from metal electrical towers and a third left lying on his back on Peace Street.*

*Hundreds of people rushed to the centre of this biblical town on horseback, in cars and by foot to see the latest victims and to spit on the bodies. Children, women and men gathered around the hanging corpses, smiling and laughing.*

*Yesterday's lynchings were said to be retribution for the death hours earlier of Marvan Zalum, the 43-year-old leader of the Tanzim militia in Hebron.*

*By morning, local Tanzim members had rounded up three men they accused of helping the Israelis pinpoint Mr. Zalum's location. They were brought out on to Peace Street in front of the mosque minaret, given a hasty "trial" and pronounced guilty.*

*The men were lined up in front of Mr. Zalum's car and shot in the head. Their bodies were then mutilated by a crowd that mobbed the downtown street to seek revenge for the death of Mr. Zalum.*

*Colonel Miri Eisin, a senior intelligence officer in the Israel Defence Forces, said she did not know whether the men were informants, but noted that while the Palestinian Authority has been unable to arrest many militants on a list sought by Israel, those deemed collaborators are quickly caught and punished.*

The more I've considered the situation, the more I have come to believe that the problem with secular left-liberal, quasi-socialist "thinking" in the Western Democracies is that it takes democracy for granted. In fact, it takes democracy for granted to such an extent that it sees the underpinnings of democracy, the protection of human rights, the rule of law, as merely one option among (many? several?): "democracy" and "not democracy" as an honest difference of opinion. Some people want to petition a civilized Supreme Court with a grievance through prescribed channels and use the basis of centuries of jurisprudence and legal precedence to arrive at a logical conclusion. And some people want to drag people out in the street, have a show trial on the spot and shoot them in the head. Seeing the latter as a less suitable way to conduct a society, frowning on that, let alone trying to eliminate it, is (seemingly) viewed by the secular left-liberal, quasi-socialists as culturally insensitive. Or something.

I do believe in summary execution for those engaged in targeting civilian populations. It is for that reason that, while I believe firmly in the rule of law, that belief does not extend to those who, themselves, order the execution of non-military personnel. Military personnel, that's a different matter. Take this example from earlier this year:

*The gunman who attacked yesterday, armed with a bolt-action rifle of Second World War-vintage, was hidden in trees overlooking the checkpoint near Ofra, home to 2,500 Jewish settlers. Using only 25 cartridges, he shot dead three soliders, one by one. When a paramedic and an officer arrived, he shot them too, as well as two settlers waiting in their cars. A vehicle arrived with the settlement's head of security, and the gunman shot dead two more soldiers and mortally wounded a third. A helicopter tried to locate him, but he fled, abandoning his weapon.*

In terms of "armed resistance," which is a right the Palestinian Authority has been claiming for itself, well, yes, sure. Shooting the soldiers seems legitimate to me if you sincerely believe that they are occupying your land illegally. But a paramedic? Or the two settlers waiting in their cars? No, that's simply beyond the pale. Let's say that the IDF actually caught the guy. Instead of dropping his rifle, he ran with it, they see him run with it and they pursue him. If he hadn't shot the paramedic or the settlers, I would say the IDF was obligated to try and capture him, wounding him if that's what it takes to bring him down, but making a sincere effort to bring him in alive. Because he wasn't wearing a uniform, he wouldn't qualify for Geneva Convention protections, but civilized behaviour would dictate, to me, imprisonment. However, having shot the paramedic and the two settlers to death, to me, the guy forfeited his right to keep breathing. It would be perfectly legitimate, to me, having brought him down to put a bullet in his brain. Anyone who is pretending to be part of an "armed

resistance” and shoots a paramedic is basically a mad dog and should be treated as such. This is why I recommend taking Arafat out in the woods and shooting him. He isn’t a soldier or a freedom fighter, to me, he is a mad dog. He targeted civilians: most particularly the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics and the diplomats in Sudan. He has forfeited his right to keep breathing. Likewise with those who work in the bomb factories in the West Bank, those who plan the suicide bombings and those who assist the suicide bombers. If they were blowing up Israeli tanks or barracks or military installations, I would say, fine, good luck to you. But the fact that they are blowing up civilians, the fact that their *sole intention* is to blow up civilians means that everyone involved has forfeited their right to keep breathing. Likewise with the World Trade Center. The World Trade Center was not a valid military target. The twin towers were a civilian target. By targeting the twin towers, you have forfeited your right to keep breathing. Fact of life: As an al-Qaeda or Taliban member who has fallen into the hands of the American authorities, you are going to live out the rest of your days in a cage on Guantanamo Bay. To me, you should count this as an undeserved blessing, having forfeited your right to keep breathing. The attack on the Pentagon? Just considering the Pentagon itself, I would have to say that that was legit. That was a military target. THE military target if it comes to that. A lot of civilians work at the Pentagon but I think that comes under the heading of “at your own risk”. If you are a civilian and you work in a facility that is primarily staffed by military personnel, your death as the result of an attack would have to qualify as “collateral damage”. Of course, the fact that the attack took place with an airliner full of civilians takes it *completely* over to the other side of the equation. Any individual or organization that had even a tangential role in high-jacking the airliner and crashing it so that *all the civilians on board* were killed, in my view, has forfeited the right to keep breathing.

It is also worth noting, I think, that in the only instance that I am aware of in the course of the Intifada which has been going on since September of 2000, the only instance where Israeli civilians have targeted Palestinian civilians—a nutbar group calling itself “Revenge for the Infants” planted several bombs in an Arab elementary school injuring a teacher and three students—the Jerusalem police set up a special investigation team along with the domestic security service, Shin Bet. The inquiry would be conducted “with the same diligence as if it was an anti-Israeli attack,” according to Mickey Levy, the Jerusalem police chief. Just a few weeks ago members of the outlawed Jewish Kach movement were arrested for planning a similar bomb attack. I don’t want to convey the impression that I think that Israel is Disneyland with a national flag or anything. The Agence France-Press report on the arrests quoted Motti Karpel, spokesman for families of the suspects from the Bat Ayin settlement south of Bethlehem, as saying, “There is no real evidence against them. After two weeks of interrogation in Shin Bet cellars without having seen a lawyer, anyone would admit to anything, even murdering Jesus.” It could be a legitimate quote, but it also looks like it could be the work of those wacky anti-Semites, the French.

The settlements are a huge problem. According to the same article

*The Jewish settlement population has doubled to 380,000 since the 1993 Oslo accord established the Palestinian Authority, Israeli rights groups say. Helped by lucrative government incentives, it grew nearly 4% last year even as Palestinian-Israeli violence raged.*

The settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, it seems to me, constitute the closest approach of the Israelis to fundamental incoherence when coupled with their continued negotiation over the “disputed territories”. If you intend to give someone a plot of land, you don’t tell him you’ll give him the land and then build yourself a house on it. What it looks like to me is an attempt on the part of the Israelis to tie their own hands in negotiations over the West Bank and Gaza, to allow them to negotiate a turnover of all or part of the disputed territories while making the actual implementation of such a turnover severely problematical. At the same time, driving the Arabs back into Jordan with suburbs (“Back! BACK!”) has about as much chance of success as the Arabs have of driving the Israelis into the Mediterranean by blowing themselves up next to them. It seems to me that when the time comes—and I believe the time is coming sooner rather than later—the Israelis will have to adopt the approach taken with the Blue Line in Lebanon. That is, some other entity, whether the United States or the UN will have to be the ones to draw the line and say, “level everything on this side of the line.” And will possibly have to volunteer for the onerous task of ejecting the settlers and bulldozing the actual buildings into the ground. This situation might be eased, somewhat, if the proposal to build a huge security fence in the West Bank gains momentum in Israel (which I hope it will). The extremists among the Israeli settlers (or is that redundant?) will be more likely, I think, to surrender their homes

to create a buffer zone and build a security fence than they will be to handing their homes over to the Arabs.

That the “Palestinians” have retreated to the repeated use of the “Jesus Card” as a “court of last resort” in their dealings with the Jews—essentially endeavouring to make of themselves a pseudo-nation of Martyrs and to thus render their circumstance analogous in the Christian mind to that of the founder of the elder religion (“Them lousy Jews, they’re picking on the Palestinians the same way they picked on Jesus!”) seems to me irrefutable. The underlying motivation of their strange choice of tactic (and I think everyone would have to admit that it’s a strange choice of tactic), I think can be attributed to a “paper/rock/scissors” game of “musical chairs” (a conscious mixing of metaphors). I believe that the Arab/Muslim mind, now firmly wedded to its Koreish manifestation, views the UN’s creation of the State of Israel as analogous to the *hejira* of Muhammad and his followers to Medina, that is, as a sneaky Jewish misappropriation of the successful Muslim tactic of 622 of departing Mecca and taking up residence in Medina. A very, very, very successful tactic, as it turned out. In Mecca, Muhammad and his Muslims had always been an annoying, but (for the most part) easily dealt with marginal minority. A description which matches that of the Jews’ situation in the Diaspora in Arab/Muslim lands. They were annoying, but they were an easily dealt with minority population. Once they were restored to Jerusalem, however: once the UN had officially declared the former territory of “Palestine” to be the State of Israel—just as Muhammad had officially founded the Nation of God in Medina—they were both more annoying and what was infinitely worse, from a Koreish vantage-point (in both instances), they were no longer easily dealt with. In fact, each effort to deal with them led to failure, *diminishing* the Koreish even as it *strengthened* their quarry. What, I believe, truly terrifies the Koreish-like despots and dictators of the Arab League is that at some point Israel is going to “break forth”—just as Muhammad and the Muslims did—and basically steam-roll right over the entire Arab Peninsula—just as Muhammad and the Muslims did—without even breaking a sweat—just as Muhammad and the Muslims didn’t. And I think, at a vital, central level of the Arab Muslim awareness, they know that there is absolutely nothing that they can do about it, just as there was nothing the original Koreish could do about Muhammad and the Muslims. Once they were in Medina, the end was inevitable. Consequently, I think, at a vital, central level of the Arab Muslim awareness—desperate for some kind of a saving solution—they asked themselves, What can stop the Jews? And the answer they came up with was Jesus: or, more specifically, martyrdom. Historically, I think they’re right. The only thing that has *ever* stopped the Jews (apart from their own stupid insistence on having an earthly king, instead of relying on God’s prophets and messengers) was Jesus. This is the reason that I think only a permanent border in the form of a Berlin Wall-style security fence and the dismantling of a certain number of the settlements is the only thing that is going to (even marginally) put the Koreish-minds of the Arab despots at rest. It has to be demonstrated that Israel has no intention, now or in the future, of “breaking forth” and steam-rolling over the Arab-Muslim lands. The settlements in the West Bank and Gaza constitute “breaking forth”. Granted, “breaking forth” in very, very slow motion, but “breaking forth” nonetheless.

Okay. Back to Islam.

In my view, the news is not all bad when it comes to Islam, although its negative aspects can’t—and *shouldn’t*—be overlooked, most particularly the seemingly insurmountable problem of the exporting of Wahabite Islam into the modern, secular world. Robert Fulford had an interesting column for 4 May (“An Imam dares to say what Islam should be”) with some observations from Sheikh Abdul Hadi Palazzi, an imam who serves as secretary general of the Italian Muslim Association in Rome:

*Islamic countries were not always oppressive. In fact, Islam came early to the idea of freedom, earlier than Christianity. Three centuries ago, many Jews considered Islamic societies safe havens. Bernard Lewis, the great historian, wrote recently that Islamic countries in the Middle Ages “achieved a freedom of thought and expression that led persecuted Jews and even dissident Christians to flee Christendom for refuge in Islam.”*

*The world judges Israel harshly, he says, and the world is dead wrong: “The right of self-defence is permitted to every country in the world except Israel.” He thinks Israel deserves to exist, that the Koran mandates Jewish control of Jerusalem (so long as Islamic holy sites are respected), that peace will not come until the PLO is dismantled (“supporting the PLO is supporting massacres”), and that Yasser Arafat is a gangster. Why, Sheikh Palazzi asks, was the world not delighted when the Israelis*

*pinned him down in his headquarters? In the Sheikh's view, people should have said: "Thank God Arafat is imprisoned. Now let us try him for 40 years of terrorism."*

*With the help of the British Empire, Ibn Saud rebuilt his ancestral domain and named it Saudi Arabia, with Wahhabism as its way of religious life. As Sheikh Palazzi has put it, "The Wahhabis first conquered the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, transforming these two sanctuaries into places for propagating a primitive and literalist cult to Muslims coming from every part of the world."*

*For reasons Sheikh Palazzi cannot fathom, the world has decided not to think much about the fact that the Sept. 11 terrorists were mostly Saudis. In his view, "It is as if people said Japan had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor. Imagine how the Saudi princes feel. They say to themselves, 'We kill thousands of Americans and now they welcome us as men of peace.'*

*"Many of us are now ready to admit that hostility for Israel has been a great mistake, perhaps the worst mistake Muslims have made in the last 50 years."*

Amir Taheri is another Muslim, an Iranian author and journalist and editor of the Paris-based *Politique Internationale*, who wrestles publicly with many of the conflicts within Islam and within the Arab world:

*The oil bonanza of the 1980s helped create a middle class that promptly dispatched its children to study in American schools and universities. Saudis with some American education now number almost 200,000 in a native population of less than 15 million.*

*Many of the 126 Saudi intellectuals who issued a virulent anti-U.S. petition recently are either American-educated and/or have children attending U.S. schools. "We are like a touring theatrical troupe," says a Saudi female writer. "Half of the year we are acting as pure Arabs, veil and all, in our country. The other half we put on Western clothes and act the normal part in Europe or America."*

This last excerpt is perhaps more self-revelatory than the Saudi female writer intended (I'm assuming that she is one of the 126 Saudi intellectuals cited). Note particularly her characterization of putting on the veil as "acting as pure Arabs" as contrasted with putting on Western clothes to "act the *normal* part in Europe or America" (italics mine). Even as a dissident, as an anti-American, she recognizes that Western dress is more *normal* than Arab attire. Her studious (dare I say it?) secular left-liberal, quasi-socialist female nature still tilts towards the West once she has been exposed to it, despite her best efforts to portray the scrupulous (and, I would maintain, artificial) even-handedness that is the hallmark of left-liberal, quasi-socialism. This exposure to the West, through television, movies, the internet, and all other forms of popular culture, in my view, is the Cultural Trojan Horse which proves the undoing of all other cultures it has come into contact with. In fact, in my view, Islam is only the latest worldwide recipient/victim of this Trojan Horse effect. The last one was communism, which effectively ceased to exist once it had contracted the virus. Before that it was Europe. Europe hated it. The communists hated it. The Muslims hate it. Doesn't matter if you hate it. Once you've got it, you are effectively done for. You can sign all the virulent anti-American petitions you want, you will still scramble to see the latest American film, to buy the latest American pop culture junk. And if you won't, your kids will, just to piss you off. And if *your* kids won't the odds are that they will be the only "weirdo's" among their peers who won't. I have found that Western feminist outrage at the *burqa* quickly subsides when you ask what they would suggest Orthodox Muslim women should wear instead. Mini-skirts? Guess jeans? Thongs? In an earlier piece ("Solutions to Islam's crisis lies within") Mr. Taheri, to me, touches on the effects of this Trojan Horse juggernaut with a litany of woeful statistics about the Muslim world: while Muslims account for almost a quarter of mankind, their share of the global wealth is less than 6%. Nearly two-thirds of the world's poorest, those who live on under \$2 a day, are Muslim, while not a single Muslim country figures among the world's 30 richest nations. Of the 5,000 world-class brand products, not one is produced in a Muslim country. Iran's President Khatami laments the brain drain that is forcing 1.2 million highly educated Muslims to immigrate to Europe, North America and other "Christian" lands such as Australia and New Zealand each year. (Again, it is only a Muslim who could describe

Australia and New Zealand as “Christian” countries and keep a straight face: something I don’t imagine any Aussie or New Zealander could manage without sneering)

What is interesting to me is the extent to which this “frames the debate in the aggressor’s terms” (to borrow a phrase from earlier in this essay). All of these statistics center on materialism as the be-all and end-all or, at the very least, as a central consideration in measuring success and failure. It’s hard for me to picture that, if the Prophet Muhammad were alive today, he would find any of these statistics troubling. Nor are there any suras in the Koran to support the view that one of our primary purposes in passing our brief, dream-like existence in this vale of tears which the Koran calls “the farmland of the hereafter” is to come up with a world-class brand product or to find away to suck up more than 6% of the world’s wealth. In fact, the Koran is at great pains to remind us *repeatedly* that our wealth and our children are a trial for us, a temptation that can seduce the unwary away from the path of God.

*...many of the intellectuals who have joined the “dirty linen” exercise, end their discourse with the assertion that “we have not been good Muslims.” Their solution is to apply “true Islam.” Each, of course, has his own definition of what a “good Muslim” is and what “true Islam” looks like. Some have come out with citations from the Holy Book and, by doing so, have defined themselves rather than the problems discussed.*

*The result is a new form of obfuscation designed to theologize political problems and, thus, avoid the core issue that is the absence of democracy and the rule of law in most Muslim countries.*

*Muslims need the exact opposite method of dealing with their problems: They need to de-theologize their politics and recognize the concept of the political as an independent category.*

That is, the separation of church and state. I think this is inescapable if you consider material prosperity to be a vital component of a successful society, a first priority. I think what escapes Mr. Taheri is that material prosperity has never been a centerpiece of Muslim life. From a Muslim standpoint, the fact that most of the world’s Muslim population lives in a state of poverty is, inherently, a good thing. Fewer temptations, less corruption, individually and collectively. Arguably, the despotic, wealth-encrusted dictators in their palaces, from a Muslim standpoint, are “taking one for the team”. Unlike the corrupted “Christian” countries, where materialism and decadence (in Orthodox Muslim terms) exist in virtually every household as a society-wide infection that spares so few and that is resisted by only the merest handful of citizens, in the Muslim lands, it is materialism, decadence and corruption which are confined to the merest handful of citizens, the dictator, his cronies, and their families. There are extremes involved, of course. Mr. Taheri asks why it is that Algeria—which has energy export revenues of \$20 billion a year—can’t provide drinking water for its capital. The issue, it seems to me, is one of how far—and for what reason—a Muslim nation will allow technical innovation, materialism and corruption to intrude within it. On an individual basis, everyone is confronted with these compound dilemmas (whether they acknowledge it or not). Anyone who owns a computer has to decide if he or she is going to get hooked up to the internet, if they are going to allow the internet access to their private residence. If yes, they then confront the question of how much of their time they are going to allow the internet to occupy. As with any other potent societal force it can come as a complete surprise that an “internet addiction” does not remain within the confines one intends. The decision is made to sit down for an hour and four hours go by without any awareness on the part of the decision-maker. When the societal force in question is alcohol, that sort of “loss of control” is called (rightly, in my view) alcoholism.

[For men, internet access also implies granting porno sites access to your residence, which implies the question of whether you will or won’t allow yourself to “visit” them, how often you’ll allow yourself to “visit” them, which ones you will allow yourself to “visit,” how much money you’ll allow yourself to spend on them. If you intend most of the time *not* to “visit” porno sites (but do), intend to “visit” only softcore sites (but “visit” hardcore sites, s&m sites, kiddie porn sites, bestiality and other perversion sites), intend to limit your visits to an hour (but often put in three hours or more), intend to spend only a few dollars (and end up spending hundreds) to me, again, this is analogous to alcoholism. In terms of porno sites being a potent societal force—the billions upon billions of dollars of revenue which they generate is proof of that—I think it far more accurate to say that the porno sites “visit” men, not the other way around. And those porno sites visit you *only* at your invitation].

In my own life, I chose to get rid of my television, my CD player and my CD’s, my tape deck, my tuner, my VCR and my videotapes. In my own view, relative to myself, I saw them as being in the “alcohol and gambling” category as described in the Koran. They had their benefits, which I could

happily enumerate and use to rationalize hanging onto them and they had their drawbacks which, to me, inescapably outweighed their benefits. I could have hung onto all of them. I also could have bought a DVD player and 800 DVD's, a computer, a modem and gotten hooked up to the Internet to add to the pile of techno-crap I already had. I could also have started smoking again. I could also have gone back to hitting the bars four or five nights out of the week instead of just on Friday. Instead, I chose to go the other way, getting things out of my life instead of trying to find more things to graft onto it.

I never once considered getting rid of my toilet, however. Nor did I consider for a moment living without electricity.

In a nutshell, I think this is the problem which is facing the Muslim nations. In one of the earliest dispatches "on the ground" from Kandahar, a reporter outlined the problems involved in finding Internet access to file his reports and described being led by one of the natives down various alleyways and up and down stairways until they came to a large room filled with computer terminals, a completely underground, completely illicit operation—reportedly the *only* place in Afghanistan with access to the Internet from which he could e-mail his report to his newspaper. According to his article, before each computer terminal sat an Afghani in approved Muslim garb, with an untrimmed beard as required by the Taliban's interpretation of *shariat* law, scrolling through porno sites.

Is it possible to pick and choose? Can a Muslim country use its oil wealth to develop a reliable source of electrical power for its populace, provide its populace with indoor plumbing, clean hot and cold running water, modern sanitation facilities, good roads, modest housing and a flourishing marketplace for fresh produce at affordable prices? And then *stop* there? Or do you really, really have to have Julia Roberts, AC/DC, *Star Wars*, 'n' Sync, Ally McBeal, 'Slutty Co-Eds Strip 4 U' and all the rest of it along for the ride?

As I said earlier in this series, I think democracy is favoured by God over theocracy for the exact reason that it represents the institutionalizing of "free will" as a centerpiece of human existence. The whole point of democracy is to guarantee that everyone gets to choose exactly what they want to do, what they want to think, how they want to live, what they will allow themselves to do and what they won't allow themselves to do—whether that's drinking too much, eating too much, watching fifty uninterrupted hours of *The Beverly Hillbillies* on a cable channel over a holiday weekend or losing their children's trust funds playing blackjack in Vegas. For many (if not most) this also involves choosing which laws they will allow themselves to break—by smoking marijuana, drinking and driving, cheating on their taxes, using prostitutes. The word of the angel spoken to the shepherds in Luke's Gospel, in announcing Jesus' birth (you remember, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*?), "Peace on earth, good will to all men." This, to me, is God's declaration of intent to us both individually, as human beings, and collectively, as society. We all have *free* will, we are all *free* to make our choices. What God wishes for us is that we make of our *free* will, *good* will. That we make not only *free* choices, but *good* choices. By the grace of God, I am free to choose to drink a 26er of vodka tonight. Drinking it constitutes an act of *free* will. *Not* drinking it constitutes an act of *good* will. The failing that I see in Islam is that—in those countries which *impose shariat* law on the entire population, that vital component of choice is removed. To me, it is a central consideration of the on-going debate between good (God's viewpoint) and evil (God's adversary's viewpoint) that the former holds that human beings are "all or mostly good" and the latter holds that human beings are "all or mostly evil". In a real sense, those societies which impose the strictest rules on their citizenry, and who use the most Draconian methods to enforce those rules (totalitarian governments, both fascistic and communist, Wahabite Muslim societies) in a very real sense, are arguing the "evil" side of the debate, not just "playing" but literally *being* devil's advocate. It is a centerpiece of the jurisprudence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as an example, that religious police are a necessity and that they need to be given a free hand in policing the religious habits of the populace—literally dragging people out of their homes and to the mosques for the mandated *salat*, prayers. Like God's adversary, they believe that without strict rules and without the strict enforcement of those strict rules men will choose to do evil every time. God's view (I believe) is exactly the opposite. Very few rules, very few guidelines. "Thou shalt not kill," "thou shalt not steal." Even in the Koran, in those verses which address gambling and alcohol, the revelation is limited to "they have benefits and they have drawbacks. The drawbacks outweigh the benefits." I don't think God intends for gambling and alcohol to be illegal. In fact, I think alcohol exists for the exact reason that it represents so much that we don't understand about ourselves. If I did buy that 26er of vodka and took it home and just popped it open and chugged it down. No mix, no glass, no ice cubes. Just glug glug glug. I'd get alcohol poisoning. The odds are

that I would die. That's just one bottle. There are a dozen liquor stores in this town. Each one with hundreds and hundreds of bottles of pure or virtually pure alcohol. All of it perfectly legal. I can walk into any one of them any minute of any day and buy enough alcohol to kill myself. And no one would bat an eye. I've known two guys who—literally—drank themselves to death. Not figuratively, not metaphorically. *Literally*. If you live in a society where you are allowed to do that—as everyone reading this does—then you know something about yourself that a person in a Wahabite Muslim society doesn't know about him or herself. That is: "I wouldn't do that. I'm not that stupid." You don't have to threaten me with a flogging, I know, alcohol is dangerous stuff. But, then, many of us overdo it from time to time—and that gives us a self-knowledge that you don't have in a Wahabite Muslim society: alcohol is dangerous at many different levels and in many different ways. I don't know those levels and ways as well as I thought I did. I don't know myself as well as I thought I did. I can intend *good* will (I'll just have a couple of beers) and end up succumbing to *bad* will (what do you mean, "Last call"?). The road to hell is actually paved with *bad* intentions that started out as *good* intentions and then were changed through the conscious decisions, the conscious exercise of free-will decisions, by each individual. I believe God's view is that *overall* we are getting better. The average human being in the 21st century is a better human being than the average human being in, say, the 12th century. Not just in terms of health, nutrition, income and living standards but in the debate between good and evil, where those are largely irrelevant (there are a lot of healthy, well-fed, rich, evil people living in mansions). Contrast the reaction to Pearl Harbour—the unconscionable, unlawful, but at the time almost *universally approved* of internment of Japanese-American citizens—with the reaction to the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—the internment of those Arabs and Arab-American citizens linked to radical Islamic terrorist groups, an infinitesimal fraction of the Arab population and the Arab-American population. Painstaking efforts made to maintain the safety and security of the majority while guaranteeing the inalienable rights of *virtually* every individual. God has every confidence in us. We make mistakes, sure. We're human. The indiscriminate internment of Japanese-Americans was evil, but it was an evil which was an honest mistake. We learned. When the time came, the mistake was not repeated. This, I think, is the answer to the plaintive cry of the agnostic, the atheist and the disappointed deist: "if God is good, how can he allow so much evil to exist?" God *is* good. If He were to interfere *monumentally* in human affairs—sending a legion of Angels, as an example, to steamroll the Nazis as they swept into Poland in September of 1939—he would be conceding his adversary's point: human beings need outside help because they are *intrinsically* evil, if God doesn't interfere they will destroy everyone and everything around them, and ultimately themselves. There *was* a lot of evil unleashed upon the European continent from 1939 to 1945. In human terms, an *unimaginable* level of human suffering: in London during the Blitz, in Stalingrad during the seige, during the fire-bombing of Dresden, in the death camps, on the Bataan Death March, in Hiroshima and in Nagasaki. All of it unleashed as a consequence of individual human choices, the exercise of free will by Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, Hermann Goering, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Irwin Rommel, Eisenhower, Adolf Eichman, Oppenheimer, Einstein, Mussolini. God, in his omniscience, knew exactly what role each of those individuals was *likely* to play and knew the likelihood of the consequences of each decision which led to each subsequent decision. God Knew that the Physics problems Albert Einstein was whittling away at in the 1920s would *in all probability* lead to the bombing of a major Japanese city in the 1940s. But He also knew that—despite the monstrous toll in human suffering that would take place as a result of all those cumulative human choices—that the Second World War would only be, roughly, six years long (four years in American dollars. Nyuck nyuck nyuck). Which compares quite favourably with the *Hundred Years* War fought between England and France from 1337 to 1453. We make mistakes. We are human. We are not God. But we learn, and we improve. Six years of war is better than a hundred years of war. The invention of the atomic bomb and its use against the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was, I believe, a critical moment in the debate between good and evil, the ongoing debate between God and his adversary. An even more critical moment came when the Soviet Union successfully tested its own thermonuclear device in 1953. At that point, with the Promethean Myth writ large in crimson letters, from the standpoint of God's adversary, it was inevitable that God would have to interfere in human affairs. If He doesn't they will blow each other to bits. The appropriateness of the acronym MAD applies here: Mutually Assured Destruction, the central fact of life on planet earth from 1953 to 1989. Almost forty years. And yet God won his point with the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962. Right to the very brink of thermonuclear war and STILL, still no interference from God. And the Soviet ships turned around. Even a wholly Godless State

backed down from the precipice of evil. God won his point. Human beings are not MAD and we are not evil. We are good. God knows. God made us that way. We make mistakes. We're human. But we learn from those mistakes. And, overall, we're getting better all the time. Americans (as an example) can have a hundred, five hundred, a thousand, two thousand, five thousand missiles with thermonuclear warheads pointed at their most hated adversary. And they can't push the button. Why? Because they're good. Nothing, I don't believe, would ever again compel the only nation to launch a nuclear strike in anger to repeat that action. Why? Because they're good. Nothing would ever again compel them to intern an entire population based solely on race. Why? Because they're good. This is God's thesis, I believe. The only way to prove its veracity is for God to not interfere, to send prophets and messengers delivering the same basic message—and then to stop sending them and to allow all the ensuing generations from 632 A.D. to Judgement Day to work everything out, working to understand free will, working to enshrine it in the rule of law, to progressively limit those actions which can be taken by any individual or by the state *against* any other individual or group's expression of free will and, by painful progressions of three-steps-forward-two-steps-back—progress that in some centuries can be measured in inches and in some decades can be measured in miles—to allow us all to make our own free will choices and to—individually and collectively—make *good will* choices. To make our own mistakes, individually and collectively, to suffer the consequences of those mistakes, to pick ourselves up in the aftermath of our individual and collective mistakes, to dust ourselves off and to, individually and collectively, continue our forward march of progress.

It seems to me that what unites the great democracies (those “nations formerly known as Christendom”) is a fundamental belief in using the instruments of government and society to protect by law and—if necessary—by force of arms the expression of free will choices. In any of the great democracies, any Muslim who wants to pretend that he is living in Medina in the seventh century is free to do so. Up to a point. If he catches his wife cheating on him, he can't, with impunity, stone her to death—nor can he have his neighbour publicly whipped for drinking a beer or buying a lottery ticket. The great democracies are historically tolerant with those things taking place in a Muslim country. For a country's population to accept some oil sheik's interpretation and imposition upon them of his own interpretation of *shariat* law (and there are as many interpretations of *shariat* law as there are Muslim states) is both their individual and collective free-will choice. It is only when Wahabism or any of its variants begin to spread *outside* of a Muslim country and *within* a great democracies—violating the free-will choices of others by flying them into the side of the World Trade Centre or blowing babies into so much ground beef because their mother picked the wrong outdoor market in the Jaffa Road to do some window-shopping—that force must needs be met with force. For force to sustain itself to the degree necessary for the great democracies to prevail requires, I believe, an unshakeable conviction that it is right to defend democracy against assaults upon it, an unshakeable conviction that the difference between 11 September and the latest suicide bombing in the “disputed territories” is one of degree only and (the central consideration) an unshakeable conviction that—while “might” does not necessarily “make right,” “might” is not, by implicit definition, “wrong” (the bedrock belief of those whose reaction to a crisis is to stand there with their mouths agape and tears streaming down their cheeks). Eradicating fascism was a very good idea and was accomplished in no small part through the exertion of superior “might”. Those forms of Wahabism which are not content to confine themselves to advocacy by all ancient and modern forms of communication but which seek to kill innocent people in the *name* of Wahabism, it seems to me, are well worth eradicating. Whether the great democracies are capable of maintaining that degree of conviction necessary for the arduous task of ridding the world of terrorist Wahabism (or whether a quorum of their citizens is even capable of using a term like “great democracy” without getting a left-liberal, quasi-socialist sneer on their faces) will be the subject of the concluding instalment of “Islam, My Islam”.

essay

## Islam, My Islam

*Before beginning this final instalment of “Islam, My Islam,” there are a couple of corrections and then a few overall observations that I’d like to make:*

*First, God is not mentioned in the Constitution of the United States of America. He is mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. So, the document which declares the independence of the United States from the British crown acknowledges the sovereignty of God, but the document which establishes the United States as a nation doesn’t acknowledge the sovereignty of God. By contrast, the Canadian constitution—which was repatriated from Britain in 1982—maintains the sovereignty of the British crown in Canada, but also acknowledges God’s sovereignty over...whatever it is we’re supposed to be now...Her Majesty’s Once and Future Dominion and/or Quasi-Independent, Quasi-Nation-State of Canada? Something like that. As convoluted as the latter state of existence may appear, I still, personally, prefer living in a country whose foundational document acknowledges God’s sovereignty believing (as I do) that the “first pillar of Islam” applies just as much—if not more—to nations as it does to individuals.*

*Secondly, it turns out that Turkey is not a member of the European Union. Turkey is a member of NATO and has applied for membership in the European Union. You might remember in a previous instalment that I had questioned whether the European Union was consulting with Turkey on the manner in which that country had successfully managed the “separation of mosque and state”—the only Middle Eastern Muslim state to have done so—under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Turkey’s president from 1923 to 1938 who took the remains of the Ottoman empire—the remains of the caliphate which began with Abu Bakr in 632—and formed it into a modern, secular state). It turns out that the opposite may be the case: evidently, one of the conditions which the EU is demanding as a precondition for Turkey’s admission is a relaxation of Turkey’s laws limiting free speech. If this refers to Turkey’s success in suppressing religious groups from taking a politically active role in the government and its disestablishment of Islam as the state religion, it would probably go a long way towards explaining how, in 1997, there was a brief experiment with Islamist leadership in Turkey which was “eased out” in a behind-the-scenes “soft coup” perpetrated by the army. If membership in the EU is viewed by a majority of Turks as a big enough international “carrot” (and—as inexplicable as it may be to me—it does seem that the nations of the continent do view membership in the EU as a very big “carrot,” indeed) it’s not hard to imagine popular Turkish sentiment leaning towards the accommodation of a Brussels-style political “homogenization”—absolute freedom of expression and absolute freedom of religion—with the resulting (practically guaranteed, I think) transformation of Turkey from a secular, modern state into a Muslim/EU dictatorship. The EU is also demanding that the Kurdish language be used in education and broadcasting and is insisting on the abolition of the death penalty—a move that, reportedly, may save the life of Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed Kurdish separatist leader. The Kurds, of course, are largely nomadic Muslims inhabiting much of north-eastern Iraq, north-western Iran and south-eastern Turkey. Why the great democracies of Europe are hell-bent on such a course is a great mystery to me, unless they have fallen prey to the simplistic view that the Kurds—having been the victims of Saddam Hussein’s chemical weapons in the Kurdish territories of Iraq—are somehow (under the terms of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”) potential allies of the Western Democracies. Whatever else largely nomadic Muslims might be, describing them as potential allies of Western Democracies is a bit of a stretch, to say the least, in my view. Where no firmly entrenched modern, secular governmental structure exists, certainly: one selects the least offensive of a bad lot (as was the case in Afghanistan with the Northern Alliance). But, to “switch horses in mid-stream,” advancing the cause of tribal Muslims at the expense of or in tandem with an entrenched modern, secular structure (in the name, presumably, of misguided left-liberal, quasi-socialist “even-handedness”) seems to me a recipe for disaster. As the National Post editorialized about the likely net effect of any sort of Islamist government coming to power in Ankara (“Why Turkey matters” 11 July) “Such a transformation would be nothing less than a catastrophe for the Western world. On the political front, the development of the Muslim world would be set back by decades—for the minority of Muslim scholars who argue for the separation of mosque and state would have lost their guiding star. The result would be a military disaster, too: The alliance between Israel and Turkey, two of the region’s military superpowers, is a stabilizing influence in the Middle East. Should an Islamist government in Ankara renounce Turkey’s alliance with Israel, all bets might be off.” As it is, the present Turkish government under Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit seems tailor-made for the EU. The improbable, pan-political-spectrum coalition of Ecevit’s own Democratic Left Party, the centre-right Motherland party and the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) is now fragmenting in the aftermath of a series of mysterious ailments which have left the Prime Minister unable to work and*

which cause him to slur his speech. Seeking to alleviate concerns about his health, Ecevit—for the first time in two months—appeared before the media in early July. The move backfired when he, evidently, found it difficult to string together an intelligible sentence.

As I say, he seems tailor-made for the EU.

The leader of the far-right MHP ventured the opinion that new elections are necessary because “political uncertainty” is damaging the economy (the Turkish lira has lost 20% of its value and interest rates have climbed by 15% since Ecevit’s illness). Mr. Ecevit and (get this) his wife, Rashan who is a co-founder of the Democratic Left Party accused the Deputy Prime Minister of not doing enough to support his embattled chief. Which has led to the resignation of the Deputy PM, four other ministers and 27 other Democratic Left Party members. If 33 more members resign, the government will collapse and polls indicate the biggest winner may be the moderate Islamist party, Justice and Development.

[I’m having trouble staying ahead of events, here. This morning’s news (17 July) brings word that Ecevit has bowed to the inevitable and has called for elections in November, eighteen months earlier than is required by law. A paragraph regarding EU conditions for Turkey’s proposed membership makes no mention of “free speech” “issues”. Ecevit met yesterday with American Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. No word on how intelligible Mr. Ecevit’s sentences were.]

So, unfortunately (in my view) no, there appears to be no interest in how Turkey managed to accommodate Islam and to maintain a modern, secular state. The active participation of the army in “undoing” election results will, of course, be severely problematical from a left-liberal standpoint. But then, Islamist governments are also severely problematical from a left-liberal standpoint, aren’t they? Small wonder that our age is characterized by what I would describe as “left-liberal paralysis”. My own view is that this could represent a promising development in Turkey depending on how moderate the Justice and Development party actually proves to be. If the moderate Justice and Development party proves itself to be nothing more “moderate” than another tiresome variation on Wahabite Islam—like the Taliban’s Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (you know: the kinder, gentler stoning of adulterers, the humane amputation of the hands of thieves and the compassionate, caring flagellation of those caught consuming alcohol)—that is, if the party proves itself to be just another “back-to-the-seventh-century” Wahabite Islamist sect then the EU and the Middle East will have bought itself a peck of trouble by blindly forcing Turkey to guarantee the right of free speech to religious groups which have previously been held in check only through political and military force. And, quite possibly, the EU may yet, as a result, “turn” the only secular Muslim country from a guiding star for those who favour the separation of mosque and state into a guiding star for those Muslims unshakeable in their faith that Islam is still capable of over-turning the “rule of the infidel,” even in those countries where Islam has, hitherto, been suppressed as a political force—and that such an over-turning often takes place (inshallah!) with the unwitting assistance of the infidels themselves! Quite a lesson for Turkey’s Muslims on their way to full participation in the governing councils of the EU—all of whose member nations boast sizeable Muslim populations of their own. I am hopeful, however, that the Wahabite domination of Islam is on the wane and it would surprise me if Turkey—which has had such a long history of steering a torturous course through the troubled waters of dealing equitably with Islam while avoiding capitulation to those excesses to which Islam is, self-evidently, inclined—manifests anything remotely resembling the Islamic status quo. If there is a moderate form of Islam in the offing, it seems to me more likely than not that one of the cradles into which it is likely to be born will be in Turkey.

Is there a more moderate form of Islam in the offing? I think there is, although most of the evidence at this point is anecdotal. I think we have come through a time period in which Islam showed signs of posing greater long-term danger to the West than it does today. I’m thinking of the anti-nationalism of Mawlana Mawdudi in Pakistan, Sayyid Qutb in Egypt and Khomeini in Iran, all of whom developed wide followings for their anti-nationalist views (fortunately, only within their own nations) and all of whom favoured the emergence of a monolithic, steam-rolling Nation of Islam along Wahabite lines which would supersede Pakistan, Egypt and Iran and all forms of geopolitical loyalty—in short all three endeavoured to seize the brass ring of the Mantle of the Prophet. In retrospect, I think it can be seen as a 60’s phenomenon—very much a Muslim reaction to the lunatic excesses of the Baby Boom generation in the West (which was widely seen in the Muslim world as jahiliyya, an Arabic term for the age of total barbarism which preceded Islam. Looking at the 60’s through Muslim eyes, I can see their point).

*And I think it is safe to say that the proven ability of television (despite television's inherently fraudulent nature) to transform any culture—in spite of each culture's best efforts to resist change—should never be underestimated. Feminism, as an example, would not have been possible without the televised portrayal of women characters—whose dialogue was almost exclusively written by men—as more sensible, intelligent and competent than women actually are. Leading up to 1970, television trained women to think of themselves in that way and trained men to think of women that way. The fact that women control virtually all discretionary household spending in North America continues to feed the fraudulent, but successful, syndrome. A television show which flatters women compels them to spend their husbands' (and, less importantly, their own) discretionary income on the products it advertises. The more overt and shameless the flattery (Oprah Winfrey leaps to mind) the greater the influence on discretionary household spending. This is quickly becoming the case in many Muslim countries as well. Evidently the most-watched television program in Egypt during the last holy month of Ramadan was a mini-series called The Family of Hag Metwalli, about a man with four wives. Though permitted by Islam, polygamy is frowned upon in many segments of Egyptian society. Assuming that The Family of Hag Metwalli is comparable to North American mini-series, that is, that it was a histrionic commercial fiction with just enough of a basis in reality to pass itself off as "informative," containing just enough salacious garbage to attract female interest while remaining insufficiently explicit to excite female revulsion (in other words, inherently fraudulent but sufficiently flattering to women and sufficiently indulgent of their overweening interest in "dirt"—gossip—as to compel those who control most discretionary spending to watch it avidly and then, in Pavlovian fashion, to spend freely on the products and services it advertised) it will, in my view, have had a greater effect than the immediate commercial interests which underlie all television. During commercial interruptions (and, next day, over the Egyptian equivalent of the water-cooler), viewpoints on polygamy will have been expressed by those who, prior to that, hadn't so much as considered polygamy, even in the abstract. I think it safe to say that Egyptian viewpoints on polygamy will have changed more dramatically in the period of time that the mini-series aired than in the previous umpty-ump centuries. Just as I believe that Alex Haley's Roots mini-series probably had more of an effect on attitudes towards blacks in North America than all of the efforts of the NAACP, the U.S. Congress, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X rolled into one. The information about The Family of Hag Metwalli was contained in an Agence France-Presse article headlined "Egyptian jailed for having one wife too many":*

A wealthy Egyptian businessman was sentenced to seven years of hard labour in prison yesterday for having five wives, exceeding the Muslim legal limit of four, and having entered into brief marriages with 29 minors. Sayed Ragab al-Sawarki, 52, was found guilty of entering "brief unions" with 29 girls under the age of 15 by having their birth dates falsified on official documents... Ahmed Amin Salim and Sayyed Ismail Madkur, bureaucrats whose job is to draw up marriage records, were each sentenced to two years of hard labour for helping Sawarki forge documents. A woman and her two brothers were each sentenced to three years in prison for falsifying birth certificates of the girls who were to marry Sawarki... He would stay married to them for a matter of hours or days before divorcing them and paying them sums of money, the police said.

*This has a definite basis in Islamic reality, shariat law, governing marriage. A marriage is contracted with an agreed-upon dowry bestowed upon the wife (it becomes her money, not her father's or her family's as is the case in many cultures and tribes). Divorce is a matter of the husband just saying, that's it, we're divorced. If the divorce takes place after consummation of the marriage, the wife retains her dowry. If the engagement is broken, the wife returns a percentage of the dowry. What is theologically interesting about the above situation is the idea of conforming to the letter of Muslim law regarding marriage, while, clearly indulging in acts of prostitution (and child prostitution at that). But, leaving aside the ages of al-Sawarki's "brief union" "wives"—let's say that they were all nineteen or twenty—I'd be curious as to how that plays out under the letter of Muslim law. What would an imam on the basis of "sacred scriptures and prophetic traditions" have to say about a series of "brief union" marriages where every agreed-upon penny (agreed upon by the wife's family) of the "dowry" was paid? How common an occurrence is that in Islam? How great is the lack of curiosity about a pillar of the Muslim community who uses his wealth and his prominence to indulge in (let us call a spade a spade) prostitution while claiming complete Islamic legitimacy—so long as he doesn't have more than four "brief union" "wives" at one time?*

*But my point is actually tangential to that: the story of Sayed Ragab al-Sawarki would never be considered for a mini-series even though it seems (at least to me) of more monumental theological and societal consequence, representing a potentially greater centre of societal corruption. Why? Because although it has great potential as an “informative” subject, as a representative anecdote which could be used to address a (society-wide?) “letter of the law” potential for corruption, it crosses the female boundary between salacious garbage—gossip—into areas which excite genuine female disgust and revulsion. The potential female viewer (and women are always—except for professional sports—television’s target audience) would find no point of identification in al-Sawarki’s story. No woman would want to be one of his long-term wives and no woman would want to be one of his “brief union” wives. As for identifying with the woman who helped falsify the birth records of one of her daughters, well, of course not. She is disowned from the female ranks. There is no female curiosity about her, what would have led her to make the decision, what she told her underage daughter as she falsified her birth records in preparation for her “marriage”. All these female “roles” are perceived by women to be beyond the female pale (as is anything which women find unflattering to their gender). Whereas in the case of the fictional Hag Metwalli, there is great potential for identification. In fact, I’d be willing to bet that the central appeal of the mini-series for women was, “Which wife did I identify with?” The headstrong, independent one (I will bet dollars to donuts that there was a headstrong, independent one), the caring, nurturing arbitrator? Larger interests can be introduced to women through television—but only tangentially. They pay attention to that which flatters them disproportionately and which titillates them within acceptable female parameters. I never saw Roots, but I would be terribly surprised if it did not prominently feature a headstrong, independent female character and I would be equally surprised if she (whoever she was) had been either that prominent, that headstrong or that independent in Alex Haley’s book—if she had even existed at all. So, while television offers great potential for sweeping societal change, it does have its limits: primarily, in my view, the female requirement that televised entertainment must flatter women and it must stay within the boundaries of what women will accept in the way of salacious garbage and fictional gossip. Television will do its bit in moving Muslim populations in the direction of left-liberal, quasi-socialist feminism but, in my view, its progress will be limited by what is (presumably) a wider spectrum of subjects and themes that would excite disgust and revulsion within Muslim women and which are, by now, mother’s milk to the degraded sensibilities of left-liberal, quasi-socialist secular Western feminists. The standards of Muslim women have to first be extensively eroded within their own collectivist boundaries of what constitutes (first) acceptable attitudes and (second) acceptable behaviour in fictional television characters before they will adopt those attitudes and behaviours—in the way that women had to, first, share the attitudes of Alice Kramden on The Honeymooners (talking back to her husband, ignoring his threats, while remaining, in the collectivist female view, a good person) before collectively adopting her behaviour (which began a process which led, ultimately, to the collectivist female adoption of, first, the attitudes and then the behaviours of Roseanne Barr on Roseanne)(pride in ignorance, pride in sloth, talking back to everyone—in the collectivist female view, “not taking any s—t,”—while remaining, in the collectivist female view, a good person). It will be a much lengthier process for television to turn Muslim women into Alice Kramden and—with a sufficient number of Western Roseanne Barr-types (that is, women whose attitudes and behaviours largely excite a disgust and revulsion in Muslim women comparable to the disgust and revulsion which Sayed Ragab al-Sawarki’s child prostitution “marriages” excites within all women) existing at the periphery of the reality which Muslim women inhabit and accept (and, as is always the case with Roseanne Barr types, endlessly endeavouring to hurl themselves from any societal periphery in which they find themselves to whatever position they perceive as a societal “front and centre”)(there to exhibit loudly and to the exclusion of all other voices their pride in their own ignorance, their pride in their own sloth and their pride in “not taking any s—t”)—I’m not sure there exists sufficient time (even if that turns out to be ten thousand years) before Judgement Day to turn Muslim women into Roseanne Barr.*

*[The first glimmerings of Western-style feminism—the demand for full and equal participation in societal decision-making by a number of female Saudi intellectuals—was greeted by the Saudi royal family with the suggestion that any assistance the women of Saudi Arabia could provide in rolling back the astronomical dowries being demanded by potential wives—which has rendered marriage in Saudi Arabia a luxury affordable only by the very wealthiest men and which has brought about an exponential rise in the population of “old maids”—would be most welcome and would be considered a most appropriate place to begin active female participation in the areas of Saudi social engineering.*

*This, evidently, was not what the women had in mind and appears, for the time being, to have brought an end female demands to become active participants in the restructuring of Saudi society.]*

*The events of 11 September have turned a spotlight on Islam that will not be turned away anytime soon, a spotlight that demands answers, coherent answers, answers which are grounded in reality and which are demonstrably the product of sequential reasoning. It is insufficient to describe Islam as a religion of peace while acknowledging that laws based on its sacred text, the Koran, demand the stoning of adulterers, the amputation of a thief's hands and the flagellation of those who drink alcohol. Those Muslims who have been fully assimilated within the West but who still retain a primary loyalty to their faith are experiencing, individually, the wrenching schism that usually takes place only within communities, nations and churches. Their loyalties are inescapably divided in a way which would have been inconceivable to them prior to 11 September. How can Muslims argue that Islam is misunderstood when the evidence indicates that, actually, Islam is understood only too well by those who have been raised to think for themselves and to test their beliefs in the crucible of contrary viewpoints? In the fall of last year, most Muslim writings and most Muslim views quoted in the newspapers and magazines consisted of simplistic recitations of Islamic cant along the lines of "You can't understand Islam in Western terms." Well, yes you can. You can understand anything in Western terms. Western terms have been evolving since the Greeks in such a way that Western terms arguably constitute the best means of understanding any subject and testing that subject to see if it has a solid foundation of rational thought behind it or if it is pure emotionalism, quackery or mumbo-jumbo. Up until 11 September, Islam had gotten pretty much the same "free ride" in our society as feminism. And, in my view, there is no shortage of emotionalism, quackery or mumbo-jumbo to be found in the Koran, just as there is no shortage of those three to be found in the Torah, in the Books of the Prophets, in the Gospels and in the Canonical Christian commentaries. I would defend and uphold the five pillars of Islam in any forum and under any conditions. If you want me to defend a specific Koranic verse, however, you're going to have to show me the verse and the context. I might defend it or I might admit that, personally, I find it indefensible. In my view, this is the unaccustomed corner in which Islam found—and now finds—itsself thanks in no small part to Osama bin Laden. As he said in his video-taped interview in December, "This event [11 September] made people think about true Islam, which benefited Islam greatly." In the long-term, I believe that that's true. An actual on-going examination of Islam in dispassionate Western terms by Muslims and non-Muslims, I believe, will reveal where the skeletons are in the Muslim closet—foremost among these, to me, the Koreish usurpation of the caliphate and the admitted abridgement of the text of the Koran by Osman as well as the (in my view) too extensive reliance on "prophetic traditions" in establishing shariat law (since there was only one Prophet in Islam, doesn't that mean that a "prophetic tradition" would have to necessarily be attributable specifically to Muhammad—and specifically when he was reciting the verses of the Koran—to qualify for the term? That is, isn't it theologically sound to say that a "prophetic tradition" is only valid if it is found in "sacred scripture"?). In the immediate aftermath of 11 September, as is now fundamental, as is now central to the nature of society in the Western Democracies, Hard Questions were asked about—and of—Islam. And were answered by what were, unquestionably, easy, circuitous rationalisations and practiced, glib assertions. Ten months later, the easy, circuitous rationalisations (which grew no less easy, no less circuitous over time) and practiced, glib assertions (which grew no less practiced, no less glib over time) seem, at last, to have given way to a sullen silence which—at least in the case of non-feminists—usually prefigures genuine introspection, genuine self-examination, genuine soul-searching. In feminists it usually just denotes sulking.*

*A news item from May 1 mentioned that the ninth execution-by-beheading this year had taken place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the day before. The item noted that that compared with eighty-one executions by beheading the previous year. It may not look like much. But it seems to me that that, too, represents progress of a kind.*

*[This morning's National Post (18 July) brings word that the 24th execution-by-beheading of the year took place yesterday in the southern Saudi province of Assir]*

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The title of this series of articles has been “Islam, My Islam”. Had I seen a need, I could have written a series of companion pieces of comparable length entitled “Christianity, My Christianity” or “Judaism, My Judaism”. As I have stated elsewhere, I work very hard at maintaining a co-equivalency in my own mind between the three great monotheistic faiths. To me, the Books of Moses, the Gospels and the Koran represent the beginning, middle and end of God’s revelation of Himself to the world. Out of each of the foundational sacred texts, I pick and choose what it is that I believe, what it is that I give greater or lesser emphasis to in my own system of belief, that which I choose to participate in and that which I choose not to participate in (while scrupulously avoiding grafting anything onto the texts from outside of monotheism in spite of various intellectual temptations to do so). This is, of course, very much frowned upon by the entrenched theocratic hierarchies which have formed within Judaism, Christianity and Islam. One is advised to consult with experts in the faith, to find a rabbi (or a minister or an imam) who can guide you in your beliefs. What seems implicit to me (and what has seemed implicit from the time I began studying the Bible six years ago) is that one still has to choose for oneself. Even if one becomes convinced that Judaism is the only true path to God, one is still faced with the choice between Orthodox Judaism or Reformed Judaism, the choice between the innumerable nuanced variations within each of those primary divisions. If one becomes convinced that Christianity is the only true path to God, one has to choose between Catholicism and Protestantism, Greek Orthodox, Anglicanism, Baptist and so on. If one becomes convinced that Islam is the only true path to God, one has to choose between Sunni and Shiite faiths. To ask a rabbi or a minister or an imam to guide you in your beliefs, it seems to me, is comparable to asking an insurance salesman which kind of insurance you should buy. He may purport himself to be an impartial advisor and teacher, but it stretches human credibility to the breaking point (to me) to expect that he will, in the long run, do anything other than sell you *his* kind of insurance, the brand of insurance he has, self-evidently, “bought” for himself and the brand of insurance which it is his livelihood to “sell”.

One of the things that I found to be fundamentally sound about Islam at the outset of my experience with it was the definition of the term “Islam” itself—submission to the Will of God—and the term “Muslim”—one who submits to the Will of God—which I see as “personalized” versions of the first pillar of Islam: acknowledgement of God’s implicit sovereignty over everything. “All that is in the heaven and in the earth is God’s”, “all things came from God and to God they are returning”. In computer terms, it’s a “0” or a “1,” in my view. You either believe in the pre-eminence of God’s sovereignty (“1”) or you believe in the pre-eminence of, well, anything else (“0”). The choice is your fundamental right (and, in my view, your primary responsibility) as an individual to make and you can make it only for yourself, not for others. Personally, I don’t believe the choice allows of the sort of grey areas to which the secular humanist mind is inclined. As a rabbi once said on the television program *Passages* when asked about the astronomically large numbers of people who, as North American opinion polls continue to indicate, profess a belief in God, “Yes, but how many of them believe in *God*, and how many of them believe that ‘God is love’, ‘God is nature’, ‘God is science’.” That is, how many people attempt to redefine God to suit their own purposes—to change God from a specific Being into a completely neutral state of existence? How many individuals attempt to change God from the Absolute Playwright, Absolute Theatre Owner, Absolute Theatre Director whose Theatre is the Entire Universe into a part of the scenery, into the stage or into the theatre against which, upon which and/or within which those individuals enact their own small and fleeting lives? My own view is that there are two overall Realities. There is “1” Reality and there is “0” reality. Which Reality or reality you inhabit, which Reality or reality within which you reside (and which Reality or reality resides within you) is decided by whether you have consciously, knowingly chosen to submit yourself to the Will of God or whether that pre-eminent position in your life is occupied by anyone or anything else. I believe that submission to the Will of God is implicit in the Torah and in the Gospels (and in the Torah is implicitly directed at YHWH “God” and is implicit in God’s directive to man to “subdue the earth” and that the Koran’s frequent injunction against “joining gods with God” originates in the same misapprehension). I believe that this submission to the Will of God is what the Koran refers to when describing wealth and children as a temptation to man. How many husbands and fathers genuinely believe their first loyalty is to God, and how many pay only lip service to that loyalty? How many of them even recognize that their loyalty shifted with their marriage and with the birth of their children and that God now comes in a very distant third, behind the wife and kids?

What is the Will of God?

Back when I was living a “0” life, that would have seemed a very sensible question to me. Having chosen “1” for myself, I believe that the question is both unanswerable in human terms and largely, if

not completely, irrelevant to the discussion. To *understand* the Will of God, as one *understands*, say, a mathematical formula, would, it seems to me, require deluding oneself that one was, oneself, an omniscient being—which (I hope we could agree) one isn't. In human terms, it seems to me that Reality, the Reality which is represented by God, the Reality which *is* God is inexplicable in human terms—and all other realities, which *are* explicable in human terms, are mere fragments of the single, all-encompassing Reality which is God's Reality. God is not Nature, but Nature is a small part of the Reality which is God. God is not Love, but Love is a small part of the Reality which is God. This, I believe, is a terrifying and alienating concept for the secular mind (which flatters itself that no reality is too large for its capacity to comprehend) and leads to accusation. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," is, at essence, a secular indictment of God. To which the only sensible answer, in my view, would be, "How would *you* know?" To sustain the indictment, to support the accusation, one would have to have first-hand experience with absolute power. "The more power a *human being* has the more he is likely to behave in a corrupt fashion as a result of it" is, I believe, a fairer and more demonstrable hypothesis—but is also worlds away from dealing with terms like "absolute power," and, again, (as most secular discussions of God tend to do) presupposes that the one who is doing the discussing and the One Who Is Being Discussed function on a comparable level of existence. On the one hand you have a being who is, on average, between five and six feet tall, who will, on average, live about seventy years and who didn't get perfect marks in high school. On the other hand you have an Infinite Being, Who Exists Everywhere Simultaneously, Has Absolute Power and Absolute Knowledge of All Things. *Cogito ergo sum*. I think, therefore I am. The larger implication, to me (and I suspect to most monotheists) is: well, fine, but *what* do you think? We all think (even feminists, on those rare occasions when they briefly stop worshipping their own emotions, think). *Islam*, it seems to me is the only appropriate extension from *Cogito ergo sum*:

(My own thought is limited and I speculate that my thought must have originated in Some Largest and/or Unlimited Thought) (that is, thought has to "come from" somewhere) ("little things" come from "Big Things" whether you are talking about babies coming out of adults or moons coming out of planets) (given that *less limited thought* i.e. a man's thought is always going to be preferable to *severely limited thought* i.e. a baby's thought when it comes to decision-making) (I, therefore, accept:) (that the submission of my *limited* thought to the directions of the Largest and/or *Unlimited* Thought is an inherently *good thought*, possibly the largest—which is to say, *least limited* thought—of which I am capable) (as a corollary, I reject:) (a. the choice of believing that there is no Largest and/or Unlimited Thought b. the choice of believing that, if a Largest and/or Unlimited Thought exists that it is inaccessible to me c. the choice of believing that my own thought did not originate in a Largest and/or Unlimited Thought d. the choice of believing that, if a Larger and/or Unlimited Thought exists it is unconcerned with, unaware of or hostile to my own limited thought) (that is, I reject the idea that a Largest and/or Unlimited Thought could be otherwise than beneficent) (and accept the fact that a Larger and/or Unlimited Thought would, by its implied beneficent Nature, communicate with limited thought: ergo, Scripture).

Put another way, it seems to me that to choose reality (*Cogito ergo sum*) over Reality (*Cogito ergo sum ergo Islam*) is to attempt to study astronomy seriously while refusing to accept any information obtained through a telescope, to implicitly suspect the telescope and to implicitly view the telescope as an *impediment* to accurate perception (because it occupies a space between the eye of the observer and the thing observed it is, *ipso facto*, by definition, an *impediment*) and to have faith only in what one can see unaided with the naked eye. To adhere, in other words, to the humanist view that "man is the measure of all things". The result, if one was scrupulously honest in documenting what one was able to see with one's naked eye, alone, would, of course, constitute a *kind* of astronomy, a scrupulously honest documentation of one's unaided subjective observations of the actions and motions of stars, the sun, the moon and a certain number of planets. But when that documentation is compared with the knowledge which results from *accepting as self-evident* that the telescope is a central, irreplaceable instrument in astronomy and the acceptance as a *given* that "the bigger the telescope, the better the information," there is no comparison. In terms of Reality, rather than reality (to me) God is very much analogous to the Biggest Telescope (Largest and/or Unlimited Thought) when compared with the naked eye (limited thought). Without God, you are thrashing about in a wading pool within sight of the ocean. But it *is* your choice. The definition of the term "Islam" is not "*Knowledge of the Will of God*," it is "*submission to the Will of God*." It presupposes that God, as an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent Being is better suited to directing your life than you are, just as the Hubble Space

Telescope is better suited to the purposes of astronomy than is your naked eye—and by just, in my view, so comparably wide a margin.

What is the Will of God?

I think it self-evident that—given that each human being is different—God’s Will, as it applies to each individual person who chooses to submit themselves to His Will, is different. One of the reasons that I am suspicious of organized religion and keep organized religion at arm’s length is that it seems to me that the Jewish, Christian and Muslim hierarchies (or, as I see them, “hierarchies”) accept as a given that God’s Will is the same for everyone. In my view, the “hierarchies” and those who support them have simply traded one collectivist misapprehension—the 19th century notion that “if God’s Will was to be done on the earth all of our lives would closely resemble those of the individuals who occupy the religious hierarchies” (that is, we should all live like priests, nuns, rabbis and imams)—and have simply traded that collectivist misapprehension for the (what is to me, anyway) *equally* specious collectivist view that we should marginalize the presence of God and His scriptures, his Prophets and his messengers in our lives and instead become “baby worshippers,” “marriage worshippers” and “family worshippers”. That is, that we should subscribe instead to the collectivist sensibility which has resulted from the shift in emphasis from the clergy to the laity in Judaism and Christianity and which has resulted in the (perhaps terminal) erosion of those two faiths into well-meaning but misguided...Maternalisms?...which, at essence, deplore God, deplore His scriptures, deplore His Prophets and his messengers. Which, in short, deplore everything except babies, marriage and family (and which deplores even marriage and family unless the wife-and-mother is in charge or it involves homosexuals). I likewise endeavour to keep at arm’s length anyone who purports to be an intermediary between God and man. On a purely personal, purely subjective level, I think it was and is God’s Will that I would attempt to self-publish 300 issues of a comic book. I do not extrapolate from that that it is God’s Will that *everyone* should attempt to self-publish 300 issues of a comic book. When I look at the entrenched hierarchies of the great monotheistic faiths—both in their much deplored Patriarchal forms and in their current Maternalistic forms into which they have (as I see it) *eroded*—I see just such an extrapolation, a perpetuation of the view that it is the purpose of religious faith to determine how everyone should live and (more perniciously) whom they should interpose at the highest levels of their own lives between God and themselves. I am in complete agreement with those who believe that an entrenched priesthood is a most unlikely and unhelpful candidate for the position, but I am also of the view (to say the least) that I don’t see our present entrenchment of white-muslim-and-votive-candle-feminism or the elevation of Oprah Winfrey to beatification (although I’m sure her television program has “healed” many of her followers in exactly those limited and secular categories of “healing” with which they are almost exclusively concerned) as any great improvement. And this is, in fact, what I admire about the term “Islam,” the implied submission to the Will of God, *without the interpolation of an intermediary between the individual and God.*

Speaking again, personally, speaking (I’ll give away the game right here) *subjectively*—the only way that I believe any kind of faith can be discussed—I haven’t the faintest idea how much of it I’ve gotten right and how much of it I’ve gotten wrong. The, so far, 282 of the 300 issues, I mean. Or my life, for that matter. I don’t think I’m *supposed* to know until the Last Day. Knowing would, I believe, defeat the intrinsic purpose of life: which, to me, consists *not* in *knowing*, but in *doing*. Choosing what I think is right and, hopefully, doing it. Not what necessarily *appeals* to me, not what I think I would most *enjoy*, but what I think is right. What *I* think that God thinks is right. Not what Gloria Steinem thinks is right, or what George Bush thinks is right. Or what a priest or Pope John Paul II or a rabbi or an imam thinks is right. It would not surprise me in the least to find out I’m doing really, really badly (which would be the consensus view in the feminist society in which I live) and it would not surprise me to find out I’m doing really, really well. I think I would be surprised to find out what parts of my life were “high water” marks in the eyes of God and what parts of my life were “low points”. That is, I take it as a given that, like all people, in submitting myself to the Will of God, I understand His Will in my life imperfectly—less imperfectly at some times and more imperfectly at others, but always, imperfectly. This, to me, is the meaning of *jihad*. “Striving in the path of God,” the usually excruciating and seldom enjoyable process of the practical application of “submitting oneself to the Will of God”. *Jihad*: overcoming the rationalisations that kept me smoking cigarettes after submitting myself to the Will of God. *Jihad*: overcoming my profound apprehension at even attempting to fast in the month of Ramadan. *Jihad*: overcoming my unreasonable attachment to an electronic device (television) whose puerile, vacuous and moronic contents disgusted and revolted me better than 99% of the time. My plate was and is full with things that need to be done and things that

need to be undone if I am to align myself with the Will of God. It's more than a full-time occupation, it is a near-Sisyphean lifelong task.

So, it should come as no great shock that (in my view) for me, or for *anyone*, to pretend to “muck into” the lives of others, given that all of us, as imperfect beings understand the Will of God in our own lives imperfectly really seems ludicrous to me. I see no reason to exclude priests, ministers, bishops, popes, nuns, rabbis, imams or ayatollahs from that blanket statement. They are all imperfect people who have been selected—or elected—by imperfect people for their position. To me, “mucking into” the lives of others (returning to my previous metaphor) makes about as much sense as trying to help someone see through *their* telescope by sticking *my* telescope on the end of it. Good theory (I suppose) but, in practical terms, less than helpful. The extent of the advice that I could give would be: submit yourself to the Will of God and from then on, you're both on your own and in the custody of God. God can help you. I can't. I would feel safe in saying that there is nothing you won't experience that isn't a very common experience once you have submitted to the Will of God—exhilaration alternating with discouragement, genuine submission alternating with half-hearted submission, stubbornness, rebellion, resentment, joy, despair, astonishment, unremitting boredom, tranquility. That's what I've experienced, across the whole spectrum and back again. I can't say my life has improved in any conventional sense, but then I've always found life to be very hard and largely unrewarding work so, in a sense, I've really just changed from leading a completely *pointless* life of hard and largely unrewarding work to leading a life of hard and largely unrewarding work that has as its aim doing what I think is right in the eyes of God—“striving in the path of God” or, at least, striving *to* “strive in the path of God”—to resist temptation in a world that is largely devoted to multiplying and strengthening temptation. I don't envision reward—or even “reward”—partly because I really don't think I'm very good at this and partly because of my own experience that life is implicitly unrewarding (I do, however, also accept the fact that once you see almost everything the world has to offer as a corrupting temptation—as I tend to do—it becomes very difficult to *be* rewarded in any conventional sense of the term). Most of the time, I can't picture how the “next life” would differ significantly from this one. The Koranic verses about the *houris*, the “wives of stainless purity” (a subtle but significant difference from the “virgins” they are described as being in the Western press—which I would attribute, in no small part, to the West's profound shortage of “wives of stainless purity” and consequent incomprehension of the very idea of what a “stainless” wife might be)(even, you know, *theoretically*) (say “stainless” to anyone in the West and the first thing they'll think of is steel) promised in the next world, strike me as hyperbolic—as opposed to those verses which depict this world as the “farmland for the hereafter,” resonating with the Gospel's promise that “many are called, few are chosen.” What I envision is more hard and largely unrewarding work, larger and more subtle temptations, more at stake and less chance of success. My *preference* would be for no afterlife whatsoever: complete oblivion, to cease to exist (which puts me very much at odds with the inmates of this particular asylum who—whether “0” or “1”—seem always to long for “more life, longer life” even when they know that it is unattainable) but I'm not sure how much of my preference is “flesh-thinking” (I hold to the view that if your existence has manifested itself within a physical form you have either eroded from a higher state and/or have made a series of very stupid “0” reality decisions somewhere along the spiritual line). Perhaps once my flesh is actually dead, I will be able to perceive the nature of life more accurately and prefer life to oblivion, but right now? No, definitely not. It took me a while to recognize this not as a suicidal impulse (I didn't give myself life so I don't think it's mine to throw away) but analogous, rather, to having made elaborate preparations and large sacrifices to attend a party which turns out, upon your arrival, to be excruciatingly boring and not worth a fraction of what you had to give up to attend. The fact that you have to stay at the party for as long as eighty or ninety years, it seems to me, only emphasizes the level of stupidity inherent in your choice. I've been at this party for forty-six years now and I, for one, am more than happy to leave it at any time God sees fit (Anyone you want to say goodbye to? No. Anything you want to take with you? No. Anything you're going to miss? No.)

In choosing to submit myself to the Will of God and his absolute sovereignty, it occurred to me very early on that Islam was—and is—intended to be more inclusive than it proved to be once the descendants of Abu Sofyan and Hind got a hold of it.

Consider the first of the five pillars of Islam: Acknowledgement of God's sovereignty and acknowledgement of Muhammad as His prophet. On the face of it, this appears to be “Islamocentric” and implicitly anti-Jewish and/or anti-Christian—and it has certainly been viewed that way for

centuries. However, in my view, far from being anti-Christian, it seems to me to pose a very sensible question that Christians seem to loathe to address and which I mentioned earlier in this series. Do you not suppose that God has—and *had*—absolute sovereignty over Jesus and Mary? It seems to me another “0” and “1” question over which Christianity has been tying itself up in theological knots for two thousand years trying to figure out how to make the answer simultaneously “0” (Because Jesus was God, the question is irrelevant) and “1” (Jesus was a man but co-equivalent with God so Jesus and God were equal). Even if you allow for Jesus being God’s son (which I don’t, but for the sake of argument, let’s discuss the point in purely Christian terms), isn’t a son correctly submissive to the will of his father? I mean, sure, many—if not most—sons aren’t, but isn’t submissiveness to the father’s will the ideal? And isn’t that, according to the Gospels, exactly what Jesus—both the Synoptic Jesus and the Jesus of John’s Gospel—spent a great deal of time preaching: that he was doing the Will of his Father, that he was doing the will of He who sent him into the world? Did he ever preach the opposite? That *God* should submit Himself to the will of *Jesus*? No, of course not. I do think it unfortunate that the conventional Islamic acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty includes the phrase “and Muhammad is His messenger”. Not because I don’t believe it (I do) but because the *phrasing* leaves a great deal to be desired, making it sound as if Muhammad was God’s *only* messenger. Unfortunate, particularly, because Muslims don’t believe that. The Koran explicitly names any number of individuals from the Torah and the Gospels who are included in the ranks of God’s prophets and messengers. At the same time, I can understand that Muslims would be reluctant to modify the first pillar into “There is no God but God and Muhammad is *one of* His messengers,” because it does seem to, you know, rather blunt the point. In my own prayers, I’ve chosen “There is no God but God and Muhammad is His last messenger and seal of prophets.” I’ve often wondered, how much of a problem would that be for Jews and Christians to incorporate into their own faith? For an Orthodox Jew, as an example, would acknowledgement that Muhammad was God’s last messenger jeopardize their own anticipation of a coming Meshiach? Is Meshiach considered to be in the same category of prophet as Isaiah or Jeremiah, or does the mere fact of his exalted status take him out of the realm of the prophets and into the sort of realm occupied by Jesus in Christianity? And even leaving aside the “last” messenger part, after fourteen hundred years, don’t even Orthodox Jews acknowledge that Muhammad was a prophet of God? For a Fundamentalist Christian does the fact that Jesus has promised to return on the Last Day allow for Muhammad’s acknowledgement as God’s last messenger and seal of prophets? Or could it be acknowledged because, indisputably—in *this* world—Jesus lived six centuries before Muhammad’s time? For me, of course, describing Muhammad as God’s “last messenger” causes no problem at all. Of all the pivotal figures in the histories of Judaism, Christianity and Islam since 632, the nearest that I could see as being in the category of a messenger of God would be Martin Luther. And in the case of Martin Luther, I think it indisputable that—in calling into question the corruption that had been perpetrated against the Word of God by the degraded papacy of the Middle Ages—while he exhibited great bravery and profound faith in the face of nearly universal opposition and personal peril, he didn’t *per se* bring anything *new* to the monotheistic table. There is no “Gospel of Martin Luther,” no additional Book which has been “sent down” that could be considered comparable to the Bible and the Koran. Unless you consider the Book of Mormon canonical, which I very much don’t.

Two of Islam’s five pillars, prayer and fasting in the sacred month of Ramadan, are bound inextricably together in my own perceptions because the first time I tried praying five times a day was during my first Ramadan fast in 1999, so I’d like to address the two of them together:

If you’ll recall, way, way, back at the beginning of this series of essays (back when the earth was, as it were, still cooling) it was my dissatisfying experience with the Anglican Church and the consequent sense of “something missing” when I stopped going to church which first led me to consider “fasting in the sacred month”. If you’ll also recall, praying five times a day seemed to me—as I contemplated fasting in Ramadan (particularly with the ritual ablutions, change of clothing, etc.)—excessive. What I *anticipated* with praying five times a day was that it would have the character of a marathon, an endurance rally. I assumed that, in this, it would have much in common with getting up at 8:30 every Sunday morning to put on a suit-and-tie and to struggle off to church (at first, through the always unpredictable Canadian winter wonderland and, subsequently, to sit in that same suit-and-tie for an hour and a half during the sweltering summer months in a church that wasn’t air conditioned) to listen to homey little stories about mum, dad and the kids. That is, I considered fasting in the sacred month would be the same as I assumed all religious activities were: largely unpleasant rituals through which (if you weren’t a mum, a dad or a kid) you gritted your teeth, sucked it up, bit the bullet, etc. etc.

I thought that unpleasantness was the *point* of religious activities. Much to my surprise, what I had expected to be an ordeal turned out to be anything but. In fact, for me, it served to clarify very vividly the difference between “0” reality life and “1” Reality life. Not that I noticed it at the time. At the time, it just seemed an unexpected bonus that what I had thought was going to be an ordeal had turned out to be not that difficult, that I was going to be able to manage the thirty days of praying and fasting with far less effort and exertion than I thought would be required. I had also given up caffeine, alcohol, meat, dairy products and masturbation for the sacred month. If you had asked me when I began that first Ramadan fast whether I would make it through the thirty days, the answer, honestly, would have been “no”. My thought in starting the fast was that I would give it a try and see how far I could get. I hoped I could make it through two weeks and I hoped that I would try again the following year and keep trying until I made it through the whole thirty days—and (crucially) that I would then be able to make it through the full thirty days in the years following. Ever since I began reading the Bible six years ago, I have never wanted to “take a step down,” that is, to set myself to doing something, to do it for a while and then let it slide, as had happened with my church attendance. Having resolved to become a genuine church-goer, I was (to say the least) not terribly impressed that I had only made it through six months. If you had asked me during the first two weeks of my first Ramadan fast what I was thinking about, the answer would have been “an ice-cold beer and a cheeseburger”. That, to me, was the point of the fast—*NOT doing* things and how *LONG* I could *not do* them.

It wasn’t until December of 2000 and my second Ramadan fast that—much to my own amusement—I could remember the first couple of days of my first experience with any clarity. The first couple of days, cranky about having to get up *well before dawn* to have something to eat and then being unable to eat or drink for the rest of the day, by the time the sun was going down, filled with bitterness and resentment...

[Let me interrupt myself to include a news item from Cairo which made me chuckle during last year’s Ramadan, “*23 die in car crashes linked to Ramadan fast*”: “Twenty-three people died in two automobile accidents near Cairo in incidents attributed to speeding at sunset just before the end of the Ramadan fast, police said yesterday. Seventeen were killed and 13 injured when two cars collided on Wednesday near al-Fashn, 140 km south of Cairo. Six were killed and 11 injured near Beni Suef, 100 km south.” It was nice, on the one hand, to know that I wasn’t alone in my crankiness and nice to know, as well, that I lived in a part of the world where that level of crankiness at sunset wasn’t a near-universal condition which put everyone’s safety at risk.]

...at this hard, hard Islamic row I had to hoe (poor me!). As I usually do, I would buy my dinner on the way home. And what I would buy would be three desserts. Three non-chocolate (no caffeine!) things made up of various kinds of sugar and varieties of fat in a variety of shapes—layer upon layer—which I would devour in several large bites the *minute* (c’mon. *C’MON!*) the sun had dipped below the horizon. And with a (Hah! *THERE!*) sense that a certain amount of Justice had been restored to the universe, I would sulk off to bed. A couple of days of that brought about the anatomical repercussion you would expect (GAH! POOR ME!) and then I switched to dried fruit, salads, and things of that kind. The interesting thing was that—having completely forgotten what those first couple of days of my first fast had been like—the following year, I did the same thing! And it wasn’t until the expected anatomical repercussion hit a second time that I remembered, Oh, right. This. I did this last year, too, didn’t I? Now, the reason that I forgot about it by the second year was that the difference in quality between praying and fasting in Ramadan in the *second week* as compared to the *first couple of days* was like the difference between night and day. Not only did the fasting and praying become easier, but *everything* became easier. My stamina increased dramatically, all my little aches and pains vanished, I slept soundly straight through the night, I awoke refreshed and eager to go to work, I was more alert, I was more patient, crises great and small had no impact on me whatsoever. Walking felt like gliding, a sensation which I hadn’t experienced since I was about ten years old. “I remember being like this,” I kept thinking, “I remember *my life* feeling like this: *before* I had experienced masturbation, *before* I had experienced sex, *before* I had experienced drugs, *before* I had experienced alcohol.” (I was also aware that my newly recovered state was the one that I had wanted masturbation, sex, drugs and alcohol to return me to). What was interesting was that—when the thirty days of my first Ramadan fast was up, *I didn’t want to stop*. Having dreaded fasting, I now found myself dreading *not* fasting. My stamina won’t be as great! My aches and pains are going to come back! I won’t sleep as soundly! I won’t be as refreshed in the morning! I won’t be as alert! I actually kept going for about another week-and-a-half (and found out later that that’s something of a “no-no” in Islam) and expected that I

would, you know, *crash*. Like coming down off of acid (which was the closest analogous experience—in terms of profound impact—which I had to compare it to). But, of course, fasting in Ramadan comes very much from the other side of reality—that is, from Reality—so there *was* no *crash*. What I did experience was comparable to having spent a month with my head above water—having been previously unaware that my head and the rest of me had been *underwater* for more than thirty years. As I ate my first food during daylight hours, ate my first roast beef sandwich, my first chocolate chip cookie, drank my first beer, each event pulled my head a little further down until I was living *underwater* again, which—over a period of a week or two—seemed strange and then just seemed to be the way that I had always been. Drinking beer gradually ceased to be this peculiar activity—where I had to keep reminding myself of what (exactly) the theory *was* behind drinking a liquid which had, at essence, “gone bad” (and tasted like it)—and, gradually, became again this thing that seemed to be a really *good* idea, particularly after a long week where I had all of these, you know, aches and pains and I wasn’t, you know, sleeping well and there were all these, you know, big and little crises that, you know, “got” to me.

After several days (or perhaps a week of two) of reacquainting myself with “underwater” life, it became apparent to me that, once more, in my life there was “something missing”. Clearly, what was missing was the purer state which I had experienced during my Ramadan fast which (however) kept bumping up against my certainty that I was not intended—it was not God’s Will—that I would live that way. The purer state which I had experienced had begun to erode almost immediately after the formal end of Ramadan (in early January that year). Whatever the reason for that erosion, it existed outside of my ability to comprehend it, like an unwritten law having greater force than any written law. It took me a while to consider the idea that I might actually begin praying five times a day simply as a way of life, the way of *my* life (I had returned to only reciting my prayer in the morning after getting ready for work and in the evening just before bed) as a way of filling that “something missing” hole in my world. It was an interesting experience making my series of choices—choosing not to perform the ritual ablutions, not to change clothing, to not observe the specific Muslim prayer times (calibrated to the minute: the sheet of Ramadan prayer times I had received from *Reflections on Islam* were for “Toronto and Vicinity” and noted that to each prayer time in Guelph you should add 3 minutes, in Hamilton 2 minutes, in London 8 minutes, in Waterloo 4 minutes. The beginning of Ramadan is also “subject to moon sighting,” that is subject to the sighting of the full moon by Muslim authorities. Even though, in the 20th century, we know—to the minute—when the moon becomes “full” in any geographic location on the globe, Islam still takes into consideration that if God chooses another time, just this once, we must be prepared) but to pray, instead, at the approximate times of Fajr, pre-dawn—described in the Koran as the hour in which it first becomes possible, by natural light, to discern the difference between a white and a black thread (which is undoubtedly the case in the Arabian Peninsula but, trust me, that at 5:56 am in Canada in December it is impossible, by natural light, to differentiate between one’s hand in front of one’s face and, say, the bottom of a mine-shaft, let alone a white and a black thread)—Zuhr, noon-time, Asr, mid-afternoon, Maghrib, sunset and Isha, evening, when the last traces of sunset have faded. And so that was what I did. Of course my Fajr prayers soon slipped from “pre-dawn” to “dawn” to “close-to-dawn” to “morning” (and, on Saturday mornings, after being out until 2 am, “mid-morning”) on the rare occasions where I have some kind of social engagement where I’m apt to have a glass of wine or two, I compress Asr, Maghrib and Isha into early afternoon, mid-afternoon and late afternoon. The further I get from Ramadan in the calendar the more...flexible...my prayer-times become, the more I am apt to stretch three beers on Friday night into five beers (and maybe a shot of Jack Daniel’s) (or two). At the halfway point (right around now, in fact) I begin to develop a genuine longing for Ramadan—the ritual ablutions, the change of clothing, the specific prayer times, the day-long fasts—and the giant Muslim NO! sign which is, by my own choice, attached to it. Thirty days, once a year, where I no longer have to ask myself if two coffees are too many, if I’ve been eating too much chocolate, if I’ve been eating too much meat, eating too few vegetables, masturbating too often, ogling too many pretty young girls. For thirty days, by choice, I take those decisions out of my own hands and (two weeks in) begin to re-experience who it is that I actually am, under all these layers of small, creeping vices and their attendant rationalisations, and their attendant rationalisations’ levels of attendant anxieties, and their attendant anxieties’ levels of spiritual “discomfitedness”? You know, that stuffy feeling, the feeling as if your skin is on too tight? Yes, exactly. That feeling that you’re probably, as a North American or European, feeling right now. That feeling that has made pharmaceuticals, recreational drugs, pornography, self-help books and holistic medicine the multi-to-the-nth-power-billion-dollar industries which they are today. Ramadan

which, for me, is now and (*inshallah*) in all the years which remain of my life indisputably “home base,” the way of thinking and the state to which I return once a year. Because there is no better experience, to me, than to experience being ten years old again at the age of forty-six.

Anyway, it has occurred to me, over the course of three fasts in the sacred month—speaking as someone who has studied Judaism, Christianity and Islam—that the five pillars of Islam seem to offer the greatest ecumenical possibilities of the three monotheistic religions. That is, I think Jews and Christians could both observe at least four of the five pillars, while leaving every other element of Judaism and Christianity intact and unchanged. Although Islam prohibits the consumption of alcohol, the prohibition of the consumption of alcohol is not one of the five pillars.

Of the two remaining pillars, the *zakat*, of course, I have addressed on several previous occasions and I still consider it to be an inherently good idea for each individual to contribute 2.5% of his or her accumulated wealth to feeding the poor in his or her city, town or region. I also don’t think (I may be wrong) it should be that terribly difficult, in the ecumenical spirit in which I’m discussing these issues, to get synagogues and churches to agree to institute the *zakat*. Or for secular humanists to go along with it, for that matter. It probably *is*...terribly difficult, I mean. But I honestly can’t see a good reason why it *should* be.

Coincidentally, the remaining pillar, the *hajj*—the pilgrimage to Mecca—was the subject of one of my few direct contacts with the Muslim world, a letter which I wrote to the host of *Reflections on Islam*, Ezz E. Gadd (who frequently answers viewers’ questions on the air). Essentially, what I asked was: speaking as a person who believes in God’s sovereignty, who believes that Muhammad was His last messenger and seal of Prophets, who prays five times daily, who pays the stated alms and who fasts in Ramadan, but who also believes that Judaism and Christianity are completely valid faiths in their present form, would I be considered a Muslim, insofar as making the *hajj* was concerned? And if not, by whose authority would Mr. Gadd claim that I wasn’t?

(I am an incorrigible troublemaker: it interests me to take questions from other monotheistic debates and apply them to other situations: in this case freely adapting the Scribes’ and Pharisees’ question to the Synoptic Jesus when they asked “by whose authority” he healed the blind, the lame and the lepers. His reply, of course was that he would answer their question if they would answer a question of his own, as to whether the Scribes and Pharisees believed that John the Baptist’s ministry was divinely inspired or purely an “earthly” preaching. As the Synoptic Gospels tell us, the Scribes and Pharisees declined to answer because they knew that John was almost universally regarded by the people as a Prophet and they feared a backlash if they said that his was an earthly ministry—and they couldn’t say his ministry was divinely inspired because the obvious question would be, Well, why didn’t *you* follow him, then? When they said, “We cannot tell,” Jesus basically said, “Then I cannot tell either by whose authority I do these things.” Which got him out of a jam, no question, but which doesn’t really add up in any logically sequential fashion—unless you draw the inference that what the Synoptic Jesus was saying was, “We’re both working the same side of the street. You guys are afraid of the people if you tell the truth and I’m afraid of *you* if I tell the truth”—but, then, that’s the Synoptic Jesus for you.)

The correct Muslim answer to my question (which I already knew, so I don’t know why I asked it) was that Mr. Gadd’s authority—as it is the authority for all theological Muslim answers to theological Muslim questions is “sacred scriptures and prophetic traditions”. As I’ve already said, I can go along with the sacred scripture part—the Koran—but “prophetic traditions” always sets off alarm bells and warning flags for me. A “prophetic tradition” that can be directly traced to Abu Bakr or Omar? I think I could bring myself to granting that authority. A “prophetic tradition” that began with Moawia or any of the other hereditary caliphs descended from Abu Sofyan and Hind? There, I would have a problem.

I was surprised and rather pleased when I got a phone call from *Reflections on Islam* telling me that my letter had been selected to be read and answered on the air the following Sunday. I was even more surprised when I watched the program and found out that Mr. Gadd’s answer (based on “sacred scriptures and prophetic traditions”) was yes, I would be considered a Muslim and could thus enter the sacred precincts and perform the rituals of the *hajj*. Obviously, it was the answer I wanted but (no big surprise, knowing me) once I had it, I found that I disagreed with it. Perhaps I idealize Islam a bit much, but I do tend to think that unless I was very clear in my own mind that I was never going to touch a drop of alcohol again for the rest of my life (I like to say that I am at least three beers a week away from being a good Muslim) and unless I regularly went to the mosque in Waterloo and prayed in the prescribed Muslim fashion, in my own view, I had no business venturing anywhere near the sacred precincts of Mecca. Of course, a year or so ago my parents took me to a restaurant that is run by a Muslim family (my parents having mentioned that their son was fasting in Ramadan, the family was

eager to see this North American freak of nature for themselves) and I asked one of the sons (who was a waiter) if he had ever performed the *hajj* and he smiled and said, “No, not yet. I haven’t committed enough sins.” I burst out laughing. It’s believed that after executing all the prescribed rituals of the *hajj*, the pilgrim returns home as cleansed of his sins as a newborn baby. *My* idea of Islam doesn’t include putting off the *hajj* until later in life so you can get enough sins “under your belt” to make it worth the airfare. I’m sure, just given basic human nature, that he’s not the only Muslim that looks at it that way. And, perhaps, by that very human standard, I *would* qualify as a Muslim. So, assuming that Mr. Gadd was correct and his view would be shared by (gulp) Saudi immigration officials and (gulp) the guardians of the sacred precincts—and I’m *not* correct—then even the fifth pillar of Islam is open to a much wider ecumenical interpretation than my own.

What I’m driving at (in my usual long-winded fashion) is that—so far as I can see—the conversion of the world to Islam is really not *all* that unattainable, depending on how you examine the logistics of the problem. It is unattainable right now, sure, particularly in the United States where you are not likely to get anything approaching a favourable reaction to anything Islamic—now or for many years in the future: at least for as long as it takes the War on Terrorism to curtail, suppress and/or eliminate Wahabite Islam. How long a period that will be really, I think, depends on how long it takes for the lessons learned from the aftermath of 11 September to sink in. I’m thinking particularly of the central lesson which is the mind-boggling military hegemony which the United States holds in the world and which the United States demonstrated in Afghanistan and which the United States will not (Democrat or Republican) be surrendering to any other nation anytime soon. I’m sure the lesson hasn’t fully sunk in with the Arab dictators who are the despotic heirs of the Koreish—the *unspiritual* sons of Abu Sofyan and Hind—the lesson is too large to be fully absorbed in mere months by parochial minds which have been insulated from geopolitical reality (what used to be called *realpolitik*) for too long. But there is no question in my mind that it *will* sink in (sooner, rather than later). When it does, I think Osama bin Laden’s words “when people see a strong horse and a weak horse, they will naturally choose the strong horse”—representing as they do a sentiment near and dear to both the Arab and Muslim heart—will become more poignant in the coming years as Arabs and Muslims come to realize that if the dream of universal Islam is to be realized, the “line of least resistance” could well involve the integration of the five pillars of Islam into Judaic and Christian worship. Given the virtually universal belief in the freedom of the individual and in the pre-eminence of individual human freedoms over the authority of the state which is now shared by Jews and Christians of all denominations, and postulating a Judaic and Christian future (however distant) in which *individual* Jews and *individual* Christians would both acknowledge and practice the five pillars of Islam, a future—for all spiritual and practical purposes—in which Jews and Christians, in addition to *being* Jews and Christians would *also be* Muslims. . . I don’t think it entirely outside the realm of possibility—were the momentum of society to begin moving in that direction and were the Koreish-style corrupt Arab and Muslim dictatorships to fail to democratize fast enough—that Islam might very well find itself, for all intents and purposes, *absorbed* by Judaism and Christianity. That Judaism and Christianity, in tandem, might yet prove to be the “strong horse,” of what might yet prove to be a virtually universal—and *freedom-based*—monotheistic faith.

## Part VII

“Mr. Bush was telling us what is a martyr...God forbids Bush from telling us who is a martyr.”

*An unnamed Jordanian imam quoted in the New York Times, reacting to President Bush’s assertion that “suicide bombers are murderers, not martyrs.”*

“A group like al-Qaeda cannot be deterred or placated or reasoned with at a conference table. For that reason, this struggle will not end with a treaty or accommodation of terrorists. It can only end in their complete and utter destruction.”

*U.S. Vice-President, Dick Cheney*

What I think needs to be recalled in the Western Democracies is what, exactly, *is it* that we are in favour of?—what, specifically, *is it* that separates us from Wahabite Muslims?—what *is it* that we are willing to fight for and, if need be, to die for in the War on Terrorism? We have become such purists in the field of human freedoms that it is difficult to not view ourselves as nations which have simply eroded into a grey, squishy philosophical pudding that believes that everything is okay, really it is. It doesn't matter what it is, we agree with it. 11 September put an end to that perception of ourselves. It seems to me that what we, the Western Democracies, believe in is the freedom to choose and our belief that the freedom of the individual to choose must supersede the freedom of the state—or any governing authority—to infringe upon that freedom without a valid, demonstrable, logic-based cause. Thus, we, the Western Democracies believe in the freedom of the individual to participate in a religion and the freedom to practice that religion. We also believe in the freedom of an individual to *not* participate in a religion and the freedom to *not* practice a religion (which was a nuance, admittedly, rather late in arriving at the forefront of our consciousness: through the long centuries where we, the Western Democracies, were more aptly described as “Christendom,” with all the deplorable suppressions and oppressions of people's freedoms and unwarranted exaltations of our own preferred worship that—for the better part of two millennia—that implied). Where the clash of civilizations between the Western Democracies and fundamentalist Islam takes place, now, is that fundamentalist Islam holds that it, Islam, supersedes the freedom of the state—*any* state (in exactly the way that we, the Western Democracies, view the rights of the individual to supersede the freedom of the state) because to Islamic fundamentalists, Islam represents the Will of God. *L'état, c'est Dieu*, in a manner of speaking. Those states which are not Muslim states are considered by fundamentalist Islam to be infidel states which must be overthrown if Islam is to achieve what fundamentalist Islam believes to be the motivating force behind Islam: the belief that it is God's intention that the entire world must—and *will*—one day convert to Islam. Clearly, this represents a fundamental disagreement, a “deal breaker” between Islam and the Western Democracies writ large and—so long as a significant portion of the Muslim world adheres to this view and endeavours to bring about just such a fulfilment by whatever means it deems necessary, well, the inescapable conclusion, in my view would have to be:

“Of course, you realize this means *WAR!*”

Yes, the classic Groucho Marx/Bugs Bunny line—which is only funny, really, in peacetime and only to those who, in peacetime, are seduced by and, thus, hold firmly to the view that war can never be regarded as an *inevitable* outcome but only as the result of a failure of good will, a failure to communicate with sufficient eloquence a desire for peace or (as is the popularly held view in our feminist age) as the result of a failure to properly curtail masculine aggression. And yet situations do exist where war becomes inevitable. The German invasion of Poland in 1939 is a perfect example. The bombing of Pearl Harbor is another. There was no way to answer those actions which did not involve physical confrontation and bloodshed. It was not a matter of finding and encouraging “moderate elements” within the Nazi high command or in proximity to the Japanese Emperor. “If only we could have thrown our diplomatic weight behind Goebbels and encouraged the German people to restrict Hitler to a ceremonial position.” It just wasn't that kind of situation. Nor, today, in our own world, post-11 September, do I think any reasonable person can believe that it is a sensible course of action to seek out “moderate elements” within the ranks of the Wahabite Muslims or to try to open lines of communication and nurture areas of common interest. The late Daniel Pearl attempted to do that as a journalist and, unfortunately for himself and his family, became a perfect example of why that won't work. The viewpoints are irreconcilable: not “difficult to reconcile”. Irreconcilable. Either Wahabite Islam will prevail or the belief in Democracy and its foundational belief in individual human rights superseding those of any earthly authority will prevail. The choices that Muslim countries make in the next few years regarding Wahabite Islam will either gradually decrease tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim countries, or their choices will bring those tensions to an acute level where World War III will become inevitable. By declaring War on Terrorism, the United States has essentially drawn a line in the sand and has essentially already said (rightly in my view) that World War III will be the result if Wahabite Islam—as exemplified by Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and 11 September, which divides the world into Muslim and non-Muslim and which views the targeting of non-Muslim civilian populations, women, children and the elderly, as valid forms of warfare—is not curtailed, suppressed and confined by Muslim states. Wahabite Islam will be curtailed, suppressed and

confined by Muslim states or Wahabite Islam will be curtailed, suppressed and *eliminated* by the United States as was accomplished by the United States in eliminating Wahabite Islam from Afghanistan. Which one will it be? There is no way of knowing at this point. In my view, a lot hinges on a) whether there are any further terrorist attacks, b) which countries they target and c) how large those attacks are. At the one extreme you have 11 September. At the other extreme you have the “lone Muslim nut” who shot the girl behind the counter at the El Al ticket counter at LAX. It is not difficult to see why the U.S. government chose not to describe the latter as a terrorist attack. To do so would be to imply that some reciprocal action—some further step on the road to World War III—would be taken. The guy shot a few people, he got shot himself. Pretty straightforward. Eye for an eye. Nothing we didn’t know already, but it’s nice to have an example to show the Wahabite Muslims that the U.S. means business. Shoot someone in an airport in the United States, post-11 September, and you have forfeited your right to continue breathing. No one is going to tell you to drop the gun. No one is going to try to disarm you, no one is going to shoot you in the leg or the shoulder. And whoever kills you is certainly not going to face murder charges. In between those two extremes—11 September and the “lone Muslim nut” at LAX—you have the “Palestinian” terrorists blowing themselves up in Jerusalem. To me, that means that the War on Terrorism, right now, is confined to Israel. The frontline in the War on Terrorism is Jaffa Street in Jerusalem. That is where it is being fought and it is being fought with the lives of Israeli civilians. Ariel Sharon is the one who is currently leading the War on Terrorism. Although President George Bush is the Supreme Commander in the War on Terrorism (and if he’s not, I’d sure like to know who is), he has given Sharon a free hand as a Deputy Commander to root out the terrorists, their bomb factories and their leadership. And has stated explicitly that he will support the formation of a Democratic State called Palestine in the West Bank (and presumably Gaza) but he will not support the formation of a Muslim dictatorship in the West Bank (and presumably Gaza). Now it is up to the Muslim states, the “Palestinians” and the Arab League to decide what their reaction to this is going to be. They can either stop their terrorist attacks on Israel and begin to build a democratic infrastructure in those territories supervised by the Palestinian Authority—that will pass muster with the standards of the United States and Israel as vanguard democracies—or they can be walled off from civilization and left to their own Wahabite Islamic devices on the other side of the Israeli equivalent of “Checkpoint Charlie”. I’m not sure how many “Checkpoints” there were in the Berlin Wall, but there weren’t many of them and not very many people passed through them, even temporarily. If the people in the refugee camps think they suffer deprivation now, they should ask the former East Germans about what further levels of deprivation they can expect. I’m leap-frogging the current Middle East geopolitical realities here—where the 300-mile-long security fence currently under construction by Israel is intended (by most Israelis) to be just that: a fence between themselves and the “Palestinians” which will be a border crossing with the usual amount of human and vehicular traffic associated with border crossings. I think that Ariel Sharon is too much a military realist to not recognize that once the security fence is in place, he faces the same problem represented by a comparable barricade erected by the Israelis between northern Israel and Lebanon: limited military responses (of the kind the Israelis have been using in occupying and withdrawing, occupying and withdrawing from the cities of the West Bank) become impossible. You can’t roll your tanks and trucks through your own barricades in response to a series of homicide bombings. You are limited to covert infiltration and targeted killings by IDF Special Forces (without the back-up of mobile artillery) at the low-end of your response options and massive aerial retaliation at the high-end of your response options. Once the security fence is erected, I imagine Sharon will use the first option long enough to show the left-liberal, quasi-socialist world community that it won’t work, that it doesn’t deter “Palestinian” attacks and will then begin turning the security fence into a Middle East version of the Berlin Wall—no one in, no one out—secure in the knowledge that once his options are limited to massive aerial strikes and his borders are secure, Israel wins by virtue of the fact that it has modern firepower and the “Palestinians” don’t. The U.S. will re-supply Israel as needed and probably upgrade Israeli weaponry (not to the current levels of U.S. sophistication but enough to allow the Israelis the same pin-point accuracy the U.S. maintained )(give or take a wedding or two)(in Afghanistan). That is, the War on Terrorism will be continued in the West Bank as it was begun in Afghanistan—all of the casualties will be on the Terrorist side of the ledger, with a certain increase in the amount of collateral damage to “Palestinian” civilians. The entire left-liberal quasi-socialist world community (which, unfortunately, counts Canada among its active membership) will deplore these casualties and there will be an exponential increase in acts of anti-Semitism in the countries of the EU but, in my view, massive aerial retaliation will work on “Palestinians” just as effectively as it did on

the Taliban, eliminating terrorist Wahabite Islam from those territories and countries of the Middle East which border on Israel and resulting in the emergence of an Arab, "Palestinian" and/or Muslim majority which will begin the too-long delayed movement to democratization in those same territories and countries.

To me, what is essential is for the Western Democracies to maintain their resolve in this situation, that Wahabite Islam is completely acceptable as a religious faith practiced by ascetic and devout individuals and is completely unacceptable as the foundation for attacking civilian populations in democratic countries. We must steel ourselves to take a hard line on these issues and to maintain that hard line. The peril represented by the least "softness" on Wahabite Islam or allowing the perception to take hold that "softness" on Wahabite Islam is even a remote future possibility is—post-11 September—just too terrible to contemplate. The biggest danger that I foresee as events unfold is represented by feminism and the feminizing of the Western Democracies which fortunately (but not coincidentally) has experienced its least success in the United States. Having allowed women to vote and having allowed women into the decision-making processes in the Western Democracies, the odds increase of the West "going soft" in the War on Terrorism with each day that passes which separates us from the events of 11 September and which bring no further large-scale acts of terror against civilian populations in democratic countries outside of Israel. Where compassion overwhelms common sense and the ability to perceive accurately erodes into wishful thinking, there you will find feminists, male and female. I'll be discussing this more thoroughly in "Why Canada Slept".

So far, the United States, in my view, has done a commendable job of treading the fine line between human rights and wartime national security. But it is a fine line where, again, in my view, some errors need to be made on the side of the diminishing of human rights—those rights which the United States has always held sacred—for those individuals who fit the profile of Wahabite Islamic terrorists. Every single person on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorist List which catalogues people wanted for participating in terrorist crimes committed since 1985, is a young or middle-aged Arabic-speaking Muslim male with dark brown or black hair, dark eyes and an olive or dark complexion. Before 11 September the targeting of a specific racial or national group could legitimately be described as "racial profiling" and could legitimately be deplored and safely ruled unconscionable by those who believe in the sanctity of individual human freedoms, as we all do. After 11 September, I still believe that this holds true—except for young men from Muslim countries. In my view it is foolish in the extreme either to a) make everyone a target of increased airport security, thus diminishing everyone's individual human freedoms or b) to randomly target airport security at a percentage of young men from Muslim countries while ignoring the rest. Let me put it this way:

If the planes that were hijacked and flown into the World Trade Center buildings had been hijacked by members of the Irish Republican Army, all of whom had been trained in Ireland and had been living in West Germany, Spain, the United States, England and France up until 11 September, I would think it only sensible that every guy with an "O" and an apostrophe at the front of his last name or an Irish passport or an Irish accent or who was arriving on a flight from Belfast would *reasonably* have to expect to be subject to increased airport security, surveillance and scrutiny. It also seems to me that—if the government of Ireland had expressed as little contrition and accepted as little blame and was as unforthcoming in assisting the United States in investigating the perpetrators of the crime, their organizations and their associates as Saudi Arabia has been since 11 September—that would more than justify—would, in fact, make mandatory—the erosion of the human rights of all Irish nationals living in the United States for a period of time that could (again, in my view) justifiably remain... fluid... until such time as the conditions of war (and I'm sure the United States would have declared war on the Irish Republican Army) changed. Changed, first and foremost, in response to the collective will of "We, the People" in the United States. If "We, the People" in the United States disagree, collectively, with the internment and interrogation of Irish Republican Army prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, you will be sure to read a Gallup Poll to that effect on the front pages of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. It is also safe to draw a negative-left-liberal-inference that—absent "American people support internment of terrorists, interrogations" headlines on the front pages of those newspapers—the on-going support of "We, the People," for "internment, interrogations" is, indeed, the case. Likewise with the "we mean business" approach to the internment of Irish nationals until such time as they can establish their bona fides to the satisfaction of what constitutes reason and common sense (i.e. an Irish national being found in possession of multiple passports would, presumably, forfeit his right to basic human freedoms unless and until he could explain in way that would satisfy reason and common sense *why* he has multiple passports. If the passports contain his photo but are registered

under different names, you basically lock him up and “misplace” the key for a few years—under the reasonable and common-sense assumption that this would send a very valuable message to other Irish nationals considering ordering an extra passport or two under different names). I don’t think “We, the People” of *any* democracy could argue successfully that a person with multiple passports bearing different names is entitled to the same human freedoms as the rest of us. I think many people could argue the point *unsuccessfully*, but I think they should have their heads examined and, in a state of war, should be completely ignored. It is a measure of just how large and unconscionable the events of 11 September were that the world’s premiere vanguard democracy has been able to maintain—virtually without dissent—its temporary suspension of basic human freedoms for those who fit the profile of the perpetrators of those events for a period of (at this point) ten months and (looking forward) with no end in sight. I believe there will come a day (if no further terrorist acts take place) when those human freedoms will be restored and I believe that day will come only when it becomes inescapably apparent that “We, the People” in the United States have decided that the day has come (and will be signalled by headlines in *The Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, “Bush policies worse than Hitler, Stalin 52% of Americans agree”). But not until. I believe the biggest impediment to that day arriving is the continued unwillingness of the Saudi Royal family to express genuine contrition, accept genuine blame and to enter whole-heartedly into assisting the United States to investigate the 11 September perpetrators who were all—hair-splitting arguments aside—Saudi nationals.

“We can hear rumblings in the [U.S.] Muslim community about the need to keep fighting against profiling... People say profiling makes them feel like criminals. It does—I know this firsthand. But would that I had been made to feel like a criminal a thousand times than to live to see the grisly handiwork of real criminals in New York and Washington.”

*Arab-American Tarek Masoud  
in The Wall Street Journal*

Why is it that that contrition, that acceptance of blame, and that assistance—ten months later—is *still* not forthcoming from Saudi Arabia?

I think it is worth considering that there is easily as much—and actually a great deal more—fear of Wahabite Islam among the hierarchies of the Arab dictatorships than there is in the Western Democracies. I believe that that fear is so pronounced and so desperate that it supersedes all other diplomatic and international considerations by a wide margin—among the Arab dictatorships, in the Palestinian Authority, at OPEC. The militant, terrorist Wahabite Muslims and their derivative incarnations—whether one is discussing al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad or the others—have one thing in common. They are certifiably insane, in the exact way that the Nazis were certifiably insane: their perceptions of right and wrong are so skewed as to place them beyond the pale of reasoned discourse. Like the Nazis, none of them represent a national majority, and, like the Nazis, where they have been granted influence or where they have seized power they ruthlessly pursue a course of wanton destruction. Like the Nazis, they blame the Jews for their every misfortune. Like the Nazis, they are convinced that nothing will end their misfortune but the utter destruction of the Jews. Like the Nazis, their first recourse is always violence and bloodshed. Like the Nazis, it is impossible to appease them. Like the Nazis, whatever level of appeasement is offered them is viewed by them as a “gimme,” as a “freebie” which they are happy to accept...sequentially, successively and incrementally. *Unlike* the Nazis, they do not (I don’t believe) accept the fact that at some point efforts to appease them will come to an end (in the sense that I *do* believe that Hitler understood that at some point he would no longer be ceded territory and would be forced to use whatever territory, power and influence had been ceded to him as a staging area for military, rather than diplomatic, conquest). *Unlike* the five years in which Europe’s Great Democracies endeavoured to appease Hitler, the appeasement of Wahabite Islam has been the misguided policy of the Arab world for *decades*—if not, arguably, for *centuries*. And *unlike* the Nazis, the Wahabite Muslim belief that they are “striving in the path of God” and that their murder of women, children, babies and the elderly is mandated by God supersedes nationality, national interest and simple territorial ambitions.

It is that level of insanity, and that level of cold-blooded violence which, in my view, engenders and has engendered an almost unimaginable level of fear among non-Wahabite Muslims. I think that what we will see in the coming months and years, is a gradual recognition among non-Wahabite Muslims

that the Muslim fear of Wahabite Muslims is no more valid, has no greater basis in reality than the fear that the German people had of the Nazis, or the fear that the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza have of Yasser Arafat and his “security forces,” of Hamas, of Hezbollah, of Islamic Jihad. They are thugs, pure and simple. As the Taliban and al-Qaeda are thugs, pure and simple. The elimination of a thug is purely a matter of identification and the application of superior force of the kind the United States demonstrated in Afghanistan and which Israel is now demonstrating in the West Bank (having taken into account the inescapable price of a temporary world-wide escalation of anti-Semitism): that it possesses the superior force and the national will to use it against Yasser Arafat’s “security forces” and against the terrorist organizations which have gotten by for too long on the illusion that they, too, possess firepower comparable to that of the world community.

Of course there is also the insular nature of Islam itself, which takes justifiable pride in being the recipient of God’s Last Revelation to the World (a pride comparable to Christians with their New, Improved Testament) but which tends also to a disproportionate sense of self-importance in more...temporal...matters (the Jordanian imam quoted above, telling the President of the United States that God forbids him to decide who is and who is not a martyr is an example of this syndrome) particularly where Islam, a Muslim nation or a Muslim individual is involved. If an accurate perception of the severe limitations of Islamic firepower isn’t actively demonstrated on an on-going basis, Muslims will retreat at the first opportunity to a wholly inaccurate perception of themselves and their opponents. Along that line, it was with no small measure of amusement—on the occasion of Colin Powell’s last tour of the Middle East—that I read the *National Post* headline, “U.S. credibility collapsing, Saudi Prince tells Powell”. This, you will recall, came shortly after U.S. Vice President Cheney had returned from a comparable tour of the region. I suspect that—knowing Secretary Powell’s dove-ish inclinations—the Vice President said, “Mr. President, why don’t you have Mr. Powell go over and talk to some of these...fellows. I think he’d find it very...enlightening.”

*Shortly after Mr. Powell was asked icily by Moroccan King Mohammed why he had not headed straight to Jerusalem, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah told him in a meeting that the United States must restrain Israel. “U.S. interests in the region are suffering gravely. U.S. credibility and prestige are collapsing quickly,” said Adel al-Jubeir, a Saudi foreign policy advisor, paraphrasing the Prince.*

I’m just guessing, but I suspect the Vice President found the progressively more glazed look and artificial smile in the news photos of the Secretary of State’s face as his Middle Eastern tour proceeded confirmation that Mr. Powell had been as thoroughly...enlightened...as had the Vice President before him. Something along the lines of, “What in the HELL are these people TALKING about? We just KICKED THE TALIBAN’S ASS around the block in FIVE WEEKS without breaking a SWEAT! We had more JOURNALIST casualties than MILITARY casualties! That sounds pretty damned CREDIBLE to ME!”

The United States has...gradually...been trying to break the news to its Arab allies. David Warren in the *Ottawa Citizen* wrote:

*Colin Powell has, this year, made a much bigger issue of the State Department’s human rights reports and has been willing to say aloud—about the Uzbeki regime of Islam Karimov, for instance—things no U.S. administration has ever said before about an ally. Even President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt has received an earful, though not publicly. (Saudi Arabia’s crown prince, Abdullah, protects himself against such hectoring by going berserk the moment it starts.)*

In announcing the Secretary of State’s mission, President Bush, in a White House Rose Garden speech, 4 April, had said, “America itself counts former adversaries as trusted friends—Germany, Japan and now Russia. Conflict is not inevitable. Distrust need not be permanent. Peace is possible when we break free of old patterns and habits of hatred.” His language was perhaps too diplomatic for the occasion or perhaps it was too soon after the U.S.’s overwhelming military victory in Afghanistan or perhaps it was a little of both, but for anyone willing to read the President’s words with their eyes open, the writing was clearly on the wall: Germany, prior to becoming a trusted American ally, had needed to be purged of fascism and (unfortunate, but them’s the breaks) that had required that the country be crushed militarily. Japan, prior to becoming a trusted American ally had needed to be purged of quasi-religious Imperialist pretensions of world conquest and (unfortunate, but them’s the breaks) that had required the country to be subjected to atomic bombing. Russia, prior to becoming a

trusted American ally, had needed to be stripped of its *Marxist* pretensions of world conquest and (rather wisely I thought) chose complete capitulation over either the German or Japanese Option.

In my opinion, we are at the point where the U.S. State Department may finally have recognized what most right wingers—and even such notables on the “other team” as Nathan Sharansky, the Russian dissident—have been saying for some time: no progress is possible in the Middle East until the Arab countries democratize. If this seems unlikely, then I think it worth considering what (unless I miss my guess) the U.S. approach will be: to militarily impose a regime change in the *least* democratic of the Arab nations (in the American view, Iraq—I’d say Syria, myself, but, hey, it’s American ordinance, American military personnel and American tax dollars so, Iraq it is) in a conflict comparable to the war in Afghanistan, allowing for a war, say, five times the duration (that is, six months) and, say, ten times the American casualties (eighty, maybe ninety) to be followed by international assistance in the development of democratic structures and institutions while also allowing the U.S. time to (you know) reload and while they’re (you know) reloading, to give the other Arab dictators time to (you know) mull things over and see if some or (heck) even all of them might just be able to see their way clear to maybe doing a little Wahabite-ectomy on themselves before the Americans, once they’re (you know) finished...reloading...end up having to decide for themselves who the *next* Arab dictatorship is that needs a little (you know) radical surgery in the interest of its own (you know) *long-term* health requirements.