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IF GOD INSISTS: A TRIBUTE TO RASHAD KHALIFA

by Virginia Omar Kamouneh (formerly Karima Omar)

For several years I had thought of him simply as "The Number 19 Man"—you know, that guy in Arizona whose computer research on the Qur'an had smashed so many intellectual walls, freed so many hearts to accept God's last revelation.

I also thought of him with a good deal of bewilderment. After all, this Rashad Khalifa, this #19 guy, was also reputed—and openly claimed—to deny Prophetic traditions. Even the collections of hadith which I had invested so much money and so many brain cells in amassing and absorbing. Not only the "weak" hadith (rather a redundancy, really) which my imported role models frowned upon even more than usual, but the good old Sunni staples of Bukhari and Muslim with their lovely bedtime stories of the Mercy for Mankind forcing his enemies to drink camel urine, gouging out eyes with hot nails—in between satisfying 9 wives in a single evening.

So this #19 guy had the gall to prefer the Qur'an—the Word of God—to these gratuitously graphic goodies? Gee. Then how did he know how to do all the fun stuff the sunnah teaches us? How did he know which shoe to put on first, which hand to eat with, or what to say before, during and after going to the bathroom? From what I had been taught, man could not only not live by bread alone, but he couldn't even make it on a strict Word of God diet—he had to have supplements, other men to do the hard stuff for him—like thinking.

So, for quite awhile, my perception of him was marked by ambivalence. Given my intellectual/emotional/social state at the time, this was probably the best of all emotions—firm indecision. For quite awhile, my comment on Dr. Rashad Khalifa was, "I love the work he's done with Qur'an and may Allah bless him for it but—I can't agree with his views on hadith." It was a stock response, a mantra which I dutifully chanted when asked my opinion of this man from the Mysterious East of Tucson.

For quite awhile. But, as the Qur'an says, "You pass from stage to stage" (84:19) and I certainly did. To stage to stage, in fact, though that's another story altogether. For gradually, almost imperceptibly, I came to understand—and finally accept—what ironically had always qualified my admiration of Dr. Khalifa. But it wasn't through him; it wasn't through his books and newsletters which, I confess, were eclipsed in my library by frightful mounds of Tafsir-of-the-Years and Icky-Ithas—it was simply through my study of hadith, my research and writing and reevaluation of my own beliefs—a process of evolution as unlikely as it was inevitable.

I had heard of lovers of God before; had even met a few who seemed to be caught up in an affair with the Divine. But, more often than not, it seemed to have degenerated into a Miles Standish situation with the love originally addressed to God being intercepted by an (unwilling) intercessor—a Prophet, a spiritual guide, a teacher or somewhat shaky shaikh.

No, I never had met a real lover—not of God, anyway. I'd encountered lovers of His lovers perhaps, or lovers of lovers of His lovers with their wishful arrangements of carefully cultivated hothouse piety, but no direct-dialing devotees. And I certainly didn't expect to find one in this Rashad Khalifa.

By the time I met him, I was a supporter, even a bit of a fan, so I had fully braced myself for the inevitable letdown. Yes, inevitable, for frankly, I expected to find an air of—of paranoia. After all, anyone who had weathered the slings and arrows of controversy that he had over the years was bound to be a little on the jumpy side. So, I anticipated at least a somber, intense man, one who matched the bold face and exclamation points of his writings. I expected a man who hadn't time to be silly, hadn't strength left to laugh at himself and was too busy opening hate mail to crack a smile. But that was OK, I reminded myself; OK and quite natural. Writers always seemed to suffer in the translation of face-to-face encounters. After all, I was a writer, and had seen the suicidal looks of readers who had had the misfortune to at last meet me in the flesh.

Instead, that bright pre-spring afternoon, in the International House of Pancakes deep in the bowels of Burbank California, no less, I found a shining exception to the rule. I found a lover, a true lover of God. A man whose speech, behavior and mannerisms bore witness to the fact that submission to God is indeed a happy state—not the gloomy and grim affair that so many portray it. I found a man with a quick wit, a ready smile, a gentle humility which was fairly radioactive in its trust and reliance on his Creator. On his Creator. Not on his Creator's creation, not on the cultural security blanket of knee-jerk rituals, not on the petty shirk of self-righteous rites or Sufic psychobabble but on God Alone.

Ironically, in all my years of searching for a magical mystical cure-all, I found it in a man who demystifies Islam, who cuts through all of the idolatry of what-to-do-to-whom-with-which-hand-when to reveal the safe, sane and sensible Way that we always pretend and seldom portray it to be. A man who seems content with his God—"...secure and content soul, come back to your Lord, satisfied and satisfying." (89:27-28), a man satisfied that God has "imposed no hardship on you in observing the religion." (22:78) Perhaps that's why he ruffles the feathers of so many bird-brained Muslims, for he embodies the truth—the simple fact that piety and clinical depression are not synonymous, not even on speaking terms. A subversive truth, indeed.

Dr. Khalifa is indeed a curious case. He has gardens of laurels of impressive achievements on which he could easily rest—and not unjustifiably. His translation of the Qur'an is truly inspired, clear, concise—and being scrapped by its translator. Less than 7 years after its publication, he is publishing a revised edition.

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MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

Published Monthly by MASJID TUCSON

May 1988

Ramadan 1408

Editor: Rashad Khalifa, Ph.D.

STEVE JOHNSON

(Pillar of Islamic Society of North America - ISNA)

MAKES THE ULTIMATE MOVE

God is the Lord of those who believe, He leads them out of darkness into the light [2:257].

Only those who possess intelligence will come to Me [2:269, 13:19, & 39:9].

In View of the Qur'anic facts that the majority of people will fail to believe (12:103), and that the majority of those who do believe fall into idolatry (12:106), our heart-felt congratulations go to Steve Johnson for making the ultimate move to GOD ALONE. Steve made his courageous initial move years ago from false Christianity to false Islam. Obviously, God knew of Steve's sincerity in his quest for God's truth, and God saw to it that Steve discovered the true Islam. Hence, the

blessed move came, and Steve declared that he could not possibly accept Hadith, Sunna, or any man-made teachings; he decided that the word of God, the Qur'an, the whole Qur'an, and nothing but the Qur'an, shall be his source of religious guidance.

Congratulations Steve. "Only those who steadfastly persevere ... those who are extremely fortunate succeed in making the ultimate move" (41:35). See Steve's article on Pg 3.

National Council on Islamic Affairs Discovers the Fallacy of Hadith

A famous Hadith where the Prophet Muhammad is accused of predicting that the Muslims will fight the Jews, and that the stones and trees will speak to tell the Muslims about Jews hiding behind them, has been declared by the National Council

on Islamic Affairs as "so stupid," and "un-Islamic," and "anti-Islam." Thus, common sense is prevailing among the enlightened Muslims, and the truth marches on. God bless the National Council on Islamic Affairs.

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED ISLAMIC NATION Sep. 2, 3, & 4, 1988, Tucson

This year's conference is shaping up as a major historic event. Dr. Mansour, the first Azhar Scholar to embrace the true Islam, will deliver the Friday Khutba. Other speakers: Gatut Adisoma, Kassim Ahmad, Malik Ali, Ismail Barakat, Dr. E. Douglass Brown (formerly Rashid Hamed), Gale Cunningham (formerly Razia), Linda Calloway (formerly

Jamilah), Steve Johnson, Virginia Kamouneh (formerly Karima Omar), Feruz Karmally, Rashad Khalifa, Soussan Rey, and Saeed Talari. Official Qur'an Reciter: Fatemeh Karbassi (Parivash). Send for your Conference badge today (Individual fees \$76.00; Family fees \$95.00). See you at the Conference IN SHAA ALLAH.

THE HADITH DEBATE

Rationalism VS Irrationalism

by Kassim Ahmad

I have sufficiently shown ... that the so-called "authentic" Hadith possess the characteristics of being sectarian and factional, anti-science, anti-reason and anti-woman, apart from being anti-Quran. These constitute a perfect prescription for disunity and backwardness.

The current Hadith debate in Malaysia and in some other Muslim countries arising from my book published last year (*Hadith - A Re-evaluation*) reminds me of George Sarton's remark in his monumental three-volume "A History of Science". He said, "The main issue, then as now, was not between materialism and spiritualism, but between rationalism and irrationalism. It is amazing to discover that in that very early time almost all the Greek philosophers had already realized that. No system of theirs, not even the Epicurean, was purely materialistic; none, not even the Platonic, was purely spiritualistic. They all understand that one needs some kind of matter even for thinking, and that one cannot refute spiritualism except with some kind of mind or spirit."

The dominant anti-rationalist current in the present Islamic renaissance movement must sooner or later come to realize, as did their early rationalist ancestors, the profound Quranic truth that faith and reason are not in conflict. They are two sides of the same coin. Many verses stress this. Indeed, God repeatedly says that the Quran is addressed to those who think. And extremely clear verse pointing to the very close relationship between faith and reason reads: "No soul can believe except with God's leave, for He deliberately blocks out those who defy common sense." (10:100) It was precisely because the early Muslim generations observed the unity of faith and reason that they were able to create monuments of science, thought and culture. Present-day Muslims must retrace their steps back to the spirit of those times to regain the scientific, intellectual and political leadership of the world that they once held. Are they capable of doing it again? If they are not (and the odds are against them), other nations will replace them, as the Quran has warned (see Quran 47:38).

I cannot deal with all the points that have been raised in this debate. I have answered some of them in two of my earlier articles (see "Sunday Star" and "New Sunday Times", Kuala Lumpur, June 22, 1986). My traditionalist critics, theologians and scholars alike, who have brought out two books to answer mine, have merely repeated the age-old classical arguments for upholding the Hadith, which I have refuted. It is my humble opinion that they have not answered my refutation.

I have quoted many clear verses of the Quran and some conforming hadith in my book to prove that the prophet brought, taught, followed and preached with only the Quran. Unfortunately, our modern-day blind followers of traditionalist theologians simply will not give serious consideration to them, seeking to rationalize them to conform to their already-formed opinions, and arguing that the majority of theologians, past and present, cannot make mistakes. Yet they know full well that the truth does not depend on the majority!

They tirelessly and unashamedly argue that God's command to us to obey the messenger means that we should follow the Hadith when the phrase clearly means to obey God and to follow only the Quran. This meaning is supported by countless other verses in the Quran, by such proven weaknesses of very many 'authentic' hadith and by such proven weaknesses of the classical Hadith methodology that it is pointless to dwell on it any further.

Most of our traditionalist theologians and scholars have proved themselves quite incapable of discussing the Hadith issue rationally and intelligently. This is the strongest reason

why a public debate is necessary so that the enlightened sections of the Muslim community can criticize their errors as well as their narrow-mindedness and bigotry, and bring them back to reason.

Many people criticize me for connecting the Hadith with Muslim disunity and backwardness, some contending that many Muslims have not even read any book of Hadith, let alone being influenced by it! They have missed the point altogether. The relevant question is one of the ideological basis or bases of Muslim behaviour, not what books they read or do not read. As a matter of fact, the Hadith has been with us for around a thousand years and has been actively propagated to us for as long. I agree that not all Muslims have come under the spell of the Hadith, as a number of them have chosen to follow liberalism or Marxism as of late (including me, at one time!). But none of us can deny the fact that the Hadith, along among other ideological ingredients, has been, since its emergence, the major ideological basis of Muslim thought and behaviour. If one understands this non-Quranic ideological configuration under which modern Muslims live, one can grasp the profound import of the prophetic words of the Quran:

Shall We treat the submitters like the guilty? What is wrong with you? How do you judge? Do you have another book that you apply? One that gives you anything you want? (68:35-38)

The messenger will say, "My Lord, my people have deserted this Quran." (25:30)

Of course, the traditionalist theologians and scholars, tied to their traditional 'sacrosanct' methodology, will hotly deny the applicability of these verses to the Muslims. But since the Quran is current, what can the phrase "another book" that "gives you anything you want" mean for the Muslims but the Hadith? As to the second verse, it obviously refers to the present rejection of the Quran by all ideological groups of mankind, including the formal Muslims. The term "my people" used by Prophet Muhammad must mean "all mankind" since his mission was universal.

In spite of the contradictory testimony of historical sources, a general conclusion may be safely drawn that the first division in the early Muslim community between the 'orthodox' Sunni party and the 'heterodox' Shi'ah party of Ali was both political and religious. The party of Ali resorted to a so-called Ghadir Khum hadith in which the prophet was alleged to have said, "He of whom I am master, of him Ali is also the master," in order to bolster up their factionalism when the noble prophet spent his whole life fighting against it! Of course, at this time the hadith had not yet been compiled or institutionalized as a primary source of law, but the great prestige of the prophet had already been misused by the various political and theological factions. It should be well noted that as long as the Quran remained the only primary source of reference for the Muslims, they could reunite and advance on the basis of its teachings, but as soon as they set up other sources of reference to rival the Quran, as happened when they set up the Hadith as the "second primary" source, the division became irreversible, continuous and permanent.

I have sufficiently shown in my little book that the so-called 'authentic' Hadith possess the characteristics of being sectarian and factional, anti-science, anti-reason, and

anti-women, apart from being anti-Quran. These constitute a perfect prescription for disunity and backwardness. Of course, detailed data should now be collected to fully demonstrate and prove the destructiveness of the Hadith ideology to the Muslims. This, however, was not the aim of my book.

In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, many Muslims are still unable to disassociate Prophet Muhammad from the Hadith. But this is precisely the first important hurdle to clear before one can get any rational understanding of the Hadith. The classical formula is: "Bukhari (or the other compilers) reports from A, who heard from B, who heard from C, who heard from D, who heard from E, who

heard from F, who heard from the prophet." It is a report of an alleged saying or doing of the prophet across six to eight generations. At the time of the compilation (between 200 and 400 years after the prophet) the first few generations of alleged reporters were no more and there were no sure means of determining the truth of those reports directly. Even the traditionalists admit that the bulk of the report is hearsay. Such being the case, it is astonishing that the consensus of traditionalist theologians has required Muslims to believe in it, and has pronounced those who disbelieve in it to be outside the fold of Islam!

[To be continued in the coming issues]

MEDITATION ON A JUGULAR VEIN

by Steve A. Johnson

Closer to me than my jugular vein? Then He knew. He knew when joy slipped into routine and routine into hatred. Why didn't He just flick my heart, ever so lightly—a reassurance, a hope filled nudge? But He didn't, and even hatred slipped away. Then came the tears of pleading, "Please let me feel." But the answer? Silence. Always the same "please", the same questions, the same remnants of hope; but the same answer—Silence. The tears stopped.

"Everyone walks through the desert," the wise-feigning, saint-feigning Muslim sheikh said. He didn't understand. It was not the desert I feared. Deserts can have blue sky surrounding the cruel sun, they have shifting sands, days and nights, skittering creatures—life. I don't fear the desert, only the absence of desert; the absence of feeling—spiritual death.

He knew when the prayer was followed by sighs and quiet stares through cold window glass into...onto streets chaotic with twilight traffic. He was there when I played my role—Mr. Muslim lecturing to the lost lonely miserable unbelievers—a paid savior amid the "ma sha'Allah's" and "Allahu Akbar's". Why didn't He at least let me delude myself in the act? Why always the silence inside, placing silent judgment on the different me's?

He felt and knew before I forced my smile, a handshake, a word of praise. So what was He teaching me? What was I to see? What insight? What meaning?

He was closer to me than the pulsing vein the moment I whispered, "NO", "NO MORE." No more. My God is not of ossified rules separating men from women, believers in this from believers in that. My God does not sit sternly denouncing the goodness outside the barbed wire of Islamic law, or condemning love that bursts into music and festivity.

He felt the joy in me, in Him when after the "NO" I said "YES" to the mysterious Real beyond theology, beyond hadith, cosmic light and hope years past ritual.

He sustained the me that did not leave a truth, but who now embraces The Truth that cannot be enshrined in Arabic. No, it is The Truth that dances on the language of wordless faith.

Closer than my jugular vein? He knew and felt it all. He gave the permission, and shared in the journey. It cannot be wrong or evil because life cannot be wrong or evil. If He is closer to me than me, then it was all His and it was good.

Virginia Kamouneh

[Cont'd from Page 4]

NEW VIDEO PROGRAMS

He is comfortable, at-home-with-his-feet-propped-up-on-the-coffee-table, with self-correction—and I think I know his secret. It's no secret, really—it's simply Qur'an. "Yeah," he'd probably say with a sly smiling twinkle, "Simply Qur'an. Just the Word of God." Well, you get the point. His platform is indeed constructed entirely on Qur'an, a fact which is gently evident in conversation with him. Unlike so many self-styled "scholars" and ignorant "alims," his incessant reference to Qur'an is truly spontaneous, uncontrived—and uncluttered by fishy fish stories and fatuous fatwas.

Since my "association" with him (it sounds like we've been discovered in a love nest with Shaikh Rattle 'n Roll and Jimmy Swaggert in ISNA HQ and let's see how long it takes for that to hit the rumor mill!), I have been asked by countless individuals, "Do you know what Rashad Khalifa is all about?" They have heard, they confide in hushed tones, that he is a spy for the Qadiyanis, a Baha'i, a Mason, Jello Biafra's podiatrist... No, they've never actually met him, they confess; no, they haven't actually read his work, but they've heard from someone whose second cousin heard from someone that—

But Dr. Khalifa remains unfazed by these rumors; in fact, he seems genuinely amused by them. He says that these tales have actually been instructional, that he's learned most of what he knows about these sects from the "Islamic" tabloids, the National Expirers of the Muslim world, that broadcast them.

Yes, I do know what Rashad Khalifa is all about, or at least, I think I'm beginning to; I only wish that they did. All they would have to do to find out is to pick up a Qur'an.

"They want to put out God's light with their mouths, but God insists upon perfecting His light..." (9:32) God insists. And that's what Rashad Khalifa, this gentle, twinkling #19 man in Arizona is all about.

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