

**A press interview run by Onislam.net
with
Professor Abdul-Hamid Abu Sulayman**

On Sunday, 7/11/2012, Onislam.net held in the Sixth of October City an in-depth press interview with Professor Abdul-Hamid Abu Sulayman, Director of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, on the following topic: "Limits to the relationship between the freedom of faith and freedom of expression from an Islamic perspective", on behalf of the Onislam.net gate, for both its versions, Arabic and English.

The following persons represented Onislam.net for the interview, and put forth their questions to Professor Abdul-Hamid Abu Sulayman,

- 1- Mr Hisham Ja'far
- 2- Mr Usamah Abdul-Aziz
- 3- Mr Muhammad Zaidan
- 4- Dr Majdi Sa'eed, and
- 5- Mr Hisham Abdul-Aziz

The interview was held in the form of a number of questions, all relevant to the issue under discussion, posed by the interviewers, and responded to by Prof. Abu Sulayman.

The First Question posed by Mr Usamah:

One notices a kind of return to religion in the West, in terms of defending what the Western people hold to be sacred in their encounter with the Muslim world. So the question is: has the 11 September 2001 event resulted in any increase in the number of those who enter Islam in the West, despite the hostile attitude which swept the West in the aftermath of those tragic events?

Prof. Abu Sulayman's answer: It is a common mistake in the Arab/Muslim World to interpret the others' behavior in light of our own culture – this usually leads us to misconstrue the peculiarities of the phenomena. Here for instance, it is an illusion to speak like this of religion in the West: we all know about the religious tyranny in Europe in the Middle Ages, when the church claimed to be the final arbiter in almost all matters. In reaction to that, the West adopted a social Darwinism – and this spirit is still predominant until today. They had

some excuse in rejecting the corrupt version of Christianity inculcated by the church, together with its representation of man, life and worldview. The new philosophy upheld materialism and power; it overpowered and subdued lesser powers; ignored man's spiritual needs, and ignored the requirements of truth, justice, enlightenment and human responsibility – indeed it was a regression to baser elements of life, to man's animal side, a reversion to the law of the Jungle. In this context, might is right, survival for the fittest means for the most ferocious: and this has really taken root in the Western mind, and in the minds of those who hold the West as their model.

Bearing this in mind, we will find the Zionist religious movement as no more than a political justification for aggression on the part of colonial powers against Muslim nations.

Let us note that such notions as humanity, cooperation, integration, and human edification have disappeared for centuries from the dictionary of the racist nations – although this has taken shape in different ways, all equally predatory, materialistic and colonially-minded. The leading spirit has been one of occupation, with all the concomitant cruelty and bestiality. Have we not witnessed enough racist and imperial action on the part of Western powers? Has their oppression not tormented most nations of the earth? It is this doctrine, this thought and philosophy, that explains the trait of nationalism in modern Western thought – a national spirit that drove its bearers to exterminate large communities in the Americas, in Africa, Australia and the far east; it lay behind the Opium War of China and Japan – and it is the basis for what happens until today in Palestine and elsewhere in the Third World and Africa.

The law of the jungle is, the law of materialism, predation, oppression, racism and subjugation. The doctrine of light on the other hand, is the doctrine of Truth, found in Islam and in the non-corrupted aspects of the other Divine religions. It is the doctrine of truth, justice; accountability, brotherhood, compassion, and human welfare. It is the doctrine of piety and protecting human life; the doctrine of discharging what is entrusted with you, providing justice to the wronged and holding back from corruption and waste. It is putting the human consideration before the narrow selfish or national or racial considerations. In this doctrine truth is invariably given first place – unlike the doctrine of might is right we have described above. It is the law of the jungle that predominates at present, while justice and truth have no existence of their own – they are only acknowledged in so far as they serve the priorities, or rather the material calculations of national interests and political exigencies; it is the scramble for advantages, and the struggle for political

gain and subjugation of the weaker nations. This has long been practiced, and is still being practiced, everywhere around us – many nations, especially in Africa and South America, still groan under the monstrous practices of the colonial powers – and we have a most glaring example of it at the hands of the Zionist movement: for over a half century the Zionist colonizer has inflicted all kinds aggression against the Palestinian people – their land was confiscated, and many massacres took place on their own land, and many people were banished from their homes. All this has been done with the full support of Western imperial powers, with their weapons and in fulfillment of their policies. Despite the false claims, fabricated pretexts, psychological warfare, political stratagems and tasteless propaganda – there is a most telling proof that the West's dealing with nations is governed by materialistic impulses and base motives; it will not hesitate to inflict on other nations all kinds of injustice and aggression, nor will it hesitate to use double dealing if not multiple dealings. Humankind has long suffered from the West's oppressive and disastrous dealings; and it developed, for better attaining its goals, mass destruction and deadly weaponry. This is the opposite of the doctrine of light– whose message has descended from heaven to lay the basis of justice, truth, helpfulness and cooperation. Anything else is false and deceptive.

Now as for the question about the increase in the number of those who enter Islam after the September 2001 events, the reason, as I see it, is the state of agitation and turbulence that took place in the West after the above-mentioned events – and its focus has been on effecting a state of mobilization in the West against the Muslim World. But this attempt backfired – a large number of Western people felt drawn to read translations of the Qur'an, the traditions and biography of the Messenger, peace be upon him, and some other literature that is not written by biased colonizers. And they found in Islam what their spirits needed – hence the big numbers of those who enter Islam.

A question posed by Hisham Ja'far

What is the relationship between freedom in the Western sense, and in the religious sense?

Prof. Abu Sulayman: After the West gave up its religious faith, it was replaced by animalistic materialism; which appeared in three manifestations.

First: in the economic sphere, capitalism took hold. All the economic theories were designed to serve the interests of the West, as for instance in opening up all markets for Western products. One very glaring

example is Adam Smith's economic theory. While this theory promoted the idea of free trade, it did that when the colonial West was the only producing force – it monopolized production; colonies, on the other hand, were the consumers. They were not expected to have in the foreseeable future any industrial production, and that suited the West, for it needed those nations as a market for its products.

Second: In the political sphere, there appeared the idea of democracy. Now the problem here is not with democracy itself, Although according to democracy truth and error are arbitrarily subjective; hence the West's double standard concerning democracy, and here lies the real problem: the West took democracy to be all right only for Western nations – for other nations it thought it right to apply the law of the jungle; or to devour nations in the name of colonialism.

Third: concerning freedom, the West adopted the moral principle of liberalism – absolute freedom, with nothing to restrain it except what an individual's whims and desires dictated. No common sense or moral code were to be consulted there. The result was not just that perversion and collapse of the family happened in the West; the West would not settle with less than the spread of this culture to the whole world: globalization is the means to having this culture disseminate, through all the available media and forums and international agreements.

What happens here is that freedom is getting out of hand, shattering in its way all that is natural and ethical, all that is good for humanity – it turned out to be opting for anarchy, destruction and decadence. Turning to history, one finds that all people in the past who had trespassed the limits of natural and productive morality brought upon their own collapse – and we do not here make an exception for the Islamic civilization: for there came the time when it trespassed the limits of what was good and beneficial for humankind; it replaced what was right and fruitful with what was injurious, unjust and counterproductive: Don't we see the outcome of all this around us, when the Muslim Ummah is groaning under all kinds of servility, subjugation, weakness, backwardness and misery?

Let's refer in this connection to France and Turkey's joining the EU. It is no wonder to see France at the head of voices which resist Turkey's joining the European Union: it realizes that a nation as big as Turkey, a unanimously acknowledged regional power, would bring about some Islamic moral principles into their midst, to replace the liberal morality that had entered the stage of anarchy and social decadence: it would disrupt the Western materialistic doctrine and its wildly liberal ways. And hence France's fierce resistance to Turkey's joining them.

And there is another ugly dimension to the backwardness of Muslims and collapse of their civilization: the deviation had started quite early, as early as the Umayyad Caliphate. It was since then that a kind of confusion started to blur the vision of Muslims; their worldview was becoming more and more negative: since many Companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, had passed away soon after the Prophet's death, the supreme teaching of the Qur'an was receding, and the Prophet's, peace be upon him, guidance had come to a stop – it was they who had received the Prophet's guidance, and had witnessed his wise decisions. It was this generation who saw firsthand the implementation of the Qur'anic values, and saw how the Islamic teachings took shape in real time and space. Now this generation was passing away: some through natural death, and some in the frequent fighting – inside and outside the Arabian Peninsula. The invading Muslim armies consisted mostly of tribesmen who had not received enough education; the Arab tribes were the predominant group in the political system – and these tribes knew little about Islam; they were more the children of pre-Islamic racist and animalistic traditions, which ignored the rights of the 'other'. It was difficult to erase the pre-Islamic traditions from their memories completely. Their pre-Islamic values were reemerging and coming to surface again, as a result of the clashes at an early stage with the two adjacent empires, the Byzantine and the Persian, and the desert life was too tough and involved conflict over scarce natural resources.

Until today not everyone embodies the values of Islamic solidarity, cooperation, family ties, neighborly ties, and national loyalty. And now the whole Ummah groans at the mischief these forces bring about, the corruption and unrest at all levels. Definitely nothing like what the Qur'an teaches as the fruit of having diverse tribes, "and made you [O mankind] into nations and tribes, that you may know each other [not to despise each other]. Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things." [49:13]

The point we need to repeat here is that when the desert Arabs were let to have sway over the nascent political life of the new Ummah, the political side prevailed over the religious, the individual over the social – with all the concomitant decadence, corruption and tyranny. It was all in fulfillment of the Messenger's, peace be upon him, prophecies, when he described the delusion and aberration that would come about after his passing away; and the outcome of such aberration on the progress of the political, social, and economic life of the Ummah; more important is the impact on the intellectual and Islamic worldview.

Those tribes were, because of the dry atmosphere of the Arabian Peninsula, less civilized on a cultural level than other groups, and that was true of them before Islam and after Islam, for they were in both eras secluded in their desert or in the high mountains. It was the duty of the rest of the Muslim Ummah to do all in their power to bring that sector of the Ummah within the prevalent civilization; like any junior, they were always in danger of delinquency. Especially in such a superior system as the Islamic one, far above racism and the baser instincts, no effort should have been spared to bring them to join the Islamic society, in all its humanity, civilization, cooperation, and freedom; they must have been made to choose between fighting and Islam. This should be the first step towards lifting the primitive and racist tribes to the level of civilization and civil society. By doing this, one would not be forcing those tribes to rise to the level of Islam: it would be really like the 'breaking' of wild horses; they would not come round without the threat of resorting to force – you see how a child has to be forced to take the necessary medicine; it is of these that the Qur'an says, "The desert Arabs say: 'We believe.' Say, 'You have no faith; but only say, "We have submitted our wills to Allah," for Faith has not yet entered your hearts.' "[49:14]

The Qur'an-trained generation, under the guidance of the Prophet, peace be upon him, included such figures as Umar bin al-Khattab, who announced, "How could you take people for slaves when their mothers gave birth to them as free persons!" and he said this in the course of arbitrating between an Egyptian Copt, who was hit by the son of Amr bin al-As, the viceroy of Egypt, and Amr himself, the great military leader who had previously conquered that land: he let that Coptic retaliate against the viceroy's son. It was that same Umar who would not enter a region hit by an epidemic of a fatal disease, while on his way to Jerusalem, to sign the treaty of peace; and when someone objected to his holding back from entering the epidemic-hit land, he asserted, "Oh yes! I do flee from Allah's destiny, to replace it with an alternative, no less Allah's destiny than the first one." Those are natural laws rather than superstitions and fabrications.

Let's take a little more elaborate incident – the distribution of the Iraqi cultivated land. According to sources, Umar bin al-Khattab spoke to the public from the pulpit, seeking their counsel concerning the distribution of Iraq's cultivated land, a land which was a spoil of war – his own stance was that it be the state's land, that it should belong to the public treasury. Some Companions of the Prophet, peace be upon them, however, spoke out against it, and asserted that what he proposed to do was in contradiction with the practice of the Messenger, who had divided a land taken by force, among the Muslim fighters. He had no choice but to

follow the practice of the Prophet, they were sure. His argument was this: What would we have left for Muslims to come? All the land would have been distributed and inherited by certain families, and no other Muslim would be left any of it. Their decision was not the right decision, he said. Abdul-Rahman bin Aouf, a prominent Companion, and a very celebrated merchant himself, said: So what is your suggestion? Is not the land the same as other spoils of war? Some other Companions, like Bilal, Amr bin al-As and al-Zubair bin al-Awwam opined that he divide the land among the fighters who had participated in that fighting. Some other Companions, like Ali bin Abu Taleb, Uthman, Mu'adh bin Jabal, Talha bin Ubaid Allah, Abu Ubaidah and Abdullah bin Umar agreed with Umar – asserting that that land had better not be divided, that it belonged to all Muslims. As for the Ansar, the Medina Companions, they were unanimously of this last opinion. At last Umar settled the dispute by declaring that had found evidence in the Qur'an in favor of one side – several sources report, though in different wording, that Umar asserted that he found in the Qur'an what settled it; and that is when the Almighty says:

"What Allah has bestowed on His Messenger and taken away from the peoples of the townships, – belongs to Allah, – to His Messenger and to kindred and orphans, the needy and the wayfarer; in order that it may not merely make a circuit between the wealthy among you;" [59:7] and the Qur'an adds, "Some part is due to the indigent Muhajirs, those who were expelled from their homes and their property, while seeking Grace from Allah and His Good Pleasure, and aiding Allah and His Messenger: such are indeed the sincere ones." [59:8] But Allah did not leave it there, for He added more types, "But those who, before them, had homes in Medina and had adopted the Faith, – show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the latter, but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their own lot." [59:9], and added even more types, "And those after them say: 'Our Lord! Forgive us, and our brethren who came before us into the Faith, and leave not, in our hearts, rancor against those who have believed;" [59:10] the last type includes coming Muslim generations to the end of time on earth. So Umar commented on the verses that the mentioned spoils of war belong, according to the above verses, to all the above types; so how could we divide them among the single group (soldiers) and bypass all the coming generations. "Indeed," Umar added, "the verses include all believers without exception; not a single Muslim but has some right in this. Even the herdsman, grazing his goat at Kidaa' should have his share. I assure you that if I survive for some time, the herdsman in Himyar (of Yemen) will receive his share,

while in Saru, his region, without having to trudge all the way here to Medina for it."

But things did not stay like this. Scholastic mentality permeated the Medina scholars; they relied too heavily on the Prophet's sunnah (the collective term for all the Prophet's legacy) and got further from the Qur'an, ignoring its principles and purposes, which may not be confined to any limited time or space – hence, the Islamic intellect fell far from the previous heights, its institutions fell into disuse, and a new era of backwardness and rigidity reigned. We still suffer from this condition – you see how we live as parasites on other civilizations, exporting to them our raw materials at cheap prices and importing the same materials as high-tech products at exorbitant prices; in fact all the nations of the region suffer from the cost of such imports, for not much is left for other expenditures.

What we should be doing for picking up, for raising the Ummah – and the rest of humankind – to their previous level of values and the lofty position of the past, is to reestablish the Qur'anic worldview and mindset – it is there that we may find the meaning of life; and it is from there that we may set out to put right our approaches and ways of thinking; and set free our minds by reforming our teaching methodology; by freeing our historical legacy from all the weeds that have clung to it and that impede our progress towards civilized life – we need to work on sorting out the worthy from the worthless, disposing of the worthless, and putting the valuable to good use.

Mr Hisham Ja'far had more to ask concerning the same point; he said: It is sometimes claimed that religion imposes limits on the freedom of faith, that religion is there to direct a human's progress in life – this seems so when Islam is presented in its legal aspect, especially concerning the Divinely-specified penalties [*hudud*, pl. of *hadd*] for certain sins. Some people do actually see Islam in term of such narrow perspectives rather than contemplating man's existence on earth as a viceroy and as a responsible agent. In this perspective, religion appears as a list of rituals and bodily movements – rather than a source of values and understanding. So how would Prof. Abdul-Hamid solve this problem?

Prof. Abu Sulayman answered that whatever good we had gained soon after the Prophet (PBUH) passed away, it was because the activity of *da'wa* (call to Islam) was running its course independently of the rule of the state: *da'wa* work takes care of inculcating religion – its values, purposes and objectives. And it does that, should do that, independently of the political authority's dominance – for the political authority is

always inclined to manipulate religion, especially its great authority over souls, for its own advantage, and the advantage of the ruler's supporters and minions – including some of the scholars and intellectuals who claim to be in the service of the public. As you know, the political system would not hesitate to monopolize both authority and wealth, therefore spreading corruption and repressing the people's creative potential and growth. It is in this that religion would turn into meaningless manifestations, and sometimes a lever for subjugation and intimidation.

We have evidence enough for this, which I'll elaborate from my own experience. I assure you that every time I had intellectual doubt in my life I turned to religion, and found in it a solution for that doubt. It is settled in my mind that a sound perception of the Islamic texts will lead you to the right way; that belief in the Islamic message is based on sound thinking. Early in life I inquired: Why am I a Muslim? Is it because I was born Muslim, or was born in Mecca? Is it because it is Islam everywhere around me – or because I have to be a Muslim? I know a priori that there is this universe, and its creation is something beyond my comprehension – nor do I feel urged to understand the act of creation. But when someone comes and announces: I have a message for you from your Creator and the Creator of the world – well, I cannot take this announcement lightly. It concerns me most intimately! In response I asked myself: How do I know that someone who claims to have a message from the Creator does actually have such message? Thinking it over, I arrived at three criteria for this: One that it be authentically transmitted, and the only scripture I find to be absolutely authentic is the Qur'an. The second is that it be a message of goodness, and this is true of Islam – we find in the Qur'an: "Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion," [16:90]. The third criterion is how to ascertain that it is a genuine message, and not a baseless claim? How can I do it when I have no access to the Prophet?

Well, it dawned on me that for an answer to this last question, I needed to look into the Messenger's character. And what I found compelled me to believe that he is a truthful Messenger from Allah: for Muhammad grew up as an orphan, among illiterate people, in a simple, barren town, devoid of any philosophy, schools, libraries or a ruling system; he had never assumed any post or political position, nor had he any kind of experience: he was a wage-earner. Add to this another fact, asserted to be true of him by all his contemporaries, and extremely important to what will take place later – the trait I speak of is trustworthiness: for how could one accept a message from the Lord if the bearer is not truthful and trustworthy? We know all we need to know

about Muhammad's (peace be upon him) life. We know that he was already forty; that he had experienced all there was to experience in life: that he had grown into maturity, married and had children; a man who had shown no ambition of any kind, and yet he cried to the Quraish people [the great tribe of Mecca], from above mount Safa: "O Quraish people! Suppose I were to tell you of some horse-riding men about to attack you from behind that mountain – would you have believed me? And they said: yes we would, for never have we heard a false word from you. And then the Prophet said: So I come to you with a warning of severe penalty [from Allah if you fail to believe.]"

I felt sure that it made no sense that someone had this ambition, and had hidden it all these years – for forty years, and through all the stages of life, then he surprised everyone by asserting: I am a prophet from Allah. You know how, by age forty, one's ambitions and aspirations would have cooled down, for it is the age of maturity. It is not the age of having new ambitions and aspirations; and we find that some men, from his own people, some intelligent and capable men, believed in Muhammad, and accepted to enter his risky venture, with all the concomitant hardship and suffering, for thirteen years. They never faltered or hesitated, and they never changed their opinion about him. Then, soon after, I find him as a great political leader, philosopher, and educator. I had no alternative but to believe in him as a genuine Messenger from Allah.

While analyzing some psycho-sociological research on the students in the residential area of the International Islamic University of Malaysia, it suddenly dawned on me that there was some great philosophy behind the penal system in Islam, a system that had been singled out for attack. I started to see something new when the number four [the minimum accepted witnesses in a trial of adultery] appeared to have important psychological and social implications: four persons are the minimum number for effective social interaction, the minimum community, so to speak, with all its psychological and social needs, including reproduction and proliferation. For people to reproduce we need, not counting the parents, four persons, two men and two women; with less than four, one of the parents will have to participate, in which case the children would be related through the father or through the mother: this is also the reason four witnesses are the minimum accepted number for convicting someone of adultery, all stating their testimony in explicit unequivocal language, each and every one of them; for an adulterer who commits this sin with four persons watching, then he is doing it publicly, in the presence of society: another evidence to indicate that four, and not three or less, is the minimum society.

From such analysis, and all the reasoning that has led to it, one can see that the number four for testimony is not arbitrarily determined, but has its significant psychological and social implications: the critical point here is that the sinner is careless enough to commit his sin in public, with society present: he is defying the system, and is spreading promiscuity and shamelessness; at the same time he is encroaching on society's freedom, and enticing the growing generation to fall into similar sin, while the Almighty warns us, "Allah does not love that evil should be noised abroad in public speech;" [4:148] and the Prophet's tradition admonishes, "If anyone of you does fall in sin, let him hide it."

It also shows why witnesses who are less than four, even three with explicit and unequivocal testimony, are penalized; one can see from the above reasoning that in the first place such penalty is to discourage slander and careless publicizing of vice; not just this particular deed. To do things publicly is to do them under the eyes of society, and four is its minimum number; and it is equally important that less-than-four witnesses are to be penalized, a fair penalty for their deed – for instead of exposing the sinner, they should have urged him to repent and hold to the straight path. Their exposing the sin is transferring what was a mistake into a public affair, into slander and a publicizing of vice. It is evident in this whole situation that the purpose is to keep this vice concealed as far as possible – no one is to take it upon himself to look forward to discovering people's sin; no one is allowed to make public what was intended to be done in secret. Any less-than-four witnesses are exposing and publicizing what happened in private; they deliberately lay in wait to catch someone's sin, and then went on to make it public news. They are exposing the sinner and publicizing what should have been kept concealed. What was done at a moment of weakness is transferred from the sphere of private behavior to the sphere of slander and exposure, and it publicizes vice and spreads it. This has to do with the public and the social; and that makes it necessary that the perpetrator be penalized.

Let it be quite clear to our minds why a condition is set that four and not less witnesses give their explicit and unequivocal testimony: There should not be testimony depending on surmise or inferences. The four witnesses must all give their testimony in the most explicit terms – only then it is concluded that the sinner has done the deed in defiance of society. Had the punishment on adultery been for the mistake, for the yielding to a desire, it would have been enough to have two witnesses; indications and presumptions would be accepted as secondary evidence, as in crimes of property and injury, in which proofs and penalty are for deterring the action in itself and discouraging its reoccurrence: social security in connection with property and physical injury are ordained as a

deterrent, and not for stopping exposure. It is not so with the crimes connected with desires and instinctive lusts – four witnesses are here a necessity, and their testimony must be explicit and unequivocal: for they are ordained to expose the sinner's making light of the safety of society, for irresponsibly ignoring its system, and committing what may spread vice among believers.

We may find support for all this in the Qur'an, "Those who love to see scandal published broadcast among the Believers, will have a grievous Penalty in this life and the Hereafter: Allah knows, and you do not know;" [24:19] and "And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witnesses to support their allegations, – flog them with eighty stripes; and reject their evidence ever after: for such men are wicked transgressors; – Unless they repent thereafter and mend their conduct; for Allah is Of-Forgiving, Most Merciful." [24:4-5] And elsewhere in the Qur'an: "And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring Allah to mind, and ask for forgiveness of their sins, – and who can forgive sins except Allah? – and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in the wrong they have done." [3:135]

Evidence does exist, for anyone who searches for it, that the kind of punishment we have listed above, the Divine-specified punishments [*hudud*], is the maximum penalty; society may decide to commute the penalty, as long as it deters crime – indeed the judiciary authority may decide to forgive a killer, a thief, etc; or to imprison a convict long enough to feel that he no longer represents a source of danger; otherwise he may be detained in jail until death.

One may also discuss what is called the Divine-specified punishment for apostasy – the Qur'an is very particular concerning penalties for crimes related to this world, what has been legally known as '*hudud*', and that includes ordained punishments on theft, adultery, highway robbery, and rebellion against the legitimate ruler; and then, amazingly, if you search for specified penalty for apostasy, you will not find one – now apostasy is a very different kind of sin, since it pertains to faith, or the essence of faith; but there is nowhere in the Qur'an a penalty in this world for it, notwithstanding its seriousness and enormity. Even in locations where the Qur'an does discuss 'apostasy' and 'apostates' who act in a conspiring way against Islam, those who enter Islam, to announce soon afterwards their withdrawal from it and opting to disbelieve – they mean thereby to foment doubt and disturbance among Muslims; this has been reported in the Qur'an: "A section of the People of the Book say: 'Believe in the morning what is revealed to the Believers, but reject it at the end of the day; perchance they may themselves turn back!' " [3:72]; and even

when the problem is most serious – when rejecting the Faith is perpetrated in a spirit of conspiracy – we do not find even one verse stating a this-world punishment for apostasy, or for plots involving apostasy – like the plot of entering Islam and then soon leaving it to confuse believers – all that we find is just other-world punishments¹. On the contrary we find the Qur'an discuss faith in a tone opposite to that adopted for other sins, despite the above plots; we find the verses of the Qur'an stress the freedom of belief; that no coercion may be used for winning people to the faith. Likewise, we find in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) behavior the same adherence to the freedom of conviction. For instance, although the Jewish community of Medina fought and conspired against the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, and against the nascent Muslim state, and though the Messenger had enough strength and confidence to crush them, we do not find at any time a resort to compulsion to make them enter Islam, neither at the Prophet's, peace be upon him, time, nor after his decease.

The same is true in dealing with the Christians in the Arabian Peninsula: rather than compelling them, we find the Prophet, peace be upon him, inviting the Najran Christians to his mosque, where he debated with them in the best spirit; he did not try to insult them or their faith – they were included in the pledge which ensures the safety of Christians and Jews. At the same time, he prohibited Muslims from hurting the monks in their monasteries; and urged Muslims to treat Egypt's Copts well, to deal with the Magus people in the same way as the Christians and Jews were to be treated. As for apostasy, it was to be dealt with by the acting authority on an individual basis – if it was for causing confusion and mischief, then its punishment could be a death sentence. But let us remember that belief and apostasy here are not what settles in the heart; it is a show of belief or disbelief that is dealt with in accordance with their impact on the life of the Muslim community.

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1. See the following verses of the Qur'an: 2:217, 256; 3:85-91; 3:100; 3:117; 5:54; 4:127; and alnahl: 106-110.

From this it must be the rule in our dealing with children that religious education must be based on conviction and a call to Faith in the best spirit, never on compulsion and overpowering. It is so since free will is the condition for responsibility.

There was a question about the comparison between human moral freedom and animalistic materialistic chaos.

In his reply, **Prof. Abu Sulayman** asserted that the freedom of expression had to be guaranteed, and that any attempt to impose some arbitrary limitation on the freedom of expression was tantamount to tyranny. Freedom in this context allows one to do that which is ethical, beneficial, and in line with the accepted values and conceptions. It does not encompass what is harmful, perverse and unnatural, for these last are bestial and anarchic. Prof. Abu Sulayman emphasized education – brining up the individual to uphold what is truthful and right. What happened to Islamic thought was the result of a decline in the methods of teaching: it is essentially the predominance of the language of threatening and subjugation, and the lack of constructive curricula. If you examine our curricula, you will find that certain crucial dimensions are missing – as for instance a comprehensive and analytical perspective of knowledge. One does not find there a recognition of God's Ways or Laws "*sunnan* in Arabic", operative in both nature and human behavior – which is the Islamic equivalent of the 'laws of nature' according to Western, materialistic thinking. It is to such laws 'natural laws' that the Prophet was alluding when he said, [as in *Sahih al-Bukhari*] "The best among you in pre-Islamic life are the best among you in Islam – if they attain mature reasoning." This tradition of the Prophet's is asserting that for efficient education and socialization one needs to refer to Allah's laws and ways, which provide the basis for any knowledge about human beings; that how we deal with those laws will determine the kind of psychological structure of the individual; it means that how effectively we can deal with those laws will instill in our youth the potentials and talents they need – or their opposites; such traits as courage/cowardice, trustworthiness/untrustworthiness, etc. come under this endeavor. And then, such potentials and talents will be used rightly or wrongly depending on the worldview of the community, and according to the predominant trends in the particular community. For instance a soldier in the army and a gangster both need to show loyalty; but while the soldier uses that allegiance in protecting the security of his society, the gangster may use his allegiance to bring harm and injure people. From this one may see how grave was the mistake of our scholars when they neglected to dedicate themselves, or some of them, to studying modern theoretical and practical approaches to the human being; to learn all they can about childhood and its part in preparing the individual; how unmindful they were when they neglected the appropriate psychological and educational discourse needed for each phase of life, how crucial this discourse is for setting up the right and desirable personality traits of the Muslim individual. We need to instill in the individual the emotional and intellectual stimuli for proper socialization, so that it is an efficient tool

for reform and development. The individual can play an active role in the progress of the community, and in correcting its worldview; he/she can overcome many of the perversions in behavior that result from perversions in conceptualization, and he/she can help society regain the ability to deal properly with the issues of life and any kind of challenge society might encounter.

Another relevant factor in the failure of education is the absence of a proper psychological and educational discourse that is essential for bringing up the Muslim child. That we do not have in our hands such discourse has resulted in a grave deficiency in the Muslim child's consciousness. Our child grows up into an adult that lacks the consciousness for mobilizing his potentials. Proper psychological discourse is a necessity to have the will to exert oneself, and to be proactive enough in dealing with the challenges we all have to encounter and grapple with. The proper psychological knowledge, and educating the child at the level of the best scientific education – that is essential for overcoming the deficiency at the level of individuals and at the level of the community. When a society lacks adequate intellectual maturity, and this is true of the Muslim Ummah at the moment, then the individual, and of course the whole community, will not respond successfully to the requirement of a civilizing reform; and this is what the Muslim community undergoes at present, since it is unable to rise to the level of the challenges and to take the necessary measures – to correct the deviations, to realize solidarity, and to do things professionally. We are weak despite our good goals and sense of honor and the right awareness of what is needed among the mature youth of our Ummah.

Muhammad Zaidan had a question here: How should we go about tackling our present weakness?

Prof. Abu Sulayman said that for doing this we need to start with the Muslim mind: for the Muslim mind is composed of knowledge, will, and action. I mean that knowledge by itself is not enough for effecting change; it must be followed by action. All three components are essential: the intellectual-informational; the psychological- educational; and the purposeful – motivational, the right worldview which illumines the individual's path. Any deficiency in any of the three sectors will end in a state of backwardness. We have witnessed this, as explained above, in connection with bringing a change to the political base that is directing the Ummah's life, which was transferred from the conquering army to the desert Arabs, leading to racist tribalism. Under this new configuration, the intellectual effort was then too formal and dictatorial and there was

then a pernicious division between the intellectual and the political – the intellectual leadership kept aloof from the grievances of the public. At the same time, the political elite lost its popular base, and so it turned into a corrupt domineering authority. What we need for overcoming this deterioration is freeing the thought, and an open attitude to the sources of knowledge, both what was revealed from heaven and what was discovered by man; we need to learn about the laws of the world, and we need to know how they work in real life; the political elite must come under the surveillance and guidance of the public, and must be seen to set its political agendas in a way that responds to the Ummah's values and purposes, and realizes its interests.

A question by Mr. Abdul-Hadi Abu Talib: An outside observer could have his doubts concerning the soundness of the Islamic religion, though we all know its greatness. This could be because people observe how the Muslims occupy a back seat among nations, while they used to be at the head of nations. So how can we deal with this problem, and how can we get out of it?

Prof. Abu Sulayman replied: Let's try first to define the real meaning of civilization – whether it is fulfilling the ethical values expected of the humans: justice and equality for all, and realizing the interests of people in general; or whether it is technological breakthroughs, no matter if they were used to support injustice and persecution. Before the eighteenth century, the Muslims and the Muslim civilization were far ahead of Europe. We may say with assurance that the West is not civilized in the real sense; yes, it is powerful and technologically advanced, but on a human level it is backward. What we notice about the West is that it mainly applies the law of the jungle, where might is right. For illustrating this, one may cite what the West did in dealing with the Red Indians, or the Aborigines of Australia; what happened in South America, China and Japan. And think of the colonial powers and the dropping of the nuclear bombs over Japan. Look also at Africa and the Muslim World until today, and how the children of Africa are being enslaved. The Muslim nation, despite its weakness and deficiency, has a conscience and knows its errors and wants to correct itself. Reforming the Muslim World would be good for both Muslims and for the rest of humanity – for Islam addresses the whole of humankind, without any discrimination between races or languages or colors; or location or time.

A question posed by Dr. Majdi Sa'eed: Are you saying, Sir, that the basic task that faces us is to recast man and society in accordance with the

Qur'anic worldview; and that not curing the Ummah's ailments would make a bad condition even worse?

In his reply, **Prof. Abdul-Hamid Abu Sulayman** said: Change does not come about through a deliberate choice; it is rather an inevitable fact of history. The party that can really bring about change is the parents: if the mature educationist guides them well, and if they get the right values, then their child-raising will be quite sound. It is not enough to know religious values as abstract concepts; it is not enough for instance to order the child to say the truth and not to lie – this will not be really conducive to getting over the problem of lying. The instilling of values, such as courage, in the proper way must be done through applying it in day-to-day applications and observance. Let's learn from the secular West: It hates lying; it realizes that what happened to Nixon, Clinton, Tony Blair, and Bush was only because of lying. They do well in inculcating this value; for when a Western child lies, it is explained to him that he/she may not do that again; and if he/she is punished, it is a rather mild punishment, just to show that the family are not happy about this. The child will grow to internalize the value of telling the truth. Therefore, we do well to stop just ordering the child never to lie, without even explaining why it is wrong; we precipitate matters to lower and lower levels, and we do harm when we just punish the child severely for lying; the result is not only that he does it again, but that he now develops a skill to hide falsehood with more falsehood.

Mr. Hisham Abdul-Aziz put here this question: You have given, Professor Abu Sualaiman, some Oriental wisdom and some Western wisdom; but the relation between the West and the East seems like the relation between the wolf and the goat, rather than that of the bear and the elephant. So how can our relation with the West be one of debate rather than confrontation?

To which **Prof. Abu Sulayman** replied: Yes, definitely, our contact with the West must be one of debate, rather than hostility. Let the debate be about values and principles, about things that are of advantage to both sides in real terms; let it be as you said like the relation between the bear and the elephant, where each side goes on along its own way. Therefore, I do not approve of having debates about religion, for all religions occupy at present a marginal place. Let the debate be with the liberal people, with the policymakers who run power and deal with family matters. Let not the debate be with the intention of proving the other party in the wrong, or to prove that only one of the parties is right. Fruitful debate must aim

to develop the life of both sides towards the better. Let it be clear to us that without ever being aggressive or quarrelsome, it is the party nearer to truth that will win. Indeed both the West and the Muslim nations realize that they face a grave crisis.