

# Supplement to Introducing Jamal Khwaja And His Works

Prof. Jamal Khwaja has written seven major books, numerous articles and scholarly essays. Anyone interested in the intersection of Islam and Modernity will find Khwaja to be a reliable guide. Readers of his work will be informed, inspired, and intellectually liberated. Muslim readers will feel emotionally aligned with the Quran and find themselves empowered to live as authentic Muslims in the heart of the multi-cultural global village.

Prof. Khwaja recently added an 'afterword' to four of his works, namely, *Quest for Islam*, *Living the Quran in Our Times*, *The Call of Modernity and Islam*, and *Essays on Cultural Pluralism*. In addition, he has put on paper his authentic response to the killing of Bin Laden. This supplement contains these five short pieces in one single presentation.

These illuminating excerpts from his works will enable readers to see for themselves the clarity, range and depth of his writings. Khwaja's work is the definitive contemporary discussion regarding Islam and Modernity. Explore it. You will be profoundly rewarded.

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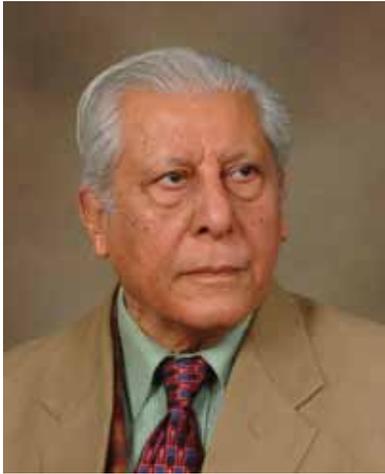
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**For more information, visit [www.JamalKhwaja.com](http://www.JamalKhwaja.com)**

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# About Jamal Khwaja



Jamal Khwaja was born in Delhi in 1928. His ancestors had been closely connected with the Islamic reform movement, inaugurated by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of the famous *M.A.O. College*, Aligarh in the second half of the 19th century, and the Indian freedom movement under Gandhi's leadership in the first half of the 20th century. After doing his M.A. in Philosophy from the *Aligarh Muslim University*, India, he obtained an Honor's degree from *Christ's College Cambridge*, UK. Later he spent a year studying the German language and European existentialism at *Munster University*, Germany. At Cambridge he was deeply influenced by the work of C.D. Broad, Wittgenstein and John Wisdom, apart from his college tutor, I.T. Ramsey who later became *Professor of Christian Religion* at Oxford. It was the latter's influence, which, taught Khwaja to appreciate the inner beauty and power of pure spirituality. Khwaja was thus led to appreciate the value of linguistic analysis as a tool of philosophical inquiry and to combine the quest for clarity with the insights and depth of the existentialist approach to religion and spirituality.

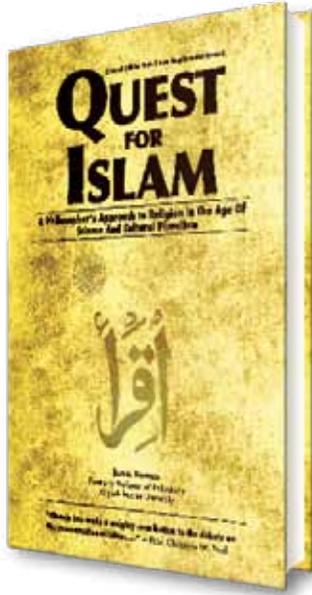
Khwaja was appointed Lecturer in Philosophy at the *Aligarh Muslim University* in 1953. Before he could begin serious academic work in his chosen field, his family tradition of public work pulled him into a brief spell of active politics under the charismatic Jawahar Lal Nehru; the first Prime Minister of India. Nehru was keen to rejuvenate his team of colleagues through inducting fresh blood into the *Indian National Congress*. He included young Khwaja, then freshly returned from Cambridge, along with four or five other young persons. Khwaja thus became one of the youngest entrants into the Indian Parliament as a member of the *Lok Sabha* (Lower House) from 1957 to 1962. While in the corridors of power he learned to distinguish between ideals and illusions, and finally chose to pursue the path of knowledge rather than the path of acquiring authority or power. Returning to his *alma mater* in 1962, he resumed teaching and research in the philosophy of religion. Ever since then Khwaja has lived a quiet life at Aligarh. He was Dean of the *Faculty of Arts* and was a member of important committees of the University Grants Commission and the *Indian Council for Philosophical Research* before retiring as Professor and Chairman of the *Department of Philosophy* in 1988. He was a frequent and active participant in national seminars held at the *Indian Institute of Advanced Study*, Shimla.

He was invited to deliver the *Khuda Bakhsh Memorial Lecture* at Patna. He was one of the official Indian delegates at the *World Philosophical Congress*, Brighton, UK, in 1988, and also at the *International Islamic Conference Kuala Lumpur*, Malaysia, in 1967, and the *Pakistan International Philosophy Congress*, Peshawar, Pakistan, in 1964. He has visited the USA and several countries in Western Europe. He performed *Hajj* in 2005.

Khwaja's written works include:

1. *Five Approaches To Philosophy: A discerning philosopher philosophizes about the philosophy of philosophy with wisdom and clarity.* 1965.

2. *Quest For Islam: A philosophers approach to religion in the age of science and cultural pluraism.*1977.
3. *Authenticity And Islamic Liberalism: A mature vision of Islamic Liberalism grounded in the Quran,* 1986.
4. *Essays On Cultural Pluralism: A philosophical framework for authentic interfaith dialogue.*
5. *The Call Of Modernity And Islam: A Muslim's journey into the 21st century*
6. *Living The Quran In Our Times: A vision of how Muslims can revitalize their faith, while being faithful to God and His messenger.*
7. *The Vision Of An Unknown Indian Muslim: My journey to interfaith spirituality.*



## I. Quest For Islam

### A Philosopher's Approach To Religion In The Age Of Science And Cultural Pluralism

Quest for Islam is a systematic exposition of Islam in the light of contemporary knowledge by a practicing Muslim. A seminal work, it successfully resolves intellectual difficulties created in traditional interpretations by new knowledge. Among other things it organically integrates core Islamic values with the requirements of plural societies and secular democracies. It thus adds a fresh dimension of value to the Islamic thought-cum-value system. It will appeal greatly to Muslim intellectuals perplexed by the assault of modernity on traditional values and institutions.

## Afterword

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*Quest for Islam* was first published some 35 years ago. At the time several close friends and colleagues who broadly shared my basic approach to the study of religions, including Islam, expressed their fear that neither the Muslim religious establishment nor the common believer would ever appreciate my work because of its radical departure from traditional Islamic thinking. They did, however, laud my boldness at expressing my authentic views without any fear of being dubbed by the community as an apostate, or atheist or as a political opportunist. They also felt that the common man, ever burdened by hunger, sickness and insecurity, looked to religion for getting solace, consolation and emotional support, without caring for such ideals as logical consistency, spiritual autonomy or self-realization and the rest. I, however, was not discouraged by their honest response and went on traveling on a road, which at that time only a few awakened fellow Muslims dared to travel. I dare say, now I don't feel myself so lonely on this road.

What has brought about this significant change in the outlook of a large number (though not yet in the majority) of Muslim believers? It is well known that information and factual knowledge grow much faster than change in mental habits and attitudes. Changes in the sphere of religious beliefs and social attitudes are the slowest. What, however, is not sufficiently understood is that religious symbols and creeds are not clear and demonstrable, but rather highly complex truth-claims that are understood in different ways by different persons with varying backgrounds. As a result, quick and easy agreement between people of very varied backgrounds is indeed extremely difficult. However, human creativity, continually increasing knowledge and the lessons of experience lead to profound changes in how believers learn to deconstruct their cultural (including religious) heritage and to redefine their cherished concepts and values in the light of expanded knowledge and experience. I have already explained in the foregoing pages how and why the great Islamic intellectual and cultural tradition began to stagnate after peaking first in Syria and Iraq and later in Iran, central Asia and Spain as well as India under Mughal rule.

The words, symbols and images of a sacred or cherished belief/value system remain the same but some creative individual or individuals (who deeply cherish the tradition but outgrow some of its perceived limitations) discover or project a new meaning or significance into it. Thus, a new paradigm of the old religion emerges in society. The older custodians and guardians of the tradition are naturally reluctant to accept the new paradigm. To them, their paradigm of the faith or religious tradition is not a paradigm, but rather the true faith or religion itself. From their point of view those who suggest or accept a new paradigm forfeit their right to identify themselves with the symbols, images and sacred history of the religion as such. Conflict and controversy thus remain entrenched in society and act as a drag on the peaceful flowering of the new paradigm among the body of believers.

However, I remain optimistic that Muslims in general all over the world will gradually gravitate to the paradigm I have presented in *Quest for Islam* and elaborated in my different works. The human spirit cries out for inner peace and harmony in society. The literal meaning of the Arabic word *Islam* is peace through submission to one Supreme Creator. Conflict arises only when hubris propels some individual or individuals to claim they have grasped the one and only true conception of the nature and will of the Creator. Such people begin to lose their sense of mystery, inadequacy, humility and respect for other members of the human family who may entertain different ideas or conceptions of the Supreme, as it is itself rather than as others imagine or conceive it to be.

The other major source of conflict is the human passion for power and domination. My study of the Quran has given me the deep assurance that the Islamic revelation is not a rigid and closed code or set of rules and prescriptions that admit of no flexibility or possibilities of further orthogenetic growth. It is a plain fact of the sacred history of Islam that the vision of the Prophet as well as the polity that he instituted or approved of evolved before the very eyes of the Prophet's Arab audience. Moreover, the Quran itself repeatedly invites men of understanding to reflect on nature, society and the very core of the human self as such. The miracle of the Quran was and is its inherent capacity to inspire faith, joy, hope, and fructify humanity's latent spirituality and reflective conscience. In simple words, the Quran definitely exhorts people of understanding to reflect, to wonder, to probe the self, to strive and to act as the most excellent of God's creation. Is this not rather different from the supposed obligation of a good Muslim to follow the *shariah* rigidly in letter and spirit without raising any 'ifs and buts'?

This approach to the Quran implies that the good Muslim should reflect on both the text and the context of the Quranic revelations and the peculiar situation or situations of the Prophet before determining the right course of action. Moreover this decision must take into account the distinction between intrinsic values and instrumental rules. This approach to the good life removes the rather self-imposed insularity of Muslims from non-Muslims in general and fosters the idea of a larger brotherhood or fraternity of good souls, collectively trying to preserve and promote shared basic spiritual and ethical values despite some secondary disagreements. This approach will enable Muslims to become equal partners with all fellow citizens of multi-ethnic secular democratic states all over the world.

Muslims must not confuse secular democracy with atheism or immoral or unscrupulous politics. Muslims should also ponder over the new wave concept of gender justice that implies that men and women should have equal status and opportunities of polymorphous growth. Even if Muslims

feel reluctant to accept gender equality in the literal sense because of some Quranic personal laws other communities will move ahead and Muslim women will feel the pinch of discrimination and of gender inequality. To my mind, giving the status of complete equality to the female half of the human family is not any violation of Quranic injunctions. Rather it amounts to the full fruition or development of the ideal of gender justice found in the Quran. To give a parallel example, the Quran did not prohibit the institution of slavery, though it did prescribe humane treatment to slaves, both male and female. But does the legal prohibition of slavery violate any Quranic injunction? To the contrary, such legislation actually promotes the idea of human dignity and compassion, which are the basic values of the Quran as of all humanist ethics in general.

Coming to the situation of the Indian Muslims living in a secular democratic state, I am very optimistic that India has a bright future in the days ahead. The constitution of India is a landmark in world history, though there are several friction points in our machinery of governance. Once the teething troubles of our nascent democracy are over, we shall realize the inherent shortcomings and limitations of our outlook and political vices. At present we are weathering a savage storm raging at different levels of our society and state – rising expectations, the lust for easy and quick money, the clamor for rights without awareness of duties, the vicious effects of caste and tribal exploitation for ages past, the social psychological wounds inflicted on the Muslim minority in India and the Hindu-Sikh minorities in Pakistan due to the partition of 1947.

The rectification of these and still other wrongs is going on slowly and imperceptibly, despite all the ravages of totally unscrupulous politics and violence in present day India. We must, therefore, persevere in the right course and not allow the rigors of fighting the storm to defeat or deflect us.

In any case the dark clouds have several silver linings. The deprived and downtrodden (no matter what their religion or region) for ages are looking up to the sky, while the wings of the erstwhile lords of the earth (no matter what their origin) are having their wings clipped. The women of India are on the march and no power, theological or male chauvinistic will be able to block their path to full empowerment and equality of opportunity in the course of time. It is my honest faith and hope women (as the bearers of the Divine gift of maternal love) will exercise power more ethically and compassionately than men have done in the past.

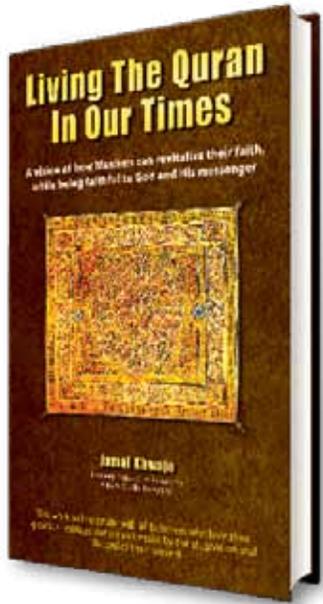
The course of history is seldom straight or clear to the traveler. However, as we move on the vision improves and we begin to see more clearly the direction and the distance to the goal, provided we keep open our eyes and ears, remain intellectually honest and consistent and continue to act according to our lights.

Let me end this afterword with a prayer found in -- the first chapter of the Holy Quran

*Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek.  
Show us the straight way,  
The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose  
(portion) is not wrath and who go not astray.  
(Surah 1, verses 5-7)*







## 2. Living The Quran In Our Times

**A vision of how Muslims can revitalize their faith, while being faithful to God and His messenger**

In the past, authentic Muslims, including the closest Companions of the Prophet, often differed sharply in their political and social beliefs. In our times the challenges posed by modernity have made such differences especially toxic. In this work, the Author clarifies the core teachings of perennial Islam and their continuing relevance to our daily lives.

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### Afterword

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Working on *Living The Quran In Our Times* has been for me a labor of love and a great education. The fruits of my labor taste very sweet to me, but I remain very conscious of their limitations. While my work was in progress many excellent works on Islam and related topical problems, both academic and generalist, appeared in Western circles. They came to my notice much after my own work was done. However, I acknowledge their high quality and utility, in particular, the magisterial work of Franz Kung, *Islam: Past Present and Future*; Muhammad Arkoun's, *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert*; Abdullahi Naim's, *Towards Islamic Reformation*; Tariq Ramadan's, *Radical Reforms*; F.E. Peters, *The Voice, The Word, The Books*; Tarek Fatah's, *Chasing a Mirage*; Hamid Ansari's, *Traveling Through Conflict*, and also some others.

Turning to my own work *Living The Quran In Our Times* my objective was to put in black and white, among some other ideas, my depth response to what I term 'the mystery of the Quran', which expression I prefer to the traditional 'miracle of the Quran'. While fully recognizing that no religious conviction can be fully proved or disproved (logically or scientifically) I do claim that religious convictions can be held to be authentic or inauthentic, as the case may be. In this sense I do believe deeply and unequivocally in *the mystery of the Quran* as the defining dogma or faith axiom of Islam.

Like any other person born and bred in a Muslim family I was conditioned to say that the Quran was the supreme miracle of Prophet Muhammad. I also held that the Quranic contents in their totality as well as the reported sayings and doings of the Prophet of Islam (provided they were absolutely authentic) were infallible. As my thought developed I was forced to make a distinction between the infallibility of the Quran and that of the Prophet. I also came to realize that the expression 'mystery of the Quran' more accurately described my depth response to the Quran than the traditional expression. Likewise, the concept of creative fidelity to the injunctions of the Quran better described my authentic response to the Quran than the traditional concept of unreflective adherence to Quranic injunctions. Gradually I realized that though every Quranic word or sentence might well be accepted as revealed and thus sacrosanct to the believer, the different verses perform

different functions for the believer and satisfy different needs of the faithful. And these needs and purposes were not one but many.

What was the implication of this insight? Well, it squarely clashed with the traditional idea of literal obedience to Allah and His Messenger without raising any *ifs and buts* or taking into consideration the situational context of the revelation. This was and remains the predicament of Muslim believers who honestly accept the Quran as a revealed scripture without taking into account the plural functions of discourse in the language of the Quran. I've dealt with these problems in considerable detail in Chapter 3 of my main work.

To my mind the distinction Western philosophers make between intrinsic spiritual and moral values and instrumental rules for preserving and promoting them in society at any given time is the key to solving the predicament of the Muslim believers. I see no reason why this distinction should not be applied to the Quranic scripture. Why should such application be supposed to subvert the sanctity of the Quran? Once we realize that the Quran is the word of God addressed to a human being for human beings of all times it is natural and inevitable that the revealed text be understood in the light of this basic distinction of *intrinsic values* (that are permanent) and *instrumental rules* (that are situational).

To hold that Quranic injunctions are directive principles that are meant to be wisely and judiciously interpreted before being applied to concrete situations in an ever-changing world by no means minimizes the status of Quran or reduces its mystery and majesty in the eyes of the believer, provided he or she sincerely believes in Quran as Mystery. Millions of people down the ages have joyfully said yes to this claim. And I am one of them.

While I concede that every aspect of life must be governed by ethics I fail to see why orthodox Muslims or Muslim theologians like Hasn al Bannah, Syed Qutub Mawdoodi, and Khumeini, et al should insist that Quranic injunctions or the Prophet's judgments in the literal sense must be regarded as a rigidly binding code in an ever changing world. In this respect the catholic and permissive approach of Sir Syed, Iqbal, Abul Kalam Azad, Ali Abdul Raziq, Ali Shariati, Zafar Ullah Khan, et al is far more insightful, valid and relevant to the modern age.

I, therefore, in all humility hold that belief in one Supreme Being as Creator of all that exists and Quran as the mystery of Divine communication or revelation to the Prophet of Islam suffices to validate the claim that one is a Muslim or that one accepts Islam as his or her religion. This, of course, presupposes that the person desires to call himself a Muslim and also desires to be recognized as such. If so, both civil society and the state should respect the individual and protect the individual's freedom of choice, no matter what religious orthodoxy might declare.

What is the significance of choosing the word 'mystery' rather than 'miracle'? Well, the expression 'mystery of the Quran' retains the air of 'ontological mystery' and feelings of reverence on the part of the believer without importing theological images, ideas and beliefs that, by no means, are necessarily true. In other words the use of the word mystery leaves space for accommodating different views or human perspectives on transcendental truth claims such as the nature of God, revelation, details of happenings after death and afterlife, and other dogmas or faith axioms of Islam, apart from

one single and simple belief. This is the belief in the total veracity of Muhammad as a human being even before the momentous happening of ‘the event in the cave’ and ever after till his passing away.

Having accepted the unity of God and the mystery of the Quran, the complete integrity and sincerity of the Prophet, the truth of his mission, the unknown and unseen dimensions of the universe, and a final day of judgment free from any admixture of myth or folklore (be it pre-Islamic or Islamic), yet I cannot honestly accept the traditional paradigm of Islam in history. This paradigm includes the attribution of miracles to Prophet Muhammad and bracketing his reported sayings with the Quranic text in the category of infallible truths or as unchanging and rigid injunctions in every walk of life. This approach patently results in a static morality both individual and social, and obstructs the creative growth and flowering of the human spirit. The fear of innovation puts a stop on multi-dimensional progress of the human spirit.

Orthodox custodians of the Islamic tradition may well accuse me of the audacity of spiritual conceit or charge me with hypocrisy and deceit. But I submit I am vocalizing the inner response of millions of Muslim believers living in the modern age. On hearing or reciting the Quran they cannot help being overwhelmed by the power and beauty of the ‘ontogenetic’ verses of the Quran in Arabic. Yet these believers remain deeply and firmly aware of the fact that the idea of evolution applies not merely to the human store of knowledge but also to the realm of ideals and values. These latter admit of continuous growth and evolution. These Muslims love to identify themselves as loyal believers, but they also yearn to participate (along with the human family as a whole) in its evolutionary march towards goals, as yet, beyond our present imagination. They are thus inevitably led to accept a plural human society where Muslims and others can function as equal partners rather than one or the other being the boss. The goal of the dominance of Islam as a spiritual dynasty or exclusive super power, thus, turns into the goal of interfaith brotherhood and peace.

Islamic orthodoxy does not empathize with this vision and legitimate aspiration. The fear of the unknown pushes the traditional custodians of the Islamic faith into the intolerance of all dissent, whether inside or outside the community. This attitude of intolerance has a very long history in the Muslim tradition as is evident from the fact that an unduly large number of Muslim political, spiritual and intellectual leaders in the creative era of Islamic history were persecuted, tortured or assassinated by their own folk. It is a truism to say that intolerance leads to a violent temperament and also acts of violence. The next step is obviously terrorism, as we know it today.

The mother of all evils is the evasion of truth and the fear of others. Tarek Fatah puts it very well when he affirms and approves of ‘the state of Islam’ but rejects the idea of ‘the Islamic state’. Abdullahi Naim covers very useful ground for the Islamic reformation of the *sharia*. Arkoun touches the heart of the problems relating to the language of Islamic discourse in a marvelous manner. Tariq Ramadan and Hussein Nasr are already being acclaimed for their creative vision of Islam. Many Western writers and humanistic observers have also made fruitful and profound observations on the Islamic vision as different from Islamic orthodoxy. Hamid Ansari’s work is an extremely illuminating area study of Muslim peoples.

God alone knows the full truth, and we humans should ever beware of possessing exclusive truth and falling into the pit of spiritual conceit and the delusion of self-sufficiency.

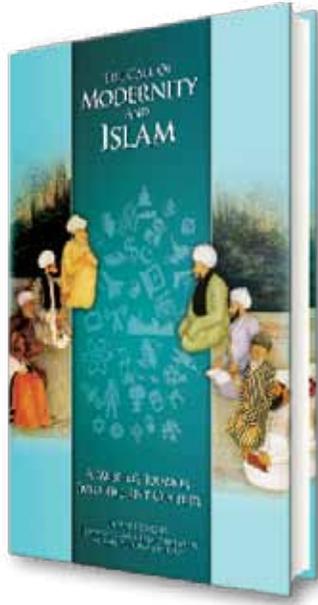
We started this work with invoking the name of Allah and we now conclude it with one Quranic surah describing the human situation, and two Quranic prayers.

*By (the Token of) Time (through the ages),  
Verily Man is in loss,  
Except such as have Faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in  
the mutual teaching of Truth, and of Patience and Constancy.  
(Quran: Surah 103)*

*Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn  
From the mischief of created things;  
From the mischief of Darkness as it overspreads;  
From the mischief of those who practice secret arts;  
And from the mischief of the envious one as he practices envy.  
(Quran: Surah 113)*

*Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of Mankind,  
The King (or Ruler) of Mankind,  
The Allah (or judge) of Mankind,-  
From the mischief of the Whisperer (of Evil), who withdraws (after his whisper),-  
(The same) who whispers into the hearts of Mankind,-  
Among Jinns and among men.  
(Quran: Surah 114)*





### 3. The Call of Modernity And Islam

#### A Muslim's Journey Into The 21st Century

**The Call Of Modernity And Islam** is a timely and welcome anthology of ten scholarly essays that focus creatively on the urgent need to re-energize Islamic culture and institutions.

The essays span an enormous disciplinary range. Professor Khwaja moves back and forth with consummate ease between religion, science, philosophy, history, and the social sciences to paint a fully integrated, big picture of the encounter between Islam and modernity.

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## Afterword

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Several Muslim intellectuals and theologians have referred to 'challenges of modernity' in their books on Islam. I chose the title 'The Call of Modernity and Islam' for my collected essays dealing with the issues of Islam in the modern age. I look upon modernity not as an adversarial challenge to Muslims but rather as a slow flowering of the human spirit in the course of its evolution in history. I do believe technology to be a major causal factor that produces change in the human situation. The scientific method is the womb from which technology has emerged. The evolution of the scientific method is a fascinating story whose beginnings date back to antiquity but which gathered momentum rather late in human history. Modernity, as we understand the word today, emerged only when the scientific method had reached a high stage of maturity in Western Europe by the beginning of the 18th century.

Modernity is the attitude of accepting and practicing the scientific method in the human attempt to understand the universe, including humankind. The essence of the scientific method is not to accept or reject any truth claim without appropriate evidence. However, the nature of evidence need not be identical or the same for validating every truth claim. If this basic insight is ignored, the scientific method inevitably lapses into a dogmatic fixation upon a particular and rigid procedure, and this leads to the impoverishment rather than the enlargement of knowledge and wisdom. This actually happened soon after the explosion of science and technology in mid 19th century. This led to a theory of knowledge usually called 'Positivism'. Many protagonists of modernity are tempted to reduce modernity or the modern sensibility to Positivism and an aggressive secularism, and tend to devalue the spiritual, ethical and artistic domains of human experience. This is the consequence of their dogma that no truth-claim, which cannot be proved in the scientific sense, could be regarded as either true or false. This is to say that such truth-claims can be merely opinions rather than knowledge in the proper sense. This outlook or approach has been aptly termed 'scientism'. However I have no doubt that *modernity* and *scientism* cannot be, or rather should not be equated.

The same remarks apply to the relationship between *secularism* and *modernity*. Secularism does

not reject the truth and proper role of religion, but only liberates the human mind from the illusion that religious faith can be proved, and that only one particular faith is true and therefore worthy of governing every field of human life. Modernity and secularism, thus, liberate people from the chains of ethnocentricity and blind faith in the ideology of exclusive salvation, and superiority to others. Modernity and secularism do not question the crucial importance of ethics for life.

The term 'post-modernity' became current soon after the end of the Second World War under the impact of the one-dimensional mindset of some free thinkers. These minds had become sadly disillusioned due to the sufferings and ravages of the two wars that were fought by the supposedly most advanced and scientifically developed nations of the world. Instead of correcting the one-sidedness of aggressive scientism many of these thinkers fell into the trap of cynicism and nihilism as such. However, if the protagonists of modernity had not committed the initial blunder of excluding the truths of spirituality, morality and art from the domain of reliable knowledge, perhaps the term post-modernity would not have been coined at all.

Likewise, no conflict between science and religion would have arisen if their respective protagonists and practitioners had not encroached upon the proper jurisdiction or domain of the two disciplines concerned. Speaking for myself, I have opted, fully and completely to accept the validity of the scientific method in the domain of factual truth and I have opted for the validity of Islam in the domain of spirituality. My chosen paradigm differs from the traditional one in several respects, which must have become clear to the readers of my works. However my paradigm gives me authentic inner peace that passes all understanding while the traditional does not. I entertain the greatest respect for all seekers of truth; no matter where they find inner satisfaction and peace for themselves and whatever religious identity they choose for themselves.

I have the same respect also for those who are unable to resolve their inner perplexities concerning their proper destination. Going still further I find that I cannot avoid respecting those souls who have honestly tried to find God or any other spiritual foothold or anchor, but have failed to find inner peace and rest and have proceeded to identify themselves as atheists. Yet they remain righteous, compassionate, loving and conscientious members of the human family. I find I just cannot bring myself to condemning such souls as wicked wretches who deserve to burn eternally in hell fire.

Here I am reminded of two anecdotes, one of Sufi origin and the other from Judaic mysticism. The famous Sufi saint, Rabia Basri (d. 801), was one day found walking on the streets of Baghdad in a strange manner. In one hand she held a plate of burning coals, and in the other she carried a bowl of water. When asked what she was up to, she replied that she wanted to extinguish the fire of hell with the bowl of water and to burn paradise with the burning coals so that people may do good and avoid evil for the love of God rather than out of love of gain or fear of pain. The Jewish anecdote says that on the Day of Judgment God will not ask humans why they did not follow the Law of Moses, but will only ask why they did not follow the truth of their own inner voice instead of following others.

To conclude, I identify myself as a Muslim and desire that others also identify me as such. I believe in the essential unity of all religions and venerate them. I gravitate to the Islamic tradition (within the parameters of my paradigm) and the Quran as I regard them as my mother tongue in the domain of spirituality. Ontogenetic verses of the Quran, such as the 'verse of the throne' (2:255),

and the ‘verse of the light’ (24:35) and others move, inspire and reinforce my faith that all that exists is somehow the locus of an inscrutable, but sacred, mystery.

At the same time I deeply feel and realize that mere contemplation of and sensitivity to the inscrutable mystery of the universe is not enough. Humans are not angels but thinking, feeling and willing agents who move from situation to situation. They cannot avoid responding in different situations and making active choices in the course of a never ceasing journey. They cannot live without bread, ideas, and ideals and without following instrumental rules and regulations for realizing their ideals. This requires unwavering commitment to ideals, but at the same time, freedom to make fresh rules and regulations in an ever-changing world. The Quranic verse 5:3, ‘...This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion...’ does not imply that on the day the verse was revealed polymorphous perfection had been achieved by Muslim society. After all said and done, perfection is only an ideal and never a fact. All ideas and ideals need perpetual inner growth of the individual as well as in the structure of society and the laws as such.

God alone knows the full truth, and we humans should ever beware of possessing exclusive truth and falling into the pit of spiritual conceit and the delusion of self-sufficiency.

We started this work with invoking the name of Allah and we now conclude it with one Quranic verse that fully illumines the path every truth-seeker has to travel in his journey to salvation, and two Quranic prayers.

*He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: “We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:” and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.*

(Quran: Surah 3, Verse 7)

*Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn  
From the mischief of created things;  
From the mischief of Darkness as it overspreads;  
From the mischief of those who practice secret arts;  
And from the mischief of the envious one as he practices envy.*

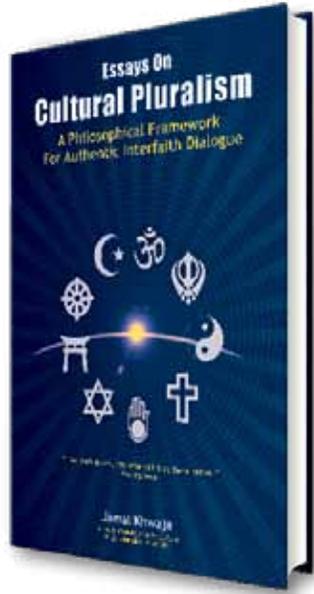
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*Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of Mankind,  
The King (or Ruler) of Mankind,  
The Allah (or judge) of Mankind,-  
From the mischief of the Whisperer (of Evil), who withdraws (after his whisper),-  
(The same) who whispers into the hearts of Mankind,-  
Among Jinns and among men.*

(Quran: Surah 114)







## 4. Essays On Cultural Pluralism

### A Philosophical Framework For Authentic Interfaith Dialogue

#### Explore The Oneness Of The Human Family.

Ours are times when religion is systematically being used: unconsciously by some and deliberately by others, in the service of politics and personal gain, rather than spirituality. However, perceptive and honest minds among all religious communities view different religions as diverse “languages of the spirit”, each valid and nourishing in its own way.

An impartial study of different religions shows the underlying unity in the diversity of religions. All religions are attempts to satisfy the human sense of wonder and awe at the inscrutable mystery of the universe. This common function produces the unity while the diverse conditions in which different religions arise and grow produce the diversity.

## Afterword

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Whoever said, ‘Let a hundred flowers bloom in the garden’ expressed one of the most profound and precious insight humans have slowly won in the course of history. But, perhaps, it is the most difficult to put into practice. I dare say: among all believers today Muslims and right wing Christians find it more difficult than others to accept this message that is clearly found in the Geeta, the Quran, as well as in the mystical versions of every religious tradition.

I speak as a Muslim myself when I say that despite the Quran, Sufi traditions, as well as the tradition of numerous Christian saints, both Muslims and Christians in history have been extremely reluctant to practice full religious tolerance. The Christian record, as is well known, began to improve strikingly since the onset of the European enlightenment in the early 18th century. At the very same time, unfortunately, Muslims began to decline in almost every sphere of human activity. This decline reached its nadir with the total extinction of the Ottoman Empire after World War I.

Lingering memories and group pride in the glorious days of Islamic hegemony over vast areas of Asia and Africa in the pre-modern era have stood in the way of an honest and well informed analysis of the causes of the said decline. The easiest human response (as is well known) is to blame the other for one’s own suffering or misfortune. Being human, Muslims fell into this trap long ago and to date remain blissfully unaware of the truth.

Great Muslim reformers, poets, thinkers and statesmen from time to time have come and gone and attempted to awaken fellow Muslims from their dogmatic slumber. However the Muslim caravan has not paid much heed to the lamentations, exhortations and dreams of the wise ones. Even today wild and unverified conspiracy theories continue to grip large sections of even highly

educated Muslims in their private discussions on contemporary international relations and world events such as the destruction of the twin towers in America in 2001, and the killing of Bin Laden in Pakistan in 2011.

I find it tragic that a very large number of Muslim believers hardly ever give themselves the self-permission to ask honest and very natural questions about issues connected with their own early sacred history. For example, why and how numerous civil wars and a string of assassinations took place soon after the Prophet passed away: the killing of the third *Khalifa*; the battle of the Camel fought between the Prophet's beloved wife and the Prophet's beloved cousin and comrade; the battle of Siffin between close relations and comrades (all Muslim), culminating in the super tragedy of Karbala itself.

Similar instances, as is well known, continually occurred down the centuries in Islamic history. Indeed the present scenario is no different. Yet few Muslim believers have tried to analyze and learn from them. What they have done is to remain content merely with taking sides and defending their own sect or group while maligning the other. This has produced the infamous chasm between the lovers of the house of the Prophet on the one hand, and the supporters of the different Arab tribes and clans of the time, and later, between Mongols, Pathans and others.

In a somewhat similar fashion Muslim believers have hardly tried to ponder over the various issues and aspects of gender justice and have remained supremely satisfied that the Islamic value system leads to perfect social and gender justice, and all that remains to be done in the field of women's welfare and self-realization is the literal implementation of the *sharia* laws. I respectfully ask my Muslim brothers to rethink these issues in the light of modern sociology and psychology, and the actual experience of the human family, rather than confine themselves to the judgments of stagnant theologians alone. What the Muslims and the world in general need, is the full acceptance of cultural pluralism, empathy for 'they groups', the practice of gender justice and the according of full dignity to all religious traditions, including so called atheists. This approach of full tolerance was actually practiced in ancient Persia, India and China.

God alone knows the full truth, and we humans should ever beware of possessing exclusive truth and falling into the pit of spiritual conceit and the delusion of self-sufficiency.

We started this work with invoking the name of Allah and we now conclude it with two Quranic verses that stress the virtue of tolerance and two Quranic prayers.

*To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah. it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute;*

(Quran: Surah 5, Verse 48)

*It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces Towards east or West; but it is righteousness- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your*

*substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah fearing.*

(Quran: Surah 2, Verse 177)

*Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn  
From the mischief of created things;  
From the mischief of Darkness as it overspreads;  
From the mischief of those who practice secret arts;  
And from the mischief of the envious one as he practices envy.*  
(Quran: Surah 113)

*Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of Mankind,  
The King (or Ruler) of Mankind,  
The Allah (or judge) of Mankind,-  
From the mischief of the Whisperer (of Evil), who withdraws (after his whisper),-  
(The same) who whispers into the hearts of Mankind,-  
Among Jinns and among men.*  
(Quran: Surah 114)





## 7. Reflections on the Death of Bin Laden

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Bin Laden is no more in flesh and blood, but the idea of Islam, as projected by him survives in the minds of a considerable section of Muslims, though they are, certainly, a small chunk of Muslims, in general, who decry terrorist ideology as strongly as do ordinary decent people the world over. Evidently, no idea is, or could ever be, killed by violence. Fear, hatred and violence can only be conquered by the arts of peace, not of war. But, then where is the road map to stable peace in a divided world where Bin Laden grows into an icon in some quarters while an arch villain in others? The typical response of putting the blame on the other side must give way to an informed and sober look at the human situation without fear or favor. Terrorism, certainly, must be eliminated from the globe. But this objective will never be achieved unless both sides fully and honestly realize the root causes of the evil.

From time immemorial it has been the common practice of sovereign states or rulers to resort to war against adversaries or dissidents if persuasion or threats do not work. Smaller groups used the tactics of terror to demoralize and coerce others into submission. Until the rise of the idea of democracy and rule of law in modern times (which means an institutional agreement to differ but to settle the differences through the ballot rather than the bullet or through the exercise of human adjudication rather than of muscle or murder) humans did not know how to settle disputes relating to the transfer of power, wealth or land without war or sporadic terror. There were also no developed ideas relating to equality of opportunity for the entire human family without any distinction of religion, race, region, caste and gender.

Different races or groups rose to dominance at different times in world history. Islamic hegemony prevailed in a goodly portion of the known world in medieval times. The 19th century was presided over by Western Powers; the 20th by the USA and the present is witnessing new contenders for the driving wheel position. Humanists outgrow racism, tribalism, nationalism and identity politics, though one could well remain a good patriot or belong to some religious tradition or other. The Quran affirms the spirit of universal human brotherhood and religious tolerance. The Quran (when one reads it afresh without the gloss of the long Muslim tradition) and the tradition of Sufi Islam both affirm the idea of spiritual pluralism. The Gita does the same. Secular Humanism and the higher versions of other religions also converge in the same direction. What then stands in the way of world peace? Understanding the right answer is the crux of the matter.

But, then, what is the right answer? Whatever truth-claims claims or slogans might float in the air, howsoever many rallies or marches religious event-managers might stage, the plain truth is that both individuals and groups (at different levels) thirst for the largest possible share in the cake of power, prestige, influence and wealth. Well, in all humility, may I submit that only when one has the rare capacity of empathy for different sides could one reasonably hope to reconcile them to accept a win-win compromise package that is practical and equitable in the same breath.

To Muslims the world over who feel deeply hurt by the divide and rule and gun-point diplomacy of Western powers over the Palestine and some other sensitive issues I say: Please do not wallow in negative sulking but realize how the once dominant Muslims had themselves behaved in the past towards their own dissidents and adversaries during the past days of Islamic hegemony. Many

Muslim dissidents had themselves turned into hard-boiled terrorists and the then dominant power at Baghdad was compelled to crush and eliminate fellow Muslims who had turned into terrorists. Muslims must honestly accept that their traditional mode of conflict resolution carries numerous scars of systematic elimination of rivals.

To the dominant powers today who are fully armed with modern technology I would say: Please do remember that dominance or hegemony is not a permanent condition but a passing phase or process. Let Washington, London, Paris, Peking or Moscow today visit the sites of ancient Carthage, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Ayodhya, Pataliputra, Baghdad and Agra in the past. Let them not mock at or lightly dismiss the suffering, bewilderment and helplessness of Afro-Asian sections of the human family, not yet touched by science, technology and modernity due to reasons beyond their control. Indeed, the strong and affluent nations of the world should help in equipping the weaker sections of humanity struggling to cross the long dark tunnel of stagnation and poverty. Indeed, in such matters enlightened self-interest and social altruism pull in the same direction.

To fellow humanists and social activists I say: Let us keep the flag of hope flying. Let us remind the doubters in different camps how the dream of Gandhi was fulfilled in India, the dream of Nelson Mandela in Africa, and the dream of Martin Luther King in North America. Now, let us give a fair chance to President Obama to succeed under enormously difficult challenges that flow from the Himalayan blunders of the earlier American Government and its allies, including Pakistan itself.

To those who deeply mourn the martyrdom of Bin Laden I say: Let them learn that those who live by terror die by terror. The logo of Islam should be the ballot box, not the human bomb or bullet. Moreover, all Muslims ought to realize that it is utter folly to think that only one version (their own) is the 'be all and end all' of the Islamic faith, while all other versions are fakes, or the work of hypocrites (deemed as even worse than known atheists or non-Muslims). To my mind, a modern reconstructed Sufi version of Islam is the proper destination for Muslims even as the cultural pluralism of the Gita is for Hindus and non-Hindus alike.

Are those who rejoiced on May 2, 2011 and also those who mourned that day listening to the cry of an unknown Indian Muslim who was nurtured by the Aligarh Movement of Sir Syed, and simultaneously inspired by Gandhi, Nehru and Abul Kalam Azad?

Jamal Khwaja  
Aligarh  
May 7, 2011





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