

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

AND THE
ISLAMIC SCHOLAR

Text and commentary of their historic conversation in 1935

Commentary and editing by
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EDITOR'S PREFACE

The following is the text of a conversation between the famous European playwright and intellectual, George Bernard Shaw, and the famous Islamic scholar and missionary, Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui. They met in Mombasa, in British-occupied Kenya, 65 years ago on April 17, 1935.

Shaw, the literary genius, rationalist and intellectual, was a perfect representative of the new essentially godless Euro-world order that had cloaked itself in the mantle of 'humanism'. That world order emerged in the wake of the transformation of Europe from Christendom into a 'one-eyed' secular society, and the empowerment of Europe through the scientific, technological and industrial revolutions. By 1935 it had already imposed its godless rule upon the rest of mankind 'at the point of the sword', and had made considerable progress in its new crusade of globalization to establish one global godless world.

Maulana, on the other hand, through his spiritual magnetism, his intellectual brilliance and integrity, and his winsome personality, was an equally perfect representative of that sacred model of society that was established in the world for the last time by Prophet Muhammad (s). It was destined to survive the godless storm and to triumph over all rivals at the end of the Last Age when godless globalization would have lost all its steam.

These two worlds, – representing the sacred and the secular models of society, were locked in a universal rivalry which would dominate the Last Age and would eventually culminate in the triumph of one model and the destruction of the other. It was yet possible, however, for their two representatives to meet with each other in conditions of mutual respect, and to conduct their discussions in a civil and courteous way. There are lessons in this today for representatives of both those worlds. I have made minor editorial changes to the text in such mundane matters as sentence construction. The reason for this is, of course, the difference between spoken and written language. But the substance of the dialogue, the language of the speakers (including the sometimes antiquated language of Maulana), and the ideas that were exchanged, have remained unchanged in this revised text.

More importantly I have also ventured, from time to time, to insert critical comments in which I attempt to analyze certain questions and responses in the text. My comments are always in a smaller type and are also separated from the text with brackets. I do hope that these comments prove beneficial to the reader and that they do not detract from the treasure that lies within the text itself.

The reader will find a biographical description of Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, the Islamic scholar, at the end of the document.

Imran N. Hosein

On tour at Freemont Masjid in the East Bay Area of San Francisco December 2000

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It was the morning of Wednesday April 17 1935 when Maulana Muhammad 'Abdul 'Aleem Siddiqui *al-Qaderi*, the eminent Indian Islamic scholar and Sufi Shaikh who was on a visit to Mombasa, met with George Bernard Shaw, world-renowned Irish playwright and savant, who was passing through the city on his way to (White) South Africa on a holiday. Shaw was travelling by the Union Castle liner, *Linlithgow*, when it made a stop for three days at the island. During this time he was a guest of the resident British Magistrate of Mombasa who was a distant relative he had never met before.

There was drama at that moment when the Islamic scholar arrived at the residence of the Magistrate and Shaw himself came out at once to receive him. Shaw was well built, of medium stature, and with an erect and imposing figure, – an elderly gentleman of noble mien. He was smiling too, – not the smile of the sceptic that flickers just round the corners of the lips, but a smile of real welcome, and it suffused his face. There was nothing Shavian about him, if the phonetic pun were to be permitted, for even his chin was not shaved. Rather, a long flowing beard imparted a serene dignity to his falsely represented Freudian features. Full of vim and vigour, were it not for the gray colour of his hair, beard, and eyebrows, he could scarcely be credited with the four-score years that he carried with youthful buoyancy.

Maulana 'Abdul 'Aleem Siddiqui, on the other hand, was a venerable figure dressed in dignified Arab robes. He was comparatively young, just forty-three. Chronic catarrh and unceasingly intense mental strain had turned his hair gray and it made him look much older than he actually was. He, also, was smiling. It was the sparkling smile of those whose hearts radiate with innocence and purity. When Truth enters the heart then such a smile appears on the lips!

Maulana stepped out of the car. There was a hearty exchange of greetings between the two men. Maulana expressed his great pleasure at meeting Shaw. The 'grand old man' immediately rejoined that having heard about Maulana's missionary exploits and his novel way of preaching Islam, he himself was very eager to know him, and it was indeed a very happy coincidence that they were able to meet each other for the first time in Mombasa.

The conversation was very interesting, and quite devoid of Shavian shafts and sarcasms. Perhaps this was because the usual roles of interviews with

George Bernard Shaw were reversed. It was Shaw himself who kept on questioning his guest, and who listened attentively to the prompt, lucid and informative replies.

The following is the (edited) text of that memorable conversation:

TEXT AND COMMENTARY OF CONVERSATION

George Bernard Shaw: I regret I was unable, on account of a previous engagement, to attend your lecture last night, although I was very keen on doing so. You spoke on the 'Philosophy of Peace', but as a Muslim it would have been more appropriate if you had delivered a lecture on the 'Philosophy of War', for Islam, doubtless, has spread at the point of the sword!

[Shaw's opening statement was meant to test the Islamic Scholar and to probe him in a matter that was so very sensitive. Modern European scholarship considered this subject to be the very 'Achilles heel' of Islam. But Shaw was already alive to the possibility that Islam was being misrepresented and demonized by Euro-Christian writers. Would the Islamic Scholar rush to offer an apologetic answer, or would he summon the courage to 'take the bull by the horns' and deliver a forthright repudiation of the charge without being overawed, and without fear? Shaw's abrupt opening 'brutal thrust' was not uncharitable. Rather it was made for the purpose of discovering the psychological profile of his guest. Was he made of iron and steel, or recycled paper? Western scholars have continued to do this over the years in their interaction with Islamic scholars. Indeed this has been, and still is, the method of Western civilization as a whole in its overall relations, - political, economic, strategic, etc., with the Muslim world in particular, and with the rest of non-European humanity in general. My own spiritual insight has allowed me to recognize it as the method of Gog and Magog.

Maulana replied in an extraordinarily courageous and forthright way, and in doing so he set a magnificent example for those who would follow in his footsteps. The Qur'an itself, in *al-Ahzab*: -33:1, had commanded the believers to speak in precisely such a straightforward way. Maulana politely yet effectively put Shaw on guard that he would not be intimidated, and that he did not deal in apologetics. Maulana did not confine himself to a simple exposition of Islamic theory pertaining to the subject. Instead he proceeded to promptly dismiss the charge against Islam as a 'myth', and he then offered a daring comparison with the conduct of both early Christian civilization and modern European civilization. That was brilliant!

Maulana could have responded with an equally brutal psychological trust that would have put Shaw on the spot. After all George Bernard Shaw was an icon and a celebrity of a modern Western civilization that had just accomplished its colonization of most of the earth through the use of brute force. And Shaw was himself bound for a white man's holiday in the very land where 'apartheid' was established without as much as a fig leaf to cover its abominable shame. But Maulana restrained himself and chose to remain faithful to the command of the Qur'an in which Allah declared: "*Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knows best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.*" (Qur'an: al-Nahl: -16:125). He also remained faithful to the Sunnah (example) of Prophet Muhammad (s) who was most respectful and gracious in his language. Maulana based his response on Truth and on facts, and it was presented so respectfully and so brilliantly that Shaw was satisfied with it and probed no further. That was no mean achievement].

Maulana Siddiqui: This is a common misunderstanding regarding Islam. I was dealing with this problem only last night, and I am really surprised that this myth, which has been thoroughly exploded by now, should receive any notice from a scholar of your calibre. However, I may briefly tell you now that the literal meaning of the very word 'Islam' is 'peace'.

An authentic record of the teachings of Islam in their pristine purity has been preserved intact in the Qur'an and the Traditions. They go to establish, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Islam permits the use of the sword only when wantonly attacked and compelled to 'defend itself. Besides there is an explicit injunction in the Holy Qur'an in which Allah, Most High, declares: "*There should be no coercion in religion*" (Qur'an: al-Baqarah -2:256). This clearly forbids the use of force or compulsion in matters of religion. As a matter of fact, I entertain the same conviction regarding the teachings of genuine Christianity, for our sense of reasoning tells us that if they are divine revelations and their source of emanation is consequently divine, they cannot but emphatically veto any manner of violence in respect of belief and enjoin its inculcation by means of arguments and rational discourses. As far as Islam is concerned the Qur'an distinctly says: "*So that he who perishes hereafter may perish after demonstrative evidence, and that he who lives may live by the same evidence.*" (Qur'an: al-Anfal: -8:42)

Islam has enjoined a specific method for its propagation. It was this method that yielded such positive results. The spread of Islam around the world and its acceptance by all reasonable men is solely due to Muslim adherence to the Qur'anic injunction which declared: "*Invite people to the way of your Lord with wisdom and graceful exhortation, and dispute with them in the most conciliatory way.*" (Qur'an: al-Nahl: -16:125)

History bears testimony to the fact that "*Christ was declared consubstantial with the Father*" (Gibbon) by the Council of Nicea, convened by Constantine in Bithynia in the year 325 A.C. An effort was then made to enforce belief in the divinity of Christ. Christians refused to submit to this belief, not only in Europe, but even in the sacred city of Jerusalem as well. This resulted in a most horrid and inhuman slaughter of thousands of innocent people. But in spite of it all I can never hold the real Christianity responsible for it. On the contrary it is those representatives of the Church who wanted to impress the hearts of the people with their power and greatness and who wanted to perpetuate their priestly authority, who can be rightly saddled with all the blame.

Similarly, the sanguinary wars known as Crusades were the outcome of the Machiavellian machinations of precisely such interested ecclesiastical groups of men. They realized that the uncompromising preaching of the oneness of God by Islam was a great obstacle in their path and their self-fabricated divine authority was at stake. So they launched an unscrupulous campaign against Islam and Muslims. They instigated the credulous medieval Europe to wage the so-called 'holy wars' against Islam and Muslims by circulating blood-curdling tales of imaginary atrocities by Muslims on Christians. They described the Muslims as infidels and inveterate enemies of the Christian religion, property and persons. Obviously, therefore, it is these Church dignitaries who alone can be held accountable for the cruel, protracted, futile wars. The blame cannot be attributed to the original teachings of Christianity or Islam, nor for that matter, to Muslims.

Furthermore, if we grant as a supposition that some Muslim rulers and tribes were actuated by the lust of conquest and, in consequence, became aggressors, long after the advent of Islam of course, and let slip the dogs of war for self-aggrandizement, we can, to be fair, condemn those individuals for the reprehensible acts, and surely not Islam.

I made certain remarks recently, in one of my speeches at Durban, and as they are very pertinent, I would like to repeat them to you. (So saying, His Eminence read out the following passage from a booklet which he was carrying with him):

"If certain nations, immersed in. paganism and superstition and ignorant of the real teachings of religion, wage wars in its name, the crime is theirs, and no blame can be ascribed to religion. Were not millions of human beings killed during the Great War in the name of peace, justice and the laudable object of safeguarding the rights of weaker nations? Should we then condemn these humane and noble qualities because some statesman abused these terms and sanctioned the inhuman slaughter for the attainment of their own selfish ends?"

George Bernard Shaw: There is no doubt that fanatics of the Roman Church were, to a great extent, responsible for the sad events, and the pure teachings of Christianity have no concern with their occurrence. It may also be admitted that a great many misunderstandings prevail regarding Islam, and that it is being widely misrepresented. But do the Muslim masses agree with your interpretation? Do they believe that Islam was not, and should not, be spread by force?

[Shaw had got the answer he wanted. Here was a scholar who commanded his respect. And so he now seized the opportunity that had come his way to get as much information on Islam as was possible 'from the horse's mouth'. In its confrontation with Islam, the Western world was more concerned about a Muslim's resort to force than it was of any other subject. The modern West would marshal all its resources to ensure that Jihad never took place again. The Prophet (s), on the other hand, had prophesied that one section of his followers would never abandon Jihad until the Last Day. 'Fighting for Islam' and 'spreading Islam by force' were not synonymous. What was the thinking of contemporary Muslims on the subject of fighting? Shaw may not have been 'fishing' for an answer to question of 'fighting for Islam'. But that 'fishing' expedition continues to this day]

Maulana Siddiqui: Every Muslim is bound to endorse it, for whatever I say is precisely what the Qur'an says, and my own views or conceptions have nothing to do with it. Many books have been written on this subject. Syed Amir Ali, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Allama Shibli and other learned doctors of Islamic theology have exhaustively dealt with all the aspects of this subject in their books.

[Maulana Siddiqui correctly avoided expanding on his reply. There was no need for him to inform Shaw, at this stage of the conversation, of specific conditions that require Muslims to fight. Such, for example, would be the obligation to fight in order to liberate the oppressed, particularly so when the oppressed were themselves crying out for such help (*Qur'an: al-Nisa -4:75; al-Hajj -22:39-40; etc*). Even the very 'stones' of the Holy Land are crying out to Muslims today to fight to liberate the Holy Land*. In replying in this brief and prompt way he provided an opportunity for Shaw to turn to another subject. And this is precisely what he did.]

George Bernard Shaw: I know that there is a considerable amount of concord between Islam and Christianity!

Maulana Siddiqui: The correspondence is not merely nominal or superficial, for the Qur'an expressly predicates that when the ultimate source or origin of an inspired or revealed and divine religion is the Being of God, unanimity in such

revelations is indispensable. Islam has been conceived as a new religion. But according to the Qur'an the religion preached by Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the same that was promulgated by all the true Prophets from Abraham right up to Jesus (peace be upon them all). God deputed them one and all for the dissemination of much the same teachings.

It was only when their original teachings were tampered with and corrupted, and their authenticity became dubious, that Almighty God sent the last Prophet, and the last book, to re-state, confirm and complete His original Message. The Holy Qur'an has made this quite clear by saying that:

"We ordained for you the religion with which We commanded Noah and which We have revealed unto thee (O Muhammad) and with which We commanded Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Observe this religion and be not divided therein." (Qur'an: al-Shura: - 42:13)

George Bernard Shaw: The translation of the Qur'an that I have read certainly substantiates your statements. I very much prefer the translation made by one who has adopted a different variation of the arrangement of the verses to that which is generally followed by other translators. I had it always with me during my tour of Morocco and Algeria, and my occasional references to its contents proved to be a perennial source of diversion and curious amusement to the Muslims of those lands. It is one of the editions of 'Every Man's Library', and I have commended its wider publicity to some of the publishers.

[We now learn that Shaw had not only read an English translation of the Qur'an, but that he had also studied it to advantage, and had quoted from it from time to time. This was an important demonstration of the absence of bias in his heart.]

Maulana Siddiqui: The translation you allude to is that of Mr. Rodwell!

George Bernard Shaw: Yes.

Maulana Siddiqui: There is no doubt that Mr. Rodwell has expended a great deal of energy and industry in translating the chapters of the Qur'an in their chronological order of revelation, but as his knowledge of the Arabic literature and Islamic history was not sufficiently wide and profound, a considerable number of translated passages are so misleading and contain such flagrant mistakes (which I by no means attribute to a deliberate intent on his part, but as I have already said, they may be the result of his limited knowledge in the said spheres) that they are likely to create wrong impressions about Islam.

As far as the translations of the Qur'an are concerned, I would recommend you to read: 'The Meaning of the Glorious Koran' by Mr. Marmaduke Pickthall, and

I am sure that its perusal will enable you to appreciate considerably more of the exquisite beauty, the sublime transcendence and the appealing and impressive style of the Qur'anic guidance. However, I do not imply that it is a perfect version of the original. You are yourself a splendid writer and so you can easily recognize that in spite of a translator being the ablest and the best, he can never transmit the force and brilliance of your original writings when he translates them into another language.

George Bernard Shaw: It is quite true that the spirit of the original cannot be transplanted into its translation in another language, and the same is the case with the translations of the Bible. But they have now achieved a very high standard, and the process of raising it still higher is being continued.

[In making this reference to the Bible Shaw presented an opportunity for Maulana to elaborate on a theme on which he had previously commented, i.e., changes that were made to the word of God in the Torah, the Gospel etc. Maulana promptly and courageously seized the opportunity that was presented.]

Maulana Siddiqui: Although the translations of the Bible may attain the highest stage of perfection from the standpoint of language, one cannot say, under any circumstances, that they contain the original message of Christianity, or are the genuine versions of the teachings of Jesus Christ. You know that the pure original message of the Gospel, as delivered by Jesus, is no more extant. There is no original manuscript of the Gospel and numerous corruptions have produced numerous conflicting texts. And so confusion was worse confounded, and a seeker of truth could not quench his thirst at its hydroid font. The Qur'an, in contrast, has been preserved in such a manner that there has not been the slightest change, not even to the extent of a letter or a dot. Hence, if we want to know the real teachings of Christianity, we must look for them in the Qur'an.

George Bernard Shaw: Has there really been no alteration in the Qur'an? Is it absolutely preserved in its original form? Did Prophet Muhammad know how to write, and is his writing in existence?

[We must assume that these questions were all posed in sincerity. They reveal a lot concerning the ignorance of the questioner on basic matters pertaining to Islam and to the Prophet (s), an ignorance that has mysteriously persisted in the western mind to this day. But they also imply Shaw's tacit acceptance of the charge of the Qur'an that the Torah and the Gospel were rewritten by human beings who proceeded to change the Word of God.]

Maulana Siddiqui: There is a complete and authentic record of each and every chapter, nay, even of every verse, or I might say, of every word of the Qur'an. Immediately following the revelation of a verse or verses to him the Prophet used to send for the special scribes appointed for the purpose of recording the revelations. He would then dictate the same to them. And they would record it. When transcribed, he would ask them to recite what they had written and, after listening to and verifying it, would explain to them its meaning.

The manuscripts in the handwriting of one of the most honoured and trusted among the scribes, Zaid bin Thabit, are preserved intact in the archives of Constantinople and Medina. Today's Qur'anic text is the exact copy of the original, and the copies of the Qur'an in the world today do not differ with each other even in point of a comma or a dash.

George Bernard Shaw: What! Are there punctuation marks in the Qur'an?

Maulana Siddiqui: The punctuation marks in the English language comprise commas, colons, semi-colons, periods, etc, but the principles of Qur'anic elocution comprehend numerous signs of a different kind. For instance, a stop is compulsory in certain places, whilst it is optional in others; some endings are fully pronounced, whilst others are quiescent, etc. The correct accents, pronunciations, accurate halts, etc., are so intricate and difficult of acquisition, that the Qur'anic elocution has been evolved into a distinct art, and copious volumes have been written on its theory and practice.

George Bernard Shaw: All this is rather astonishing and new to me. I was also surprised to learn that you delivered a speech on 'Islam and Science' in Nairobi. What I find difficult to understand is how you can possibly present the picture of Heaven and Hell, which is portrayed in the Qur'an, in a manner convincing to persons conversant with science, whose minds are inured to accept nothing without visible or palpable proof?

I hold the Prophet of Arabia in great esteem and I can quite understand that it would have been impossible to restrain and wean that illiterate, ignorant and perverse race, sunk in the miasma of utter moral depravity, from committing the most heinous of crimes. And it would have been equally impossible to imbue its people with enthusiasm to strive after righteousness and to assimilate high morals and virtues, without projecting these awesome images of heaven and hell. It was, perhaps, for this reason that such a terrible and intensely awe-inspiring spectacle of Hell and an equally captivating and enticing image of Heaven as a land flowing with milk and honey had to be presented before their vision.

I also very much admire the forcible and striking diction of the Qur'an. What elegant grace and beauty characterizes that passage which depicts the dreadful scene of the doomsday field, and, when dealing with infanticide, dramatically leaves off at the question: "*For what crime were you slain?*" (Qur'an: *al-Taqwir -81:8*) to the innocent child that was buried alive or put to death. In my opinion, it is the most effective way of creating an abiding impression on the minds of the people. But I am afraid I am digressing, for I would very much like to know how the problem of Heaven and Hell could possibly be elucidated in the light of science.

[Again it is Shaw who was leading the conversation. He changed the subject of conversation again and again in order to maximize the benefit he could derive from the opportunity of speaking with an authority on Islam. After questioning Maulana on the Qur'an Shaw now turned his attention to the psychology of religion. He assumed that the Qur'an has come from the Prophet (s) himself, for he had not as yet been challenged to think otherwise. But his comments concerning the nature of the description of heaven and hell in the Qur'an reveal some understanding of the Qur'anic psychology of religion. Maulana was careful to explain that the Qur'anic description was meant for temporal human understanding but could never actually describe the transcendental reality of heaven and hell.

It was when Shaw turned to the epistemological challenge involved in the defence of belief in heaven and hell that Maulana was led to that battleground which witnessed the most dangerous of all attacks ever launched against the religious way of life. The modern West saw with only 'one' eye, the external. The 'internal' eye was blind. So, the West insisted that knowledge came only from external observation and experimentation. Whatever could not be observed could never be known. If a thing could never be known, then, for all intents and purposes, it did not exist. Thus, there was therefore no reality beyond material reality. The epistemology that produced western materialism could not accommodate belief in heaven and hell! How would the scholar of Islam respond to this profound epistemological challenge?]

Maulana Siddiqui: You are a master of the art of writing, and your enchanting and novel literary productions with your magical pen revolutionize the mentality of the readers. I am sure you will agree with me on this point that material language cannot possibly act as an apt vehicle with which one can accurately convey the significance and reality of spiritual problems and phenomena. In fact this is not possible without the help of metaphors and similes that are used analogously.

One must, therefore, bear this fact in mind and make due allowance for the mode of expression with which the Qur'an describes Hell and Heaven. Simultaneously with such illustrations that confine their appeal to physical senses, God Almighty stipulates however, and in the clearest terms, that we should not be too inquisitive regarding the true nature of the blessings of Heaven: *"So no one knows what is in store for them of that which will refresh the eyes."* (Quran: *al-Sajda -32.-17*) According to the Traditions, we should not, under any circumstances, think of them in any way comparable to the objects of this world: *"The reality of their constitution has been neither witnessed by any human eyes, nor have the ears listened to words capable of expressing it; it is, indeed, beyond the pale of human imagination, and even a perfunctory surrogate of it cannot be visualized."*

How can it be asserted in the face of this pronouncement and explanation that the blessings of Heaven resemble in any way whatsoever that which pleases us or contribute to our happiness in this world? The truth of the matter lies elsewhere. In fact material progress and comfort commensurate with the degree of comprehension and execution follow as a matter of course from our compliance with natural or physical laws. So too one attains the utmost possible spiritual bliss and beatitude in proportion to allegiance or adherence to moral and spiritual laws and their translation into practice. Conversely their violation entails spiritual torture and tribulation.

If, according to the law of progress, everything is heading for advance, there must naturally be a zenith of it, and beyond that there must be no point of further progress. Comfort or happiness and grief or suffering are two states which a person experiences in this life, - hence there must be an extreme point for both of these states. This very extreme point of pleasure or bliss is called Heaven, and the extreme point of sorrow is called Hell.

Just as there are material media that are either conducive to happiness or instrumental in inflicting suffering in this world, so must there be some kind of media to procreate that state of bliss or generate pain and suffering in the other world. A metaphorical word-picture of the former has been sketched to portray Heaven, and the tremendously appalling and dreadful portrait of torments has been drawn to symbolize Hell. Now this other world, which we call spiritual or celestial, is neither like this material world, nor is it purely spiritual, having no connection, whatsoever, with matter, and where there are only souls utterly free from matter.

The human being, body and soul together, is responsible or accountable for his or her activities. Hence, the soul in partnership with the quintessence of this very physical organism will meet with the kind of happiness or grief suitable to the conditions obtaining in the world.

Now it only remains to define matter. But as you know this is not possible even at the present stage of scientific progress. For what matter really is constitutes a conundrum that has not been solved in spite of the attempts made by the best human brains. Far from succeeding in analyzing it chemically, the greatest scientists have not been able even to picture its reality. The culminating point of scientific research up to date is the establishment of the 'Theory of Protons and Electrons', according to which the wave radiations of these are the basis of the universe, and every physical body in its solid form is the result of those very radiations.

This is what the magazine *The World of Wonder* says about matter: "Matter seems very solid, but men of science tell us that if all the spaces in the atoms that make up our bodies were done away with, and the nucleus and electrons of the atoms were concentrated into a mass, the whole matter of a grown man's body would be so small that it could not be seen with the naked eye."

Hence, if it is possible for a scientist to accept with out positive proof that an average electron flies round its nucleus several thousand million times every second, and base the formation of solid physical organisms on their wave radiations, there should be no difficulty for him to imagine the soul and body in a form suitable to the conditions of the kind of happiness or grief to be met with in the 'great beyond'. A very hazy picture of those states can be said to reflect itself in those weird experiences of ours which we call dreams.

[The Islamic Scholar was well versed in modern thought. He had kept himself abreast with the latest advances in physics. He had also drunk profoundly from the fountain of Islamic scholarship through the ages. He was thus able to meet the considerable challenge which Shaw had summoned him to respond to when he invited him to present the case for belief in transcendental religious verities in an age which recognized observation as the only means of acquiring knowledge. Regardless of what the modern philosopher might think of Maulana's answer the important fact to note is that it satisfied Shaw. This was Islamic scholarship 65 years ago. Modern physics has made considerable advance since 1935. Scholars of Islam in this age would profit greatly from emulating the example set by Maulana.]

George Bernard Shaw: This is really a very beautiful, eloquent and gratifying explanation, but will the present day Muslims be prepared to accept it?

Maulana Siddiqui: This description is by no means a concoction of my brain. Rather, as I have already said, the Qur'an itself propounds it. I cannot claim any credit, even for the manner of description, because my great predecessors, Imams Fakhruddin Razi, Ghazzali, and Mohiuddin ibn Arabi, when addressing

enlightened philosophers like you, expressed themselves in similar terms. If I may say it in the oriental style, I have only gathered a few crumbs from their tables of magnificent feasts.

[The reader would be fascinated to learn that Maulana Dr. Ansari, student and disciple of Maulana Siddiqui, published in 1973 a masterpiece of Islamic scholarship. It was a 2-volume work entitled *The Qur'anic Foundations and Structure of Muslim Society***, and in it he expounded in some detail precisely the conception of heaven and hell that his distinguished teacher here presented to Shaw. Dr. Ansari was, in turn, the beloved teacher and spiritual guide of the humble editor of this text]

All the teachings of Islam are rational. There are no mysteries and dogmas. They only require to be explained in a proper light to transfuse their correct sense. It is difficult to understand the literature of any art with which we are not conversant. Hence, in order to grasp and assimilate the problematic points related to any art, we must first acquire knowledge and cultivate intimate acquaintance with that particular art. If we then seek their solution in the light of this knowledge we shall easily understand them.

(At this stage Mr. Shaw's hostess came in, and Mr. Shaw introduced Maulana Siddiqui to her. Addressing Mr. Shaw, she said that it was almost time for him to leave for the docks. Mr. Shaw said he must certainly make a move then, and, turning to His Eminence, said):

George Bernard Shaw: Your conversation is so very interesting and informative, that I would like to have the privilege of enjoying your company for years. But, unfortunately, I have to leave now.

Maulana Siddiqui: I also ardently desire to have the benefit of exchanging views with such a cultured and learned scholar as yourself. This is particularly since I found that even an inadequate acquaintance with the teachings of Islam from unauthentic and perhaps tainted sources has evoked such a positive and optimistic statement from you regarding Islam, that: *"The future religion of the educated, cultured and enlightened people will be Islam."*

I would like to speak to you about the profound philosophy and psychological truths the Qur'an expounds, so that a gifted and erudite savant of your parts and genius, perfectly familiar with the tastes and mental tendencies of the civilized world, can present that truth to them in an effective and desirable manner.

George Bernard Shaw: I am really very sorry that I could secure such a short time for speaking to a learned sage like your self.

Maulana Siddiqui: I am, however, grateful even for this opportunity and avail myself of the occasion to present to you the printed copies of two of my lectures on 'Religious and Scientific Progress of the World', and 'Spiritual Culture in Islam', which I recently delivered at Durban. I also give you this booklet on 'Islam' by my friend, Mr. Elias Burney, M.A., Professor of Economics at the Usmania University, Hyderabad, Deccan. (This is now in India) He has made a classified collection of the Qur'anic verses under various heads with explanatory notes. I hope you will find these books to be of some benefit. Please feel free to communicate with me on any point connected with these books or with any other book on Islam. It will be an honour for me to respond to your enquiries to the extent that my own knowledge permits.

George Bernard Shaw: There is no doubt that your way of presenting the Islamic teachings is very fascinating, but will the orthodox section of the Muslims agree with you?

[Maulana responded to the question by expressing his confidence that even the most orthodox of Muslims would agree with his views. Maulana Dr. Ansari deleted the actual text of the answer for reasons that are not clear to this editor. He may, perhaps, have done so because his teacher and mentor, Maulana Siddiqui, may have subsequently changed his opinion on a matter he addressed in his answer].

George Bernard Shaw: I have been very pleased to make your acquaintance, and it will be the most precious of all memories of this trip of mine.

(Bidding farewell to each other, His Eminence wished Shaw bon voyage and they parted. George Bernard Shaw was seen standing on the veranda waving his hand till the car that took away the scholar of Islam went out of sight.)

[What is most remarkable about this conversation is the fact that Shaw was not a hostile critic of Islam. Yet he was, perhaps, the most famous western intellectual of his age. On the contrary he showed remarkable respect for Prophet Muhammad (s) and there was manifest sincerity in the courteous way in which he greeted, met and parted from the eminent scholar of Islam. Today's sad reality is that such westerners as Shaw have become almost extinct. It is almost impossible to find any such outstanding personality in today's secular western intellectual elite, or in its non-European progeny, who can share with George Bernard Shaw his view that: *"The future religion of the educated, cultured and enlightened people will be Islam."* The world is not experiencing progress. On the contrary, it is the scum of humanity who now control the world, and who are also hell-bent on controlling the minds of all of mankind! Mankind must choose to follow Muhammad (s), or to follow godless modernity. There is no other choice!]

INTRODUCING

Maulana Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqui al-Qaderi

Every religion and every ideology has in every age its great exponents who personify in a distinguished manner the cause they cherish and uphold and whose labours for that cause form landmarks in human history. One such great personality of the first half of the twentieth century was Maulana Shah Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqui *Al-Qaderi (ra)*. Born in the South Asian sub-continent, his noble soul soared beyond the limitations of territory and race. Imbibing Islamic as well as Western education, he rose to combine the best in ancient and modern disciplines and became a distinguished exponent of the message of orthodox Islam to modern humanity. But the most distinctive aspect of his personality was the spiritual magnetism that he radiated and which captivated the minds and hearts of all who crossed his path.

With these great qualities of head and heart, he travelled continuously for forty years from town to town, country to country, and continent to continent in the noble mission of *Da'wah* and *Tableegh*, until his labours of love for the spiritual reform and upliftment of humanity covered a major part of the world. Millions of human souls belonging to diverse races and nationalities in Asia, Africa, Europe and America received spiritual blessings through his dynamic and refulgent personality. And numerous Islamic missionary societies, mosques, schools, hospitals, libraries, infirmaries, orphanages and periodicals sprang up in the wake of his immortal missionary labours. He worked with single-minded devotion for the cause of Islam and humanity until his noble soul returned to Allah's Mercy at Madina in 1954.

The Aleemiyah Institute of Islamic Studies was established in Karachi, Pakistan, in 1964 as a tribute to the memory of Maulana Siddiqui.

See our book: 'Jerusalem in the Qur'an', published in the Ansari Memorial Series.

****** The great two-volume work of Maulana Dr. Ansari entitled: '*The Qur'anic Foundations and Structure of Muslim Society*', as well as the above book and other books in the Ansari Memorial Series, can be ordered through email to the following address: inhosein@hotmail.com .

See also the website: www.imranhosein.org

A Comment

The (edited) document looks perfect. I must admit that the commentary has really brought it alive. I have read it before, but never realized how these few words from the great *Shaikh* mirror his immense personality - his knowledge, his wit, his delivery, his poise, his dignity. I am no less amazed at his English. Think of an ordinary man of the (Indian) subcontinent with a degree from a local University during the first half of this century - what was his English like? - bookish at best, and hilarious, if not atrocious, at worst. And here is a man who is not just talking on the streets of London, he is stupefying the 'brain of Britain' with his length; breadth and depth of knowledge as much as with his English.

Subhanallah!

Muhammah Almagir

Sydney, Australia