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Where Is Our Mecca?
(Manifest of Euroislam)*

“But most of them follow nothing but conjecture; truly conjecture can be of no avail against truth” [10:36].¹

My grandmother was very religious. She prayed every day, observed sawm, and did not eat pork. In my childhood, she used to read me the history of saints instead of bedtime fairy tales. When I became a student in the physics faculty of Kazan University, I used to help her understand some complicated surahs of the Quran: I took the Russian translation by Krachkovsky and did my best retelling them in Tatar, trying to explain topics which were very remote to me.

Our generation was excommunicated from religion. In the physics faculty, there studied intelligent youth who lived in the world of quantum mechanics, synchrotrons, and the splitting of the atom. We tried to understand Lobachevsky’s geometry, according to which parallel lines must intersect somewhere in limitless cosmic space, folded by the gravitational fields of stars and planets. The young Roald Sagdeev visited us and lectured on principles of thermonuclear synthesis. It seemed that physics could explain the most complex laws of matter. God was an extra link in the logical chain of proof, which could at best be reduced to the function of the uncognizable. Albert Einstein was our god.

Having once read that one of the famous physicists was a religious person, I was greatly surprised. The creation of atomic and hydrogen bombs was hardly connected with reading the Bible or the Quran.

“Nor is hidden from the Lord (so much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven” [10:61].

It is difficult for our imagination to imagine the endless divisibility of the atom, the unlimited space of the Universe and to understand time without beginning or end. We should either discard such notions or recognize them as axioms. They cannot be explained rationally, as our entire life experience protests and does not agree with such ideas. Even intuition cannot help here. The endless is an object of faith.

An atom consists of particles that cannot even be viewed through an electron microscope: they are only spotted when they leave a trace in a special instrument. Particles are not an “object” like a billiard ball which can be touched, measured, or weighed – rather, they are a result of the interaction of “something” with the instrument. Besides, that “something” cannot be called a body or a wave, since it is both at the same time. What is incompatible in our world turns out to be possible in the other. However, it would be rash to state that particles are a mere fantasy, a construction of an intellectual mind, some traces on an instrument. When an atomic bomb explodes, everybody understands that they are a scary reality.

Generally speaking, many things in our lives are also the results of interactions between a human being and “objectivity.” The human being interferes with the evolution of the ages and in this sense creates it. The truth is not a frozen absolute; rather, it depends on us. Farid Isak mentions fairly: “But

* Translated by Natalia Dolgova Jacobsen, Donald James Jacobsen (USA).

¹ Quotes from Qur’an are given in translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali: The Holy Quran: English translation of the meanings, and commentary revised and edited by the Presidency of Islamic Researchers, Ifta, Call and Guidance, Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah: King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex, 1410 [1989 or 1990]. In square brackets, there are references to the number of sura and ayat.

my problem is not connected with how much or what exactly we extract from Islam. The question is different: what exactly do we add to it? How is our contribution able to change the image of Islam? Are we and Islam actually two completely different things? Does Islam exist on its own, separate from us? Can it be true that the essence of faith cannot perceive something from outside of our experience?”²

Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have existed for more than a thousand years, enlightening, instilling humanism and compassion for fellow creatures. Nevertheless, civilized people, maybe even with the name of God upon their lips, dropped atomic bombs on civilian populations. Afterwards, with even greater effort, they started developing a hydrogen bomb, as well as chemical and bacteriological weapons. What is that? Is it Satan’s plotting? It can be explained that way, but isn’t that too simple an explanation?

Why did God permit such destructive wars and the creation of weapons which are capable of turning the earth into hell? Isn’t He all-seeing, almighty and the most merciful?..

“Whatever good, (O man!) happens to thee, is from Allah; but whatever evil happens to thee, is from thyself” [4:79].

The Soviet country was atheist. Socialism became a challenge to the western model of democracy and the market economy. Bad or good, it was what we lived. Lenin took the place of Jesus Christ. We studied 55 volumes of his complete collected works, following the “testaments” religiously. Scholastic drilling became the main ideological weapon. Anybody wandering off from the letter of Lenin’s quotations became a betrayer, heretic – a *murtat*.

The country that shook the whole world with its revolutionary changes, won over fascism, and began the exploration of space has now lost its dynamism and ended up on a list of “third world” countries. A phantasmagoria resulted from a quirky thought and the deification of authorities.

The West extracted lessons from this situation: it parted with its colonies, borrowed some socialist ideas, reformed its education system, and united in front of the Communist threat. Incredible economic growth, technological inventions and raising the standard of living made the West an example to the whole world.

“And whom Allah leaves to stray, there is none to guide” [40:33].

Before her death, my grandmother signed her Quran over to me. She explained it as follows: “He loves books; therefore, there will be a place for the Quran on his shelf.”

The time to read the Quran has come...

There are clergy who live through Islam. It is their vocation, work, and duty. They win their daily bread through supporting religion. There are scholars who understand all the subtleties of the Quran, Sunnah and Shar’ia. Their role is to give interpretations with consideration of the whole history of the issue and different opinions, to understand the subtleties of the Asharites’ argumentation regarding the idea of predestination and know the Mutazilites’ concept of freedom of choice. There are also people who did not dedicate their life to Islam, but nevertheless, they go their own way looking for truth. They have their own path to Allah.

Once Mullah Nasreddin said:

- I can see in the dark.
- It’s wonderful, mullah, but if it is so, why do you always walk with a candle at night?
- So that others would not fall upon me.

² Farid Isak. *Byt’ musul’maninom.* – M., 2002. – P. 249.

“But those who believe and work righteousness, – no burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear” [7:42].

Why does Islam spread so quickly around the world? Why did the East fall so hopelessly behind the West? What relation does Shar’ia have to my existence? What will be the state of the world after September 11? It is difficult to find clear answers to these questions.

My opinion is not fatwa of a scholar-theologian or minister, it is rather mere thoughts aloud of a secular person who received European education and who is concerned with the future of his republic. It is impossible to stand aside and wait for somebody’s clarifications regarding the problems that concern all and everybody.

My distant ancestors voluntarily converted to Islam in the 10th century and then spread it among other peoples as they could. Tatar theologians in 19th-20th centuries embarked on the path of reforming Islam and achieved a great deal on that path. We have a rich history, but what awaits us in the future? I walk with a candle in my hand to see the unknown or, at least, to prevent other people from falling upon me.

Somebody might say: why pick up the feather if you are not a theologian or imam. Do you have the right for it? However, Islam is my essence, my culture and if I want to understand it there is not any other source except the Quran. Why should I listen to somebody else’s interpretation rather than reading it myself? Does anyone have a monopoly on truth? Nobody does.

They say one should know the subtleties of the Arabic language in order to understand the Quran. Possibly, it is so. But the knot is in the fact that the reading of the original Quran itself is already an interpretation, because the epoch, the people, the language, and the meanings of words and notions have changed. Words live their own lives. Rote memorization of the Quran’s suras is not the solution. The text of the Quran is unable to speak with its own voice. It needs interpreters, and the interpreters are people. Everyone puts his own ideas into what he has read, dwelling upon his own life experience and culture.

Muslims live in different states and under different conditions. In Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Sudan, they observe the historical Shar’ia. There are also such countries as Turkey and Egypt with secular legislation and Muslim societies, and in Russia and Europe, Muslims live as a minority in a Christian environment not completely strange to them, but different. The times of the Caliphate have gone. Sayid Kutb supposes that: “It is quite amusing to try to create, for instance, Islamic statements, in order to adapt to the societal or economic organization in America or Russia, both of them not adopting Islam as their main laws. It concerns a country which does not recognize the primacy of Islamic power! Various attempts to develop Fiqh and subdue it to a system which does not recognize the power of Islam are attempts to grow seeds in the air, an empty amusement inappropriate for the seriousness of Islam.”³ Does this mean that Tatars should be excluded from the Islamic world? Does it mean that Islam stands above and beyond human values? How should the Muslims of Europe, whose number is growing every year, behave? After all, they consider themselves Muslims.

The world has become a multicultural society that has worked out an international law. It is becoming an *ummah*, not purely Muslim, but at least united on issues of war and peace, the protection of human rights and the interests of the state. Such a community cannot emerge against the will of God. It was said: “And did not Allah check one set of people by means of another; the earth would indeed be full of mischief: but Allah is full of bounty to all the worlds.” [2:251]. The system of checks and balances, consisting of international organizations and mutual agreements, creates the worldwide *ummah*.

³ Quotation taken and translated from the book Yusuf Al-Kardavi. *Sovremennyi idzhtikhad: ot besporiadka k poriadku.* – Kazan: Iman, 2001. – P. 81.

The third millennium brings on completely new demands on man and society. The role of individuals and of some ethnicities has increased greatly. They became a value in itself and cannot be dissolved in the Muslim community. The world prefers speaking English, and kids do not want to leave the Internet. We can't imagine our lives without television with tens of channels, electronic mail, mobile phones, and airplanes which can deliver us to any destination in the world. The Arabic world and culture have lost their former significance and attraction. They do not present advantages to the human being.

Where is our Mecca now?

“We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them” [14:4].

Islam is a primary and eternal religion. It was said: “(I would rather) the Religion of Abraham the True, and he joined not gods with Allah. Say ye: ‘We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them; and we submit to Allah’”[2:135-137]. God sent tens of prophets to bring the testaments to peoples in languages they understand.

At some time, the Arabs naively thought that the Holy Book was revealed in Arabic, and Gibrail (the archangel Gabriel) translated it for prophets into their native language. Actually, the book was “revealed” to the prophet [2:285; 3:7; 5:83]; he was “sent inspiration” [4:163]. The prophet said: “I follow naught but what is revealed unto me” [10:15]. The speech of Allah was not created or verbalized by Himself, but its essence was carried through the Prophet. Abu Khanifa wrote: “Allah speaks, but in the same way as we do. We talk using the organs of speech, pronouncing different sounds. The speech of Allah does not have a beginning or an end and does not stop, since it is not letters or sounds.”⁴

“With it came down the thoughtful spirit to thy heart that thou mayest admonish” [26:193-194].

Allah listens to our hearts rather than to what is on our tongues.

Meanings of words in any language are connected with the conditions of the language's existence. “The meaning of a word is its use in language,” wrote Ludwig Wittgenstein.⁵

Let us imagine that I am translating a sentence from English into Tatar: “A melody stirs the soul.” This sentence is simple in structure, and the words are unsophisticated. Anybody speaking Tatar will produce an adequate translation: “Моң күнелне дулкынландыра.” Now let's imagine we have to produce a reverse translation. Here there emerge difficulties, as the word “моң” can be interpreted as a longing, as inexplicable feelings, as a spiritual mood; it encompasses the dramatic, and sometimes tragic history of the Tatars and all the ethnic feelings of the nation: only in the utter case can “моң” mean melody. “Моңлы көй” cannot be translated as melodious melody; it is not even a spiritual melody. It is a melody touching the depths of the Tatar soul. As a whole, this phrase is difficult to grasp in a foreign language, since every nation has its own history. As a result of reverse translation, the initial phrase will not have a place for the word “melody.” One could suggest a translation such as: “Deep spiritual feelings stir the heart,” but then there will be critics who will say that I translated the word “моң” in a superficial manner. And they will be right. The language carries cultural stereotypes characteristic only of a given nation. We see in the world around us what we carry in our consciousness. The words we hear recreate our current representations.

⁴ Quoted and translated after the book: Znanie o boge – naivazhneishee iz znanii. – Kiev, 2002. – P.17.

⁵ Quoted and translated from: Wittgenstein L. Filosofskie raboty. P.1. – M.: Gnozis, 1994. – P. 99.

Meaning is the use and sense of words which is sometimes understandable only in the context of the conditions in which it exists. A camel for an Arab is a symbol of life, beauty, prosperity, and wealth. An Arab can compare a woman with a female camel, and it will not be taken as an insult. We cannot understand the meaning of camel, since for us it is an animal from the zoo. When we read in the Quran: "Do they not look at the camels, how they are made?" [88:17], we cannot immediately grasp the significance of the phrase. For inhabitants of northern latitudes, it is nothing but an exotic animal.

It is difficult for us to understand the lines from Quran "By the Fig and the Olive" [95:1] which constituted an important base of Arabs' life and are totally unfamiliar to us. Why should we swear by these trees?! It does not make sense.

The meaning of words becomes understandable only in their use. Every word in a language means something, but an understanding of what it means is possible only within the context of the culture the word lives in. "To imagine a certain language is to imagine a certain form of life," wrote Wittgenstein.⁶

One of the modern articles on Islam says that "a man approaches Allah through his heart. The mind is the assistant of the heart."⁷

This is truly so if we begin from today's meaning of the word "heart" (*kal'b*), but in the times of the Prophet Muhammad, Arabs considered the heart to be the container of the mind. Thus, to strive toward God in the heart means to understand it in the mind. It was said: "Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that are blind but the hearts which are in their breasts." [22:46]. It says here that the heart understands rather than feels, as is more understandable for us. Today, the heart is the container of emotions rather than of mind for us. Therefore, when we read in the Quran: "Those whom Allah willeth to guide, He openeth their breast to Islam; those whom He willeth to leave straying, He maketh their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies," we should understand that it is the human mind, not the heart, that is implied here.

A whole science about the heart actually developed which is mentioned in Quran 133 times. The science had a long-lasting history and many trends. Every commune in different times had its own meaning for heart, and these meanings were often quite contradictory. Therefore, knowledge of Arabic does not yet guarantee unambiguous interpretation of Quran verses.

"The desert Arabs say, "We believe." Say, "Ye have no faith; but ye (only) say, "We have submitted our wills to Allah, for not yet has Faith entered your hearts" [49:14].

The Quran carries in itself the culture and people to whom it was revealed. The Holy Book has such a plot: "But his wife came forward clamoring: she smote her forehead and said: "A barren old woman!" [51:29]. People brought up in European traditions will take this literally: a woman hit herself in the face. In truth, this gesture means amazement and is characteristic for women of the Orient.

Sometimes, the language of the Quran is difficult to understand if taken literally. It was said: "Man is a creature of haste: soon (enough) will I show you My Signs; so ask Me not to hasten them!" [21:37]. This is just an image, the same was as the description of the judgment day, which includes the following words: "When the sky cracks, when stars fall apart..." It is understandable that the stars cannot fall apart and the sky cannot crack, but the picture described becomes more persuasive in such an emotional form. In the same way, a description of heaven is given through images.

There exists a long-standing myth about the creation of woman from Adam's rib. Musa Bigiyev, one of the foremost theologians of the 20th century, stated that the legend of woman's creation from Adam's rib is just an allegory, an image which implies the delicacy and tenderness of woman's nature.

⁶ Quoted and translated from: Vitgenshtein L. *Filosofskie raboty*. P.1. – M.: Gnozis, 1994. – P. 86.

⁷ Shaidullin Kh. L. *Verouchenie Islama*. – in the book: Abu-Khanifa Numan ibn Sabit. *Traktaty*. – M., 2001. – P.15.

It is unacceptable to apply physical force to a woman in the same way as to the delicate rib bone. A woman requires a special approach.

The legend of woman's origin from Adam's rib has existed for centuries because of a poor knowledge of the culture in which the language functioned. Friedrich Max Mueller wrote the following on the issue: "Adam could say to Eva: 'You are created the same as I am,' and in Hebrew he would have expressed his thought in the following way: 'You are bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.' This expression was repeated for several centuries, and soon there emerged a literal, so to say, material and misleading interpretation; and later on people have started believing that the first woman was created from the bone, or the rib, of the first man, due to the simple reason that he apparently could feel the lack of the rib less so than the lack of any other bone. Once it appeared, this misconception persisted in spite of all its oddity."⁸ This is quite a didactic example of how a language cliché was transformed into a persistently erroneous representation.

Mythological plots cannot be interpreted literally; they are mere elements of language imagery. Islam has acquired a plethora of legends during the hundreds of its existence. Even though they are not directly related to the Quran, these legends have been securely imprinted in people's consciousness.

Our life cardinally differs from medieval life. There are no slavery or invasions today; people live in nations rather than in tribes. Jews and Christians have changed. In addition to that, in Russia there live various ethnicities; there is a different economy and climate here.

"He created the heavens and the earth in true (proportions): He makes the Night overlap the Day and the Day overlap the Night; He has subjected the sun and the moon (to His law): each one follows a course for a time appointed" [39:5].

A number of the Quran's prescriptions are stated very rigidly, in a categorical form, but often they are not applicable under specific conditions. It was said: "Eat and drink, until the white thread of dawn appear to you distinct of its black thread; then complete your fast till the night appears" [2:187]. How is it possible to fast near the Arctic Circle, where the sun does not rise?

Musa Bigiyev, an expert on both the letter and the spirit of the Quran, suggested his own explanation of this situation. He analyzed a different ayat: "(Fasting) for a fixed number of days" [2:184] in which he sees the directions for those living in such geographical latitudes where it is impossible to tell day from night. In his work "Fast in Long Days," he writes: "According to the obvious direction of the Quran, fasting in such regions is never considered compulsory, as a fast is observed as such only for a certain number of days, i.e. where nights and days are comparable in their length. On the poles, where the year consists of either day or night, or in the cold polar regions, where nights and days last for weeks and months, the fast is excluded from the life of the inhabitants of those regions, since it is limited in time to a certain number of days. Such a peculiarity originates from the characteristics of a geographical region." An Arab who has never seen St. Petersburg's white nights will not understand or perceive this logic.

There is no east and west or zenith on the poles; the sun does not rise or set there.

The change of day and night in the Quran is given as something unchangeable, stable, going without saying – as a certain wonder and proof of God's existence. It would be wrong to think that God has no clue about the life of people beyond the Arctic Circle, but He gave the Quran to the Arabs who live around the Equator: they would not have believed otherwise.

"By the Book that makes things clear, – we have made it a Quran in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand. And verify, it is in the mother of the Book, with us, high (in dignity), full of wisdom" [43:2-4].

⁸ Fridrikh Maks Mueller. Vvedenie v nauku o religii. – M., 2002. – P. 37.

Rukaya Maksud writes that, “Both the Quran and the Hadith have numerous quotes in regard to human rights”⁹ and compiles a long list of them, such as the right to life, equality, freedom of opinion, political freedom, etc. All of these look very modern. As a matter of fact, the literature quotes the following Hadith: “How are rights violated? The rights are violated when sins are committed in the open, and nobody restrains the sinners from straying away.” These words are similar to those used today, but the meaning is different, i.e. as if we had considered a companion (i.e. satellite) of the Earth and a life companion, or a heart as organ and heart as soul to be exactly the same words. They sound and are spelled the same, but their meaning is understandable only in the context of their use.

In ancient times, human rights were attributed only to free people, as slaves were not considered to be people; they were property. The Prophet Muhammad pleaded for freeing slaves and demonstrated this by his own example, but he did not exclude the institution of slavery. Shar’ia still acknowledges slavery, in particular, as a result of captivity. Hanafiyah prescribes to either execute the captive or turn him into a slave – it does not even consider buyout, as representatives of other madhhab do. Therefore, we cannot transfer the Hadith about human rights onto the today’s situation.

The modern interpretation of human rights originates from the first ten amendments to the American Constitution, but even here we need to see the evolution of this notion. The sense of those amendments was the protection of states’ citizens from the claims of the U.S. Federal Government. It was only after World War II that these began to be interpreted as individual rights and were gradually settled in their current understanding. You could put a period here, but the plot would be incomplete if we did not mention the peculiar Russian attitude to the issue of human rights. The Russian-speaking population of Russia understands its meaning as the observance of civil rights, while “nationals” are concerned with the protection of ethnic interests, which they also consider to be a component of human rights. Therefore, human rights as discussed by the Prophet and human rights in our society are two different phenomena. It would be more appropriate to use independent terms in each case, but they have not been developed.

One should analyze the essence of the Quran considering all differences in the conditions of life and the mentality of culture representative of that epoch. One should not understand it literally, as if the Prophet lived in the 20th century; one should not ascribe the terms of art developed in the 7th century to our society.

“Thus have We sent this down-an Arabic Qur-an – and explained therein in detail some of the warnings, in order that they may fear Allah, or that it may cause their remembrance (of Him)” [20:113].

The language exists only in the context of its time and the people in whose environment it functions.

The Quran was sent down to the Arabs “in clear Arabic language” in regard to concrete events. That way, it was easier to turn them into believers. For instance, the Holy book says: “Perish the hands of the Father of Flame! Perish he!” [111:1]. It refers to the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad who organized intrigues against him. There existed a concrete situation and a need for a solution. These days, this *ayat* is only a reminder of a situation from the life of the Prophet and cannot be applied in modern conditions, especially since the hands of Abu Lahab did not perish.

There are some *suras* sent down in connection with certain military campaigns. *Ayat 25 of the sura* “Repentance” says: “Assuredly, Allah did help you in many battle-fields and on the day of Hunain: Behold! Your great numbers elated you, but they availed you naught; the land. For all that it is

⁹ Rukaya Maksud. Islam, – M., 2001. – P. 178.

wide did constrain you, and ye turned back in retreat.” This verse discusses one of many historical events. The Quran has many plots connected with the concrete life of Arabic tribes.

“Had We sent this as a Quran (in a language) other than Arabic, they would have said: “Why are not its verses explained in detail? What! A foreign (tongue) and (a Messenger) an Arab?” [41:44].

The strength of the Quran was in its concreteness, as it permitted putting the Koreishites and other tribes in the right way, but it also creates difficulties for our time. The question emerges: what is situational in the Quran, and what is universal and inspired for eternity? We cannot transfer everything in the Quran onto the conditions of today. The life of Arabs of the 7th century cannot be an example for us. It is only a piece of history—instructive, important, but still history.

I live in Tatarstan and do not want to be like a medieval Arab; I am a Tatar and would like to stay such. The history of my nation is important for me, especially since the Tatars influenced the fate of Eurasia to no lesser degree than the Arabs influenced the history of the East. It is also important for me to know the history of the Russians and the history of Russia in general, since that is where the main body of my people lives.

“(We sent them) with Clear Signs and Scriptures and we have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought” [16:44].

In the Meccan period, Quranic verses were addressed to all people. It was said: “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other” [49:13]. There is no difference between the rights of men and women; it is prohibited to use force for conversion to Islam; a tolerant attitude toward people of other confessions is expressed clearly.

In the Medinan period, *ayats* were mostly addressed to the Arabs of the 7th century and prescribed in regard to the pagans: “And slay them wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out” [2:191]. A number of *ayats* appeared in regard to women, making them unequal to men. It was said: “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means” [4:34]. Or: “Allah thus directs you as regards your children’s (inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females” [4:11]. Of course, explanations for this have been found, and it has been asserted to be a fair principle since men bear more responsibility, but inequality is inequality.

The contradictions between the verses of the Meccan and Medinan periods are too obvious and cannot be reconciled, as ones deny the others. Therefore, Muslim jurisprudents considered *ayats* of the earlier Meccan period to be canceled as earlier ones, but the date of revelation is not a criterion which allows some *ayats* to be considered more powerful than others. If it were a real cancellation, the Prophet himself would not include the so called “canceled” *ayats* in the text of the Quran. As is well-known, under his direct control four main teachers of the Quran were trained: Abdullah bin Masud, Salim Maula Abi Hudhaifa, Muaz bin Jabal and Ubayy ibn Kaab. His scrupulousness in those issues is demonstrated by the story with the pronunciation of one word. Omar complained to the Prophet that Abdullah was mispronouncing a certain verb; Muhammad listened to both and confirmed the right pronunciation of the sound. During the Prophet’s life, there were many people who knew the Quran by heart. Once, the Prophet was informed that Abu Musa taught people to read the Quran in his own house. The Prophet requested that he be brought in the part of the house where he could hear the reading, and, having heard it, he was happy with it. The Prophet Muhammad closely followed the preservation of the exact text of the Quran. If he had considered some verses canceled, they would not

have been included in the text of the Quran. If the Prophet himself did not undertake the mission of canceling verses, how can others allow themselves to do that?

“By degrees shall We teach thee (The Message), so thou shalt not forget, except as Allah wills: for he knoweth what is manifest and what is hidden” [87:6–7].

These days, a similar interpretation can be applied to the method of canceling the *ayats* of the Medinan period as less important for our time. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim writes: “An evolutionary approach to the interpretation of the Quran is nothing more than the process of *nasq* (or the process of cancellation) in the opposite direction, so that the previously cancelled texts of the Quran could be used now and, accordingly, the texts which were previously used by the Shar’ia would now be cancelled.”¹⁰ In truth, every type of *ayat* (those from the Meccan and Medinan periods) had its own area of application as well as its own *ummah*. Some principles were sent down for all peoples and for all times, while others were mostly meant to be for the Arabs of the early Middle Ages. Nothing was cancelled and is not being cancelled in the Quran, but there are different communities for whom different principles were meant.

The Medinan community emerged as the first Muslim state. Like a newborn who cannot eat adult food and drinks his mother’s milk instead, the early Muslims had to grow up a little before they could perceive the eternal. It was not possible to demand more from them. The Medinan verses were a truth for their time, and they were tightly connected with the language, thoughts and feelings of that community where Islam was being born, and they went along with this historical epoch. Just as a child turning into an adult should forget baby talk, Islam should be translated into the Meccan language. The time came, and the *ayats* of the Meccan period, taken from the “Mother of Books” and sent down to all mankind, came into effect.

“Allah doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book” [13:39].

The prophets were sent in order to interpret “The Mother of Books,” to bring the truth to concrete peoples in their native languages. The Prophet Muhammad said: “We, prophets, were given a task to speak with people on the level they can understand us.” The Quran was supposed to be explained in accordance with existing mentalities and customs.

To consider some *ayats* cancelled by others belittles the will of Allah or considers his revelations to be erroneous. It was said: “None of Our revelations do we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar” [2:106]. At first sight, it seems this is concerned with the possibility of canceling some Quranic verses. But if we go back to the previous verses [102-105], we will see the complete picture. Those verses discuss Christians, Jews and polytheists who were sent the writings. *Ayat* 105 starts with the words “It is never the wish of those without Faith among the People of the Book,” and this is followed by *ayat* 106, which talks about the “cancellation of verses.” Therefore, the principle of cancellation refers to the writings rather than to the Quran.

The Lord sent many prophets to the Earth, but they could not convey the word of God in its completeness. In their evidence, there appeared deformations and dark spots. It was said: “Never did We send a messenger or a prophet before thee, but, when he framed a desire, Satan threw some (vanity) into his desire: but Allah will cancel anything (vain) that Satan throws in, and Allah will confirm (and establish) His Signs” [22:52]. The Quran, in accordance with “The Mother of Books,” was called to

¹⁰ Abdullahi Ahmed An-Naim. Na puti k islamskoi reformatsii. (Grazhdanskie svobody, prava cheloveka I mezhdunarodnoe pravo). – M., 1999. – P. 70.

eliminate the mistakes of previous writings, but nothing is cancelled in the Quran itself, it being a divine revelation.¹¹

Instead of the *naskh* method *ijtihad* should be used, which allows for gradual transition from particular principles addressed to the Medinan community to the norms sent down for all of mankind.

At some point, mankind composed the united *ummah* of Ibrahim. Then it split up. Different religions and communities emerged who feuded, collaborated, and sometimes made alliances. Empires emerged and fell apart. The notion of *ummah* itself was changing with time. Now all mankind became a unified community.

Ijtihad allows the consideration of the evolution of society and the offering of modern interpretations of Islamic norms which originate from the spirit of the Quran. For instance, *jihad* as a war against nonbelievers had quite an explicable meaning in the Middle Ages, as back then the policy of war was quite an ordinary phenomenon. However, after World War II, when the means of war became a threat to human existence, diplomacy and international law rose above the principle of the use of force.

The Prophet differentiated between the lesser jihad with the use of force and greater jihad, which assumes peaceful promotion of Islam with the help of “The Book.” It was said: “Therefore listen not to the Unbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost strenuousness, with the (Quran)” [25:52]. Lesser jihad was needed when a threat to Muslims appeared from other states and when Islam conquered new territories in accordance with the rules of the medieval epoch. Today, issues of war and peace are regulated differently. Therefore, jihad should be interpreted in accordance with its literal meaning – “diligence,” battle with “*dunya*” – the material world – for spiritual origin, the battle with disbelief in oneself. Such a meaning is given by God for all times. Lesser jihad, if it is fair, is proclaimed only for self-defense purposes, for fighting violence and tyranny, which fits not only the text of the Quran but also the frames of international law.

Such differentiation and interpretation of *ayats* is crucial today. Wahhabism is oriented toward violence in the battle with other religions and even other trends in Islam. Appealing for the “purity” of Islam, it actually follows the Hanbalites in their extreme with complete denial of rationalism, – as it were, the Quran cannot be understood; it can only be believed in. Thus, it supports traditionalism, denying any new phenomena.

“*Mankind was but one nation, but differed (later)*” [10:19].

After two world wars, mankind created mechanisms against the start of a third one. Today, it makes no sense to talk about *ijma* (consensus) within the Muslim *ummah*. All Muslim countries develop as separate nations, as the *ummah* of Egypt, the *ummah* of Jordan and so on. Mankind became a unified community and values security, peace and stability above all.

Here is another example of *ijtihad*. It was said: “He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down tranquility to them; and He rewarded them with a speedy Victory; and many gains will they acquire (besides): and Allah is exalted in Power, full of Wisdom. Allah has promised you many gains that ye shall acquire, and He has given you these beforehand; and He has restrained the hands of men from you; that it may be a Sign for the Believers, and that he may guide you to a Straight Path” [48:18-20]. There were times when gains were the leading motive of people. Today it would be considered barbarism to share the gains, even though the Quran does regulate such issues. For centuries, mankind has fought in wars and gained trophies, but today that is gone with the past. The *sura* “Spoils of War” says: “And know that out of all the booty that ye may acquire (in war), a fifth share is assigned to Allah, – and to the Messenger, and to near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer, – if ye do

¹¹ The only compromise possible here would be to understand “cancelled” as “postponed”, and it would only be necessary to justify the founders of mazhabs; while, on the other hand, there is no necessity to justify anyone...

believe in Allah and in the revelation we sent down to our Servant on the Day of Discrimination – the Day of the meeting of the two forces” [8:41]. The share of gains might only be relevant to the “pious” pirates.

The theme of gains cannot be subdued or interpreted in some way. It should remain in the past. “Everything allowed by the Shar’ia,” – writes Yusuf Al Kardavi, – “is beneficial; everything banned by Shar’ia is definitely potentially harmful.”¹² If we differentiate between the *ummahs* to which *ayats* were revealed, then we should consider slavery and gains to be beneficial even today, which goes against the norms of civilized society.

We should not leave a single loophole to justify robberies, people kidnapping, etc., even if it is taken as *bi’tthah*. After all, it is better to end up in hell for *bi’tthah* than for the justification of a supposedly “fair,” according to the Shar’ia, share of the spoils.¹³ Following such logic, one could justify any policy. It was said: “For Persecution is worse than slaughter” [2:191]. Such phrases can be given a broad interpretation if they are taken out of the general context of the Quran without consideration of the audience they were addressed to.

In the times of the Prophet Muhammad, weapons of mass destruction did not exist. In that time, appeals for battle with nonbelievers carried a totally different meaning and implied different means. Today, Muslims should bear against the eternal idea of general solidarity sent down in the Meccan period, since mankind’s striving toward good is one of the demonstrations of Allah.

Of course, the life of the Prophet is exemplary, and the experience of Muslim countries of the 10th century is not useless either. But today, there are no slavery or invasions, and there is also not a necessity to share the spoils. According to the Shar’ia, for a murder, one should free a slave. It was said: “And whoever kills a Believer by mistake it is ordained that he should free a believing slave. And pay blood-money to the deceased’s family...” [4:92]. It is not like we should re-introduce slavery, especially since the Prophet freed slaves and opposed slavery in his heart, accounting for it out of necessity rather than belief. In the times of the Prophet, there was no paper money, organ transplantation, atomic reactors or spaceflight. Since times have changed, Muhammad would have definitely had his own opinion on cloning and on the activity of the UN.

In the 10th century, there occurred a phenomenon called in Muslim theology “closing the gates of *ijtihad*.” Critical, analytical thinking was forbidden. It was considered that everything necessary had already been developed by theologians. Since that time, Muslims observe the norms of the 10-13th centuries developed within the frames of the four *mazhabs*. In order not to follow the prescriptions of inconvenient *ayats* of the Meccan period, the notion of *naskh* was introduced. The *mazhabs* are a product of human interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah. They are not divine revelations, but they are followed even today.

The founders of the *mazhabs* themselves had a different opinion even in regard to the real number of genuine Hadith which, as is well-known, comprise the second most important source of Shar’ia. According to Ibn Haldun, Imam Abu Hanifa used only seventeen Hadith; Malik counted three hundred of them; the famous Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Ismail al Bukhari, the compiler of the most well-known collection of Hadith, brought that number up to seven thousand, while Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal believed there were fifty thousand of them. In that time, *ijtihad* was used even in regard to the most important source of Shar’ia – Sunnah – while today theologians reduce it to a question of secondary importance.

“The Bedouin Arabs are the worst in unbelief and hypocrisy, and most fitted to be in ignorance of the command which Allah hath sent down to his Messenger” [9:97].

¹² Yusuf Al Kardavi . Sovremennyi ijtihad. .. – P. 60.

¹³ For instance, Yusuf Al Kardavi, justifying distribution of funds gained from oil sales, directly refers to the ayat about the spoils, as an example of issue solution by analogy. See also: Ibid., p. 45.

One of the miracles created by God is the numerous peoples who all speak different languages. It was said: “And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are Signs for those who know” [30:22]. If God had wanted to, He would have made everybody into one Arabic-speaking nation. But He did not do it. Every nation lives its own life. There is no chosen messianic nation or castaway nation for Him. Jews and Arabs were just some of the many people who were sent down the Revelation.

God understands any language. A person must speak his own language with Him, the language that is closer to his soul. Is it at all possible to express the innermost in a foreign language?! Allah does not need an interpreter; neither does He prefer one nation or language to another. “He knows well the secrets of all hearts” [42:24].

“If thy Lord had so willed, he could have made mankind one people” [11:118].

No nation is eternal. “To every People is a term. Appointed: when their term is reached, not an hour can they cause delay, nor (an hour) can they advance (it in anticipation)” [7:34]. Arabs were once one of the most progressive peoples, but their time has gone. There was a time when the Tatars ruled over all of Eurasia...

The Muslim civilization does not swallow nor eliminate certain peoples. The Tatars’ fate turned out to be to become the northern outpost of Islam surrounded by the Orthodox world. In Russia, they formed their own peculiar Muslim traditions.

Islam has always been the second religion in Russia. However, over the years, the number of members of protestant organizations has exceeded that of the Muslim ones. Their growth was vigorous. Young people, both Russian and Tatar, reached out for the new belief. Right in front of our eyes broken the stable stereotype that the Russians are supposedly Orthodox, while the Tatars are Muslims, was broken. It is not hard to find an explanation for such a phenomenon. Protestants speak not Old Church Slavonic or medieval Arabic, but the language one has understood since childhood. The Protestants give a modern interpretation to the Bible, which stops appearing as an archaic book. They help people solve concrete life questions.

Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas introduced the notion of the Muslim language which implies “the introduction of the basic vocabulary of Muslim terms to the languages of people who practice this religion, which will ensure that language of each Muslim nation will be connected with the languages of other Muslim nations through a basic set of words familiar to all of them. This is why the languages of all Muslim peoples could be essentially attributed to one group of Muslim languages.”¹⁴ Indeed, the Tatar language is full of Arabicisms which quite fully reflect the Muslim terminology and make it unnecessary for a wide circle of believers to know Arabic. In this aspect, Russian, which relies on the Western tradition, does not have the same possibilities. The assertion made by Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas is a serious argument supporting the linguistic nationalization of Islam which seems to be inevitable in the 21st century.

“Send not away those who call of their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face. In naught art thou accountable for them, and in naught are they accountable for thee, that thou shouldst turn them away, and thus be (one) of the unjust” [6:52].

Nobody can claim to know the truth; truth is a prerogative of God. “Say: “It is Allah who gives guidance towards truth.” [10:35]. We can only think aloud. Probably, my thoughts will find a response

¹⁴ Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas. Vvedenie v metafiziku islama – izlozheniie osnovopolagaiuschikh elementov musul'manskogo mirovozzreniia. – M.: Kuala Lumpur, 2001. – P. 36.

with those people who are trying to find their way in Islam independently, who are looking for their own way, since we are people of one generation, one religion and one time, a lost century for Russia.

I do not have the necessity of analyzing the subtleties of the translation or interpretation of separate *ayats*, of finding my way in the number of Allah's attributes, or of finding the correct pronunciations of certain Arabic terms – let all these issues be for the theologians and the imams. I do not have a parish or a mosque; I am not a preacher. I do need to increase the number of my supporters, neither am I interested in *sadaqah*. But I need to know the main Islamic principles which are interpreted the same way in any language: are a woman and a man equal or not? What is the function of imams in the modern world? Is mankind one *ummah*, or is community possible only among Muslims and in purely Muslim countries? And, probably, the most important thing is: how can Islam help my people to become a progressive nation? Today we do not face the task of preserving the nation as an exotic ethnicity in a certain Muslim reservation. The goal is different: to become economically competitive. Islam should show the path to progress. For me, Islam and progress are synonymous. But as an answer I read: “The most dangerous of them are the supporters of progress.”¹⁵

Tatar youth seek to get in modern universities, some of which are oriented toward European educational institutions preferring English over other foreign languages. English is helpful in business, politics, and science; through the English language we can learn the latest ideas and modern technologies and be on top of all of the most recent discoveries. Among urban (rural) Tatars, 13% (25%) want their children to know Arabic; 10% (19%) Turkish; while 74% (33%) want their children to know Western European languages. The proportion of the Tatar youth themselves who want to study Western European languages is even higher. The tendency is that Arabic remains a ritual or a merely professional language, while English is the “mass” language among foreign languages. This is the imperative of our time, since Arabic brings a backward mentality into our society, while Western European languages help us break forward. If we do not learn from Europe, KamAZ will lose to Volvo and Mercedes, Kazan helicopters will turn out to be worse than those by Eurocopter, and our passenger planes will not be able to compete with Boeing. Imams must participate in the development of the republic's economy and culture! They should propose economic and social projects improving our lives and help conquer market outlets in the Muslim world instead of just reminding us to pray five times a day. In addition to theology, the Russian Islamic University should also teach the latest economic theories and find its own way to develop Tatarstan as a highly technological region. Abu Hanifa said: “Use your knowledge practically, as knowledge without practice is a lifeless body.”

When Musa Bigiyev started publishing the bases of the theory “Absolute Act of God,” his friends advised him to be more diplomatic and not to irritate imams. “You unduly and irrelevantly raised a useless issue and caused a storm,” they said to him. Musa Bigiyev answered to that: “I am certainly thankful to my friends for advice and instructions. However, in my research findings I will never sacrifice my dignity in order to avoid rumor and provide my daily bread. If a certain truth with all proof finds a secure place in my heart, I will not be able to act mean and hide it, thinking that people will not be able to receive this truth...”

Do not judge and condemn!

“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;...” [2:177].

During his stay in Mecca, the Prophet prayed while addressing the Kaaba. But after he fled to Medina, he started facing Jerusalem while praying. This pleased the Jews. Seventeen months later, however, he resumed praying to the Kaaba. Many started to reproach him for his inconstancy: where was the *qibla* of the Muslims? Thus appeared the following verse: “The fools among the people will

¹⁵ Yusuf al-Kardavi. *Sovremennyi idzhtikhad...* – P. 67.

say: “What hath turned them from the Qibla to which they were used?” Say: to Allah belong both East and West: He guideth whom He will to a Way that is straight.” [2:142]. It is God who has the authority to determine the direction in which one should address his prayers. Since then the Muslims have prayed turning themselves towards the Kaaba. Perhaps this was sent down to distinguish the Muslims from the Jews and the Christians, for it is said: “To each is a goal to which Allah turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good, wheresoever ye are, Allah will bring you together. For Allah hath power over all things” [2:148]. Every nation has its own *qibla* from God, but they all will be united by Him and granted His mercy.

In the Tatar language, *qibla* means something more than just the direction toward which one should pray. What principles do you stick to in your life? Is there anything that is sacred for you? Here lies the essence of the word *qibla*. Every language gives a particular meaning to words, for they are a concentration of national history...

Time is passing by, and the world is changing swiftly. In this whirl of events, many people have lost their *qibla*. They have forgotten where Mecca is. And what does Mecca actually mean for us apart from the fact that the Kaaba is situated there? Historical subjects? Hopes? Or something that cannot be explained?

True *qibla* means turning to God, who can not be found in a definite physical place. God is neither in Mecca nor in Jerusalem. He can not be measured either in terms of space or time but is omnipresent and omniscient.

“But He leaves straying whom He pleases, and He guides whom He pleases: but ye shall certainly be called to account for all your actions” [16:93].

For Tatars, the external, visible signs of a Muslim are no longer valuable. Islam has become, rather, a part of culture. Of course, those who do not keep the fast or who do not pray five times a day can be called unbelievers. But what they think of themselves is different. They have *qibla*. They probably have poor knowledge of the Koran and Islamic traditions. Religion may be just a factor of ethnic identification for them. All of this is possible. But these people had choice when they answered the questions in the poll, and they chose Islam. Abu Hanifa said: “We should not take them for believers or faithless judging by obvious facts of what they say they admit or deny, by their norms and religious ceremonies. If we meet people about whom we know nothing apart from the fact that they go to mosques, turn to our *qibla* and pray just like us, we will consider them believers... Therefore, we presume that people should be named believers only proceeding from obvious facts, although it may well be that they are unfaithful in front of Allah. Others we can consider unfaithful judging by obvious signs of impiety if they have no signs of faith, although it may be that they are faithful in front of the Most High Allah...”¹⁶ One could not say it better.

What is more important for Allah – rituals, ceremonies, rites or inner beliefs? External signs or spiritual pursuit for a personal formula of faith? It seems to be a rhetorical question, but why then does one judge Islam more from rituals, and why do rites sometimes substitute for the essence of faith?

Rituals had an important social function, especially in medieval Arabia. They promoted more civilized behavior among semi-barbarian tribes. To turn Arabs away from their pagan faiths, strict rules and norms were necessary, for they even buried new-born girls in the ground, considering their birth a disgrace. “And they assign daughters for Allah! – Glory be to Him! – and for themselves what they desire! When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from the people, because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil

¹⁶ Abu-Khanifa Numan ibn Sabit, *Traktaty* – M., 2001. – P. 55.

(choice) they decide on?” [16:57-59]. Nowadays, much has become a part of inner culture, and people do not need control from the community.

The interdiction to depict a human image is also related with a certain period in the history of the formation of Islam, the period in which one had to fight against idols. But today, we are no longer savage men, and to prove one's faithfulness there is no need to cannon statues of Buddha, as it was done by Taliban members in Afghanistan.

Savagery and Islam are incompatible.

Today, images of art are an indicator of high culture, of developed inner rules and human conscience. And is it not conscience that Islam appeals to? The interdiction against depicting humans and animals only because this is alike to Allah's creation seems archaic. Based on this argument, we should take as a likening the creation of new animal and plant species, cloning, genetics and science as a whole, as well as any creative work, which would be absurd.

Islam was given from above to turn people away from savagery. Righteousness means that people become civilized, cultured and educated. Rituals make people return constantly to the basic commandments and dispose human behavior to the search for truth. This is what they are destined for. And the truth as such lies in progress, that is, in the development of sciences, technologies and mechanical devices; in the promotion of education, the formation of a just society and an effective economy, and in the growth of spirituality as a whole.

Many bans and rituals have lost their significance in the 21st century. Killing cattle by hands according to Muslim prescriptions was not an end in itself but was needed so that people could eat good-quality meat. This was necessary for people, not for Allah. By this, ritual man does not serve God but does good to himself. If nowadays, the cattle is slaughtered properly on conveyor, then the man will benefit from this and so Allah will also be content. It is clearly shown in the Koran that rituals gain their value due to the spirit in them and not by their physical form. For it is said: “It is not their meat nor their blood, that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him” [22:37].

Rites are given to make man's life easier, not to complicate it. Islam is not like some shoes that are tight. It is a way to set free human abilities. It is said that the Prophet was sent to release them “from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them” [7:157].

Today it is not bans but positive motives that are important. In many respects, a man acts not because of fear or for the sake of some rewards but because he is led by spiritual motives and wishes to choose the best way of life. For living in a civilized world, I cannot pattern myself on the level of tribes in Afghanistan. Perhaps rituals are more important there than science and education. The Tatars do not bury girls in the sand and do not destroy sculptures with cannon fire, even if they do not like them. The Talibs are savage and, therefore, sinful.

Backwardness and righteousness are incompatible. It is impossible to agree with the thought that people in Sudan who is still living by the medieval rules of shar'ia are more righteous than my nation, which is universally literate and has its own traditions in the development of an educational system and science. Islam appeared to turn people away from savagery, to develop them, and to set them on the track of justice.

The first step to righteousness is education, whereas prayers and rituals only help to understand the importance of education. Salvation is not in rituals but in progress. Musa Bigiyev wrote in his work “A View on Human Beliefs in God”: “There is nothing official in the matter of faith. Faith that has become formal loses its significance for man's being. Faith that turns a man away from evil and vice, inspiring him to do good deeds is that very kind of faith which shar'ia esteems. The viewpoint of shar'ia is that a good faith is good for man's life. But if faith does not play any role in man's being, then it is useless from the viewpoint of shar'ia.” The truth is not in the fact that if you observe rituals, wear *hijab* and grow a beard, you secure yourself a place in heaven. It lies in overcoming the material world (*dunya*), in the rational development of society, in the improvement of people's lives, and in accumulating positive experience, which becomes a part of mankind's wisdom. The struggle to

spiritualize the material world determines man's salvation. If rituals are thereby useful, then let them be; but when the level of culture in the society is high, and people realize the importance of education and science for getting closer to God, then the significance of rites becomes secondary – they turn into a private issue, a matter of preference. And if rituals are for some reason difficult to observe, then it is better to direct efforts to expediency and good deeds. The Prophet said: "Truly religion is ease, and one who is undue in religion loses. So get straight, come closer and rejoice!"

God does not demand things which man cannot do. He is merciful and does not oblige man with difficult tasks. Obliging something that is impossible is tyranny. Everything that is written in the Koran is easy to realize and is useful. The Prophet said: "Make it easy but not difficult, cause joy but not loathing."

Allah does not need blind worshipping and the unnecessary observance of ritual. The Prophet said: "Allah does not like needless fanaticism and extremes in showing faith." He did not approve of monkhood, did not insist on observing rituals beyond man's strength, and reproached those who shunned earthly blessings for the sake of praying: "Do not live in remote and solitary places like caves, mountain heights and deserts. Living in such places is like lying in the grave." Your personal salvation lies in saving society from war, political, ecological and spiritual catastrophes.

The Prophet Muhammad placed a high emphasis on rituals, but at the same time, his attitude was flexible enough. He said: "An hour spent on acquiring useful knowledge will please Allah more than a night spent in praying," though prayer is one of the fundamental elements of Islam. Therefore, there is nothing more important for a true Muslim than knowledge—and not only knowledge of the Koran but knowledge as a whole, including knowledge of the various sciences. The Prophet also said: "Seek for learning from the cradle to the grave. Seek for science even if it were in the lands of China. Who wishes for bliss in this world, let him occupy himself with trade. Who wishes for bliss in that world, let him seek for temperance and piety; and the one who wishes for the bliss of two worlds, let him seek for it in learning and knowledge".

We could spend time arguing whether one should drink in a standing or a sitting position,¹⁷ write theses on this issue and hold conferences. As a result, both points of view could be proved, but what does it have to do with Islam? The Prophet just drank water, and that's all.

The problem lies not in the facts of what the Prophet wore or when and how he performed rituals but in the question of why he did this. Rituals, *zakat*, the right of inheritance and other shar'ia norms were necessary for the society to develop at a more rapid pace. This is the main thing. The essence lies not in the matter of which share of inheritance is due to the son and which to the daughter but in the fact that the foundations of assigning property must be firm and fair. What was just in the past is not always so today. Nowadays there are no reasons to consider daughters worse than sons, and a developed society does not have gender discrimination in the division of labor.

Norms in Islam are changing, but the main goal – fairness – remains. The great theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali said: "One hour of justice is equal to a hundred-year prayer."¹⁸ The Koran insists on fairness, "even if it is against yourself."

Zakat pleases God not because a man gives a part of his profit to the society but because he contributes to reducing the number of poor people, eliminating debts and contributing to the growing prosperity of the society on the whole.¹⁹ He abates the disposition to wealth, stinginess and hoarding. All this makes the society more just and, therefore, more viable.

What is the point in spending *zakat* on liberating people from slavery? There is not any, because there are no more slaves. But the main meaning of Islam remains – it is in making the society more

¹⁷ See arguments for drinking in standing position in *Islamskoe soznanie: mezdu neveriem i ekstremizmom*, Yusuf al-Kardavi. – Kazan, 2002. – P.47.

¹⁸ Sufii. *Sobranie pritch i aforizmov*. – M., 2002. – P.45

¹⁹ See *Zakiat*. – Kazan, 2001. – P.67.

stable and all people more prosperous. The Prophet said: “Every good deed is alms.” That is the point! *Zakat* is a good deed, and any good deed is Islam.

The meaning of faithfulness lies not in alms but in the liquidation of poverty. If there are no other ways of fighting it, then only alms remains. And if wealth makes other people rich, it is a good deed then, it has the same goal like in *zakat*! Good deed is alms. Every time a man does good, he remembers Allah.

“The mutual rivalry for piling up (the good things of this world) diverts you (from the more serious things), until ye visit the graves. But nay, ye soon shall know (the reality). Again, ye soon shall know!” [102:1–4].

Islam teaches us that wealth cannot be an end in itself. The Prophet said: “If a man has a valley full of gold, he will wish for another one, when there are two – he will wish for the third. Only a handful of soil will satisfy him”; “A man is not faithful if he eats his fill when his neighbor is hungry.” To concern oneself with the welfare of society is the path of truth. God ordered the creation of a system which excludes the break-up of the economic system because of growing debts, personal luxury and increasing poverty. That is why He denied usury: “That they took usury, though they were forbidden; and that they devoured men’s health wrongfully; – we have prepared for those among them who reject Faith a grievous chastisement” [4:161]. Worshipping “the golden calf” in any form – in the form of movable and immovable property, bank accounts that tie up money, and personal luxury – is idolatry. “Looking at our present-day life and all the time that we spend on our idols of stone (houses), metal (cars), and paper (diplomas and certificates), – writes Farid Isak – I am no longer surprised at foolishness of the Israelites, who were led out by Musa from the darkness of oppression to the light of freedom. The difference between us and them lies in the fact that Samiri, initiator of the cult of the calf, was naive and alone in his actions. But today the idols of capitalism and purchase are created by a whole class of people whose life is anyway connected with gaining profit.”²⁰ Not only capitalists but even clergymen are sometimes concerned more with material matters than with spiritual ones. They are far from being well-to-do, but they are not dervish-like either. Overcoming the material world and filling it with spirituality implies that wealth should be used for the benefit of people and not to suit personal ends.

When reading books on theology one often encounters intricate terms and complicated scholasticism which have little to do with the present-day life. The book “Faith in God and its six fundamentals” by Mahmud Toptash gives a detailed analysis of faith in angels, their power and qualities, their responsibilities and a detailed classification of them.²¹ It seems that theologians do not use computers and telephone and have never flown on airplanes. They do not bother themselves with thinking about who produces these things and how Muslim countries can compete with Europe. They have one answer to all the questions – to say prayers, as if airplanes fly only by the power of prayers. *Fiqh* cannot replace aerodynamics. There appears a great number of books on just one issue of *Hadith*, but there is nothing said about what modern universities should be like and what trends in science should be developed so that the Muslims could become more progressive. Theologians can in detail discuss the length of trousers and never say a word about modern technologies. To all complicated questions they have one answer: “Islam is a belief that sets the thought right and a divine service that makes the heart clean, morality that purifies the spirit, laws that consolidate justice and traditions and culture that make life beautiful”.²² Why then truly Muslim countries are most backward ones? Who will construct airplanes? The Christians?

²⁰ Farid Isak, *Byt' musulmaninom...* – P.184.

²¹ Makhmud Tomtash, *Vera v Allakha i shesti ee osnov.* – Istanbul, 2000. – P. 69-81.

²² Jusuf-al-Kardavi, *Islamskoe soznanie...* – P. 87.

Islam has been dominating over a huge territory during many centuries, but caliphates fell because of inner conflicts. Nevertheless theologians still continue looking for reasons outside – in all the hostile forces outside the country – in Zionists, world Christianity and capitalism.²³ This is more than strange. This is misunderstanding of the idea why Islam was sent to people and insufficient knowledge of the practical side of Islam. God gave to Daud (David) “power and wisdom and taught him whatever (else) He willed” [2:251], that is He gave him practical knowledge. If secular laws make life better and more just, if the strength of the economy increases and the level of poverty reduces, then they are good in the eyes of God.

Abdullah Bubi, the famous Tatar reformer of the educational system, wrote: “Our duty is to follow two paths at once – spiritual and material, to develop religious and mundane sides of life simultaneously.” Mundane does not mean alien to Islam. And not everything that was connected with the life of the Prophet has to be considered religious. He said: “Clean your teeth.” Today this is recommended not only by any doctor but even by advertisement. Children start cleaning their teeth earlier than learning to speak. The Prophet gave quite practical advice and lots of them have become a norm in the life of contemporary man whether he is Muslim or not. There is nothing religious in norms like the length of trousers, drinking water in sitting or standing position, wearing a beard and a *hijab*, these are purely mundane rules. Islam as a culture comprises both worldly and religious issues. Islam is not opposed to the worldly issues, nor does it try to replace it or to fight against it. It creates harmony between faith and knowledge, between eternal and momentary things, religious institutions and state, an individual and the society and between spiritual and material issues.

Modern civilization cultivates temperance in eating and alcohol drinks, recommends strongly to eat good-quality meat and to observe hygiene. These issues are not just Muslim ones, they are beyond the Muslim *ummah* now and became common to all mankind long ago. Any cultured man observes these rules. Rituals cannot be a criterion for distinguishing between a believer and unbeliever. If a man says: “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet”, then he is faithful, and rituals and rites only strengthen this faith, but they do not determine it.

“No bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another” [17:15].

The meaning of rituals in civilized society changes. Women can wrap themselves up in headscarves and men can grow beards. This is their private matter to decide; it is only an exterior behind which both faith and impiety can hide. But it is not where the essence of Islam lies.

Muslim philosophers justify wearing *hijab* by noting the wicked nature of humans. Rukaya Maksud writes, that “Muslim women prefer dressing themselves in a modest way and consider revealing and indecent clothes to be a bait for base masculine instincts, for in their opinion clothes of such kind stimulates men to view women as ‘an object of sexual desire’ but not as equal and independent members of society. They want men to pay attention not to their bodies but to women’s intellect and disposition first of all.”²⁴ This logic is more than strange; after all, life does not consist only of sex, and men should not be regarded as animals incapable of self-control. Men are by no means all lustful, and dissolute women are obviously in the minority.

There has even appeared a movement among Tatar women for the right to wear *hijab* and headscarves in passport photographs. This is their right, and the state should not restrict their freedom. Although deserving of respect, such persistence could be used, however, in a better way. If these women are so faithful, then according to *ayat* 33 of the *surah* “Allies” (“Soiuzniki”), which says: “And stay quietly in your houses,” they should not be running about courts. They ought to stay at home; they should not communicate with strangers except through the veil [33:53], and they have to live only in

²³ Ibid. – P. 77.

²⁴ Rukaya Maksud, *Islam*. – M., 2001. – P. 276.

the women's part of their house. Tatar women were considered to be the most educated and progressive in the Muslim East, but today they apparently have decided to prove just the opposite.

In the Middle Ages, women were regarded as property, and they were guarded against attempts upon them as property. Under the Quran, it was not a sin for a man to get pleasure from his female slaves, but the same was forbidden with others' women because they were not his own. According to Shar'ia, moral behavior lies not in fidelity to the wife only but in not touching another's woman. It is not accidental that theft and adultery refer to one and the same class of crime in Shar'ia – *hadd*. Property is considered to be an unshakeable basis of the society, which is to be violated by no one. That is why punishment for such violation is severe: it is determined not by the value of the stolen object but by the very fact of the theft.

Apart from their practical function, clothes are also related to beauty. They show man's inner world, the flight of human imagination. This is a spiritual matter, if you wish, an overcoming of *dunya*. Beauty is in no way contrary to modesty, which is required by the Quran. The Prophet said: "God is beautiful, and He likes beauty." Even during the times of the strictest observation of Islam, Tatar women did not have a tradition of wearing the primitive *hijab*, because fashion and religion were considered independent notions. My grandmother, who was educated in a madrasah in accordance with purely Muslim canons, never wore this kind of dress. It was alien to Tatars. The appearance of *hijab* is linked with the ethnic traditions of the Arabs, who felt themselves comfortable in such clothes in the desert, where sandstorms often occurred. Frankly speaking, *hijab* is simply not a very beautiful form of clothing. It has no special style or elegance and does not have any advantages compared to the traditional female Tatar dress or more modern fashion, although it is also fashion in its own way and has the right to existence just as any other kind of fashion. Someone may regard *hijab* as a symbol of faith, but a nudist may also regard his preference as a symbol of faith. Which one of them will go to heaven? Most would say the first. But who gave us the right to judge? For it is said: "Whatever it be wherein ye differ, the decision thereof is with Allah" [42:10]. Be patient and be able to forgive, and God's mercy will fall onto you.

Of course, symbols are also important. They are like reference points for man. When the necessity of restoring the Kul Sharif mosque in the Kazan Kremlin was discussed, my efforts were also contributed to this holy work. When Russia's Islamic University was being founded, I had the honor to put my signature alongside the signatures of the Mufti of Tatarstan, Gusman-Khazrat Ishakov, and Mufti Ravil-Khazrat Gainutdin, but I treat ritual as a very personal, even innermost, issue which is not to be exhibited for show. Mankind has come a long way in its development, and during this time, human nature has also changed. Man is no longer a savage from the Arabian Desert. Thinking that Islam failed to improve man's nature and ennoble his instincts would be equal to admitting the vainness of Islam. Muslim women ought to take a look at men as humans and not lustful animals; then, many traditions would seem out-of-date to them. And man should also treat woman not as if she were his property which needs to be kept away from other men's eyes behind a tall fence but as if she were an individual with equal rights.

The tradition of treating woman as an inferior being penetrated into Islam from Judaism and Christianity. Europe gradually abandoned such an attitude, but Muslim countries continue to follow this tradition. Woman cannot be viewed as the initiator of sin. According to the Quran, Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan simultaneously: "Then did Satan make them slip from the (Garden), and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been" [2:36]. Moreover, *surah* "T.H." says "thus did Adam disobey his Lord, and fell into error" [20:121]. Man and woman are at least equally responsible for original sin.

The verses "Women", "Light", "Allies" in *surah* strengthen woman's inferior position. These *surah* were written in the Medina period. For that historical epoch, shar'iat norms concerning women's rights were the most progressive system of laws in the world. But since then, civilized countries have gone much further. Shar'ia, however, still makes no headway. Khaidar Bash considers it senseless to

discuss the issue of women's rights. "Putting on the agenda such problems like woman's rights or giving them to her is basically absurd, for no one can grant rights to her; she has them by birth. Every man has got rights to life, property and dignity by birth."²⁵ This sounds good, but the Quran allows slavery. Should we equally consider slaves as people or not? According to shar'ia, they are property just as is a camel. Can we also apply this principle to them that every person is free from birth? Shar'ia is far from being as simple as some theologians may think. It makes sense to discuss the rights of women. We need *ijtihad*.

Another argument that men and women should have different rights is based on physiology, which ostensibly determines the difference of their function in society and hence their rights as well. "To regard man and woman as equal is virtually the same as regarding equal the apple and the pear," continues Khaidar Bash. "This is contrary to the nature of things, because man and woman are equal neither from a psychological nor a physiological point of view. As they are different by nature, they will have completely different duties and responsibilities as well."²⁶ The same can be said about men themselves – they differ physically and intellectually.

Physiology is not a good reason for solving problems of inheritance, divorce and other rights. We are human. Why is it necessary to provide evidence from two women to equal the evidence of one man? It is considered that woman is soft-hearted and pitiful by nature and can deviate from the requirements of justice.²⁷ But this is merely a subjective opinion. We can remember thousands of examples when women were strict and fair, and men turned out to be soft-hearted.

One of the goals of Islam is in making the world more just. Toward woman, polygamy is thought to be a manifestation of justice. Yusuf al-Kardavi writes the following: "For all wives, the shar'ia guarantees an equal right to financial support, shelter and clothes from the husband. This is justice resulting from polygamy. It is true that some husbands do not respect the justice which Allah imposed on them as a duty. However, bad performance does not mean denying the principles as such."²⁸ Polygamy, as well as the right of inheritance and the divorce procedure, do not allow women to be in an equal position with men, but there is no justice without equal rights. If people do not enjoy the same rights, then the world remains unjust; that is, sinful. All people are free and equal by birth. Physiology or origin, race or language, religion or country, do not play any role. It is impossible to make all people equal, but they must have equal rights.

Yusuf al-Kardavi writes further: "The nature of woman is such that she wants to be patronized by man, who would take care of her, support her, and guard her."²⁹ The supremacy of man over woman is allowed in the Quran only on the condition that the man can guarantee woman's safety and supports her. [4:34]. In countries in which this function is assumed by the state, the reason for such supremacy disappears.

In modern life, women have often the same burden of responsibility as do men. This has become a norm. "Can this be called a right when a woman does a man's job and is burdened with a man's heavy responsibilities?!" writes Khaidar Bash.³⁰ The practice of European countries disproves these arguments easily. Woman needed to be taken care of in medieval society, where heavy manual labor was loaded onto man's shoulders, and this was fair. Today labor has changed; it has become more intellectual.

Many occupations such as doctor or teacher cannot be called suitable only for men. Is this kind of labor humiliating for a woman? Of course, it is not. It brings life, health and knowledge to people.

²⁵ Khaidar Bash, *Prava zhenshiny v Islame*. – Kazan, 2001. – P. 16.

²⁶ Ibid. – P. 17.

²⁷ Ibid. – P. 22.

²⁸ Jusuf-al-Kardavi, *Sovremennyyi idjtikhad...* – P. 61.

²⁹ Ibid. – P. 65.

³⁰ Khaidar Bash. *Prava zhenshiny v Islame...* – p. 15.

The truth is that the historical norms of shar'ia concerning women's rights cannot be applied to present-day life, because they were meant for a different audience – the Medina community. The verses which were written in Mecca and given to all mankind forever do not confirm a difference in the status of men and women. This must become the basic principle of shar'ia in the 21st century. Musa Bigiyev wrote: “The social system will be as strong as women's rights are perfect and are valued.” And the Muslim must be strong.

“Say, *“The Truth is from your Lord” let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)*” [18:29].

The Prophet said: “The whole world is a place for praying.” Everyone can find a place for talking with God – at one's own house or office and even at the computer studying. People are free to determine their relations with God themselves.

Acknowledging that “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet,” one becomes a believer. Rituals and rites only result from faith and do not determine it. They are secondary. Abu Hanifa wrote: “It is faith that spurs believers to pray, pay zakat, observe the fast, go on the hajj and speak about Allah, but not prayer, the fast and the hajj that make them believe in Allah. This is so because they believed first and only then acted. Faith in Allah prompted them to do their religious duties, and not vice versa.”³¹ No one has the right to condemn and point out what a man should be like or especially to say that he or she is not a Muslim. Abu Hanifa wrote: “People do not differ in faith and do not excel over each other in it. They can excel over each other in their deeds and differ in [doing] their religious duties.”³²

The truth lies in the fact that the dispute on the issues of faith and lack of it can be resolved only by God; other people are all accessory in this matter. There cannot be a mediator here. On the way to truth, the clergy perform the function of indicatory signs on the road, but they should not be speed bumps.

Connoisseurs of Islam can help in acquiring knowledge and comprehending theology, but every person has to walk his own way. After all, when God summons us there will be no imam, mufti or commune. There will be no advocates either.

“Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another nor shall intercession be accepted for her, nor shall compensation be taken from her. Nor shall any one be helped (from outside) [2:48].

The right to judge on the Judgment Day belongs to God alone. “Except for Him they will have no protector nor intercessor” [6:51]. And there will be neither father, mother, nor preceptor, because this is the Judgment Day. No one will have the right to take over other men's sins, each will answer for himself only [6:164]. Why then should we have advocates in this life?

Allah could make all of us believers, for He is almighty. It is said: “If Allah so willed, He could make you all one People” [16:93]. But He did not do it. He chose prophets who had to set people on the way of righteousness and endowed people with free will.

People are not slaves of predestination. It is impossible that Allah could deliberately make a man atheist by birth. Everyone is given a chance for choice. One can believe or not believe, belong to the Muslim or some other confession, and one can ignore rituals. And it is in the power of Allah to punish or reward a man. Predestination does not concern the right to choose the way of truth. A man will die only where death finds him, but it is he who decides how to live his life and prepare himself for death.

³¹ Abu Khanifa Numan ibn Sabit, *Traktaty...* – P. 44.

³² *Ibid.* – P. 98.

“If it had been thy Lord’s Will, they would all have believed, – all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!” [10:99].

God appeals for faith through His prophets, but He does not do it by force. He just warns about the necessity to be virtuous: “We did send Noah to his people, and he tarried among them a thousand years less fifty: but the Deluge overwhelmed them while they (persisted in) sin” [29:14]. A thousand of years was not enough for Noah to make people faithful, and so they were punished. Not saved, but drowned. For it is said: “there came to them their messengers with clear (signs), (which they rejected, to their own destruction): it was not Allah who wronged them, but they wronged their own souls” [30:9]. God cannot save them, but can drown them so that new generation could be born. [23:42]. It is in God’s power to punish them, but it is not in his intention to make them believe by force. God chose prophets and revealed truth to them. All the rest is a matter for one’s discretion.

In Islam, it is usual to name Muslims as God’s slaves, who must fear God and the Judgment Day. It is said: “So fear Allah and obey me” [26:126]. One comes across the words “slave” (*‘abd*) and “fear” almost in every *surah*. However, understanding them literally explains little. Blind obedience is senseless, for man has the right to choice. Freedom of will and slavery are incompatible. Slavery denies free will and affirms violence, but it is said: “Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error” [2:256].

‘Abd can be translated as “slave.” But the verb also has other meanings. *‘Ibadat* means to serve Allah; that is why *‘abd* means rather Allah’s “servant,” not slave. “In the religious context, the term ‘abd describes adequately a man who being fully aware of his absolute debt in front of God humbly devotes himself to serving God,”³³ writes Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas. Further, he writes: “The idea of serving (*khidmah*) God implies that the one who offers his service is “free”; he is not a vassal but his own master.”³⁴ The words “God’s slave” distorts the spirit of the Quran, which is destined to make man free.

The essence lies not in fear, but in following the chosen path. The words *fear God* do not mean at all that you need to tremble in front of Him, they mean something different – that you need to be pious and virtuous, to try to avoid evil and guard yourselves against the ungodly. In other words, *to fear* should be understood as to follow, to listen to, to trust and to believe. And the word “slave” is used in a different context. It means God’s “follower,” a “servant” who follows his master, not a dead body in the hands of men washing it, not a staff in a master’s hand of steel.

According to the Quran, a faithful person cannot be Allah’s slave, because he has freedom of choice, and he made his choice by himself. He worships God knowingly, serves Him and practices Islamic commandments. He can adore God, but he is not a slave. Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas writes: “*Ibadat* means all conscious and free-will acts of service devoted only to God and approved by Him, including the rites of obligatory worshipping.”³⁵ *Ibadat* is a very profound term embracing the whole meaning of service, and “in its ultimate, highest degree it acquires the meaning of knowledge – *ma’rifat*.”³⁶ Thus, it would be improper to reduce its sense merely to the rites of worship.

Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas distinguishes between outer virtues concerning the observation of religious prescriptions and rites, and inner, concealed virtues that “belong to the impulses of the heart...”³⁷ Some doubts occur here. Virtue cannot be both outer and inner, being one for the society and another for the man only. Rites are necessary for man’s own sake. They do not make the world better, but they change the person’s inner state, helping him to understand his predestination and the necessity

³³ Seyd Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas, *Vvedenie...* – P. 59.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* – P. 70.

³⁷ *Ibid.* – P. 111.

of a conscious choice between good and evil. Virtue is aimed at the improvement of the society's life, the development of the nation and the salvation of mankind.

“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” [5:48].

If God wished that everyone should become a slave, then there would not exist different religions and peoples. Islam is the religion of a free man; it is a way to freedom. Being a slave and a Muslim at the same time is nonsense. Heaven does not need crowds of obedient slaves. The universe needs creative men.

The 20th century has changed life considerably. People no longer wear traditional national clothes but prefer to be fashionable and practical. Outer norms for the life of the community have been replaced by inner motives. *Jama'at* yielded to man. The individual has become equal to the community. Religion is growing from an official system, a social phenomenon, into something more intimate, spiritual and particularly personal. People do not approve of interference into their lives or dictates from outside; they favor free, personal choice.

Islam is an eternal movement, a permanent doubt and a persistent search. Rigid means dead. Islam is not a guillotine hanging over the head but a stimulus to the search of the unknown. Muhammad Iqbal said: “A contemporary Muslim should reform the life of society based on higher principles and develop from the purpose of Islam, only partially realized so far, that spiritual democracy which is actually the very purpose itself.”³⁸

Bi'thah... Is not it too easy for this word to escape our lips? If there is something unusual, it becomes labelled as *bi'thah*. Some Sunni think of Shiites as apostates and vice versa. Following this logic, both groups could be condemned to death, though it is contrary to the verses of the Quran which speak of freedom of religion.

In the world of science, disputes are usual, and even errors are taken as part of the search of truth, whereas in Islam, every fresh idea can become forbidden.

Idris Shakh writes: “It is too often considered to be axiomatic that a man should necessarily be either a believer or an unbeliever or perhaps an agnostic. If he is a believer, he will be expecting someone to show him a religion or a system which in his opinion will be able to satisfy his needs. But few will point him to what he might not understand, what exactly his real needs lie in.”³⁹

One would like to know what eternal truth is, but apparently it does not exist. Good and evil are not static categories. The Golden Rule states: “One should behave in such a way as one wants to be treated by others.” It can be found in Christianity, Islam and Confucianism. When a Chinese sage said that to Mullah Nasreddin, the latter answered: “A bird was eating poisonous berries which, however, did not do her any harm. One day she gathered some of these berries and turned its breakfast into a sacrifice, having fed her friend the mare with them.” The norms of shar'ia which served well in the Middle Ages can prove to be unsuitable for the 20th century.

“And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge” [17:36].

In its own time, Islam had the most progressive ideology. It emerged as obvious progress. Righteousness gave benefits to the country and its people. It made them more intelligent and more enterprising, and it removed discord in the society. Because of Islam, the East became a center for

³⁸ Muhammad Iqbal, *Rekonstruktsiya religioznoi mysli v islame*. – M., 2002. – P. 166.

³⁹ Idris Shakh, *Sufizm*, – M., 1994. – P. 59.

knowledge and wisdom. The Muslims not only turned their looks towards Mecca while praying but were on the whole guided by the culture of the East.

Later, the Muslim world seemed to have fallen asleep, and it has not overcome its backwardness through the present. Airplanes, cars, space stations and all more or less serious scientific discoveries are made in the West. Seyid Kutb states that “mankind is on the wrong track.”⁴⁰ He writes: “The spiritual entity of the Western civilization with all its doctrines and orders is being corroded... It is under the threat of regress and extinction, in spite of the enormous volumes of material production and rapid scientific and technical development.”⁴¹ However, some obvious things should be noticed. The advantages of the West are based on taking the best achievements of mankind. Medicine that cures people, technologies that make them richer, modern agriculture that feeds the population and helps to overcome poverty, aspiration for equality and justice – everything that the Quran appeals for – is only being realized in the West. In an attempt to explain the “ignorance” of the Western world, Seyid Kutb states: “We fancy that the mind that has invented airplanes and rockets, split the atom, created the hydrogen bomb, and cognized the laws of nature and learned how to use them, can also resolve the task of ‘constructing’ human life, determining the right ideas and beliefs, the bases of morals.”⁴² Without a highly developed social system, appropriate morality, and habits of work, it is impossible to create airplanes and rockets. To think differently is self-deception.

The great Nizami wrote: “The one who is sleeping on the Path will lose either his cap or his head.”

While the Arab countries were in colonial dependence, they could blame everything on world imperialism, but since then, enough time has passed to choose an independent way. The development models of the Muslim countries are not very impressive. And attempts to establish purely “Islamic” states in Iran, Pakistan and Sudan only resulted in more severe backwardness, political instability, inner wars and wars between Islamic states. Now, the causes of backwardness should be sought not outside but in the countries’ political systems themselves.

It should frankly be admitted that the Islamic world is mainly trading in raw materials and buys Western goods. Science and technology do not develop there. It has found itself off of the main tracks of mankind’s development.

Backwardness cannot be justified by righteousness. If Muslims are righteous, why then are they underdeveloped? The aim of the Quran was different – to make Muslims the most progressive people on the planet.

The associates of the Prophet believed that every scholar can study the Quran on his own and have a personal opinion – *ijtihad*. Newly-born Islam gave solutions to practical problems. Arabs were absorbing the achievements of various cultures very intensively, starting from the ancient Greek. Caliphs became the masters of the lands which had belonged to Hebrews, Byzantines, Persians, as well as to Greeks and Buddhists. In their campaigns of conquest, they reached the south of France, Spain and the valley of the river Indus. Islam was open to different traditions. This was an advantage for them. Free-thinking and openness made Islam powerful. The treatise on medicine “al-Kanun” by Ibn Sina was used in Europe up to the 17th century. Ibn Rushd was also very popular in Europe, and the works of al-Khorezmi acquainted the continent with “Arabic” numerals and algebra (*al-jabr*). The proper name al-Khorezmi was turned into the term “algorithm.” The ideas of Averroes dominated in Europe from the 12th to the late 16th century. Evgeny Bertels wrote: “If we remember that in the history of the European culture, the period of the 9th through the 13th centuries represented the time of the most severe decline, the inevitable conclusion will be that it was the works of Oriental philosophers that led

⁴⁰ Seyid Kutb, *Budushee prinadlezhit islamu*. – M., 1993. – P. 88.

⁴¹ Ibid. – P. 57-58.

⁴² Ibid. – P. 90-91.

the peoples of Europe out of a deadlock and showed them the way of further development.”⁴³ But after that, Islamic thought got lost in scholasticism and apparently is unable to become free of it.

Righteousness and backwardness are incompatible. If your nation does not make any progress, if the Muslim world falls behind the Christian, what is righteous here? The fact that there are no brothels and people do not drink wine? But the interdiction against wine and gaming was given so that the nation would become progressive!

The great culture of the past is not an argument for the 21st century. One cannot just sit delighted with the past and take comfort in it. Today, people use telephones, computers and airplanes, and Arab horses are admired on race tracks. All of Oriental culture has become an object of admiration, but it is of little use in the economy. It increasingly resembles a live museum in the open air. It was not Atatürk, who did away with the age of the Islamic caliphate,⁴⁴ but the blind observance of traditions (*taqlid*) which has weakened the Islamic world.

Theologians are afraid of the modernization of Islam, of the rationalism which ostensibly denies faith. Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas considers intuition to be the highest form of cognition: “Intuition on the highest level of man’s conscience achieved by prophets and saints allows one to look deep into the essence of reality.”⁴⁵ The author believes that society is mainly ignorant, and therefore, the interpretation of Islam based on intuition is the lot of the elite and saints and is completely improper for the crowd, the common people.⁴⁶ It should be mentioned that the Prophet did not avoid simple people but, on the contrary, was willing to communicate with the poor and the persecuted. Today, *sayyids* prefer to tower above the crowd and almost pretend to the role of new prophets.

Yusuf al-Kardavi, appealing for *ijtihad*, writes at the same time: “It is inadmissible that the state of affairs would be such when *ijtihad* is accessible to everyone, because this will lead to anarchy and distemper.”⁴⁷ He believes that there are those deserving to do *ijtihad* and those who are not. But who can choose the cohort of the “deserving”?

Theologians make reference to the prominent thinkers of the Middle Ages, who constricted the circle of people having the right to *ijtihad*. This can be perfectly explained. At that time, the level of education among the population was such that not all people were able to muse upon theological problems. Today, the general literacy of the population and the accessibility of higher education change the situation. Everyone can study the Quran without assistance and in one’s native language.

Yusuf al-Kardavi proposes other restrictions on *ijtihad*: “There is no place for *ijtihad* as far as some crucial issues are concerned, such as the mandatory fast for Muslims, the interdiction to drink wine or eat pork, to practice usury or the obligation to cut a thief’s hand if there are no doubts in his guilt. Other issues are the division of a dead father’s inheritance between his children, with the sons getting twice as much as the daughters, and some more provisions of the Quran and the authentic Sunnah which have been accepted by the whole *Ummah* and are religious dogmas, being the basis of the ideological and social unity of the *Ummah*.”⁴⁸ There are verses in the Quran which provide a very flexible formula concerning forbidden matters. It is said: “On those who believe and do deeds of righteousness there is no blame for what they ate (in the past), when they guard themselves from evil and believe, – then again, guard themselves from evil and do good. For Allah loveth those who do good” [5:93]. Verses of this kind need a more modern interpretation.

The Quran has many of verses about killing the unfaithful. It is said: “But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them...” [9:5]. Furthermore, some theologians think as pagans of everyone who does not follow the rules of historical shar’ia. Seyid Kutb

⁴³ Quoted from Sufii. *Sobranie pritch i aforizmov...* – P. 496.

⁴⁴ See Seyid Kutb, *Budushee prinadlezhit islamu...* – P. 5.

⁴⁵ Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas, *Vvedenie...* – P. 138.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* – P. 24, 37.

⁴⁷ Yusuf al-Kardavi, *Sovremennyyi ijtihad...* – P. 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* – P. 72.

writes: “Those living in accordance with the path that is predetermined by Allah are Muslims. Those following any other path are pagans who are not accepted by this religion.”⁴⁹ However, Christians and Jews are named in the Quran as people of the Scripture, not pagans.

One can also find verses of the following kind: “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor hold that forbidden which hath both been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of truth, from among the people of the Book” [9:29]. At the same time, another *ayat* is not that categorical: “Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching” [16:125].

The Prophet was told: “O Prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them”[9:73]. And he himself said: “Indeed, Allah loves kindness and gentleness in everything.” So we encounter different instructions on one and the same issue. It is also said: “O ye who believe! Fight the unbelievers who are near to you and let them find harshness in you”[9:123]. But the Prophet would often repeat: “Beware of extremeness in religion.” *Mazhabs* interpret these theses as categorical, and with an inclination for severity. In present-day life, such severity is not justified.

“Do not the Believers know, that, had Allah (so) willed, He could have guided all mankind (to the Right)?” [13:31].

On the verge of the 18th and 19th centuries, Habdennasyr Kursavi, the founder of jadidism⁵⁰ among the Tatars, called on the people: “You are not true and faithful Muslims. You have given up the Quran of Allah and the tradition of the Prophet.” He urged them to turn to the most Holy Book and to judge existing traditions critically.

In Bukhara, he spoke on the subject of divine attributes (*sifat*). At that time, there were seven of them according to one group of theologians and eight according to another. Kursavi asserted that none of the variants was possible, since the number of the attributes was not determined by the Quran. On a Majlis of *ulems* convoked with the assistance of the Emir of Bukhara, a *fatwa* was issued which provided that any Muslim who did not acknowledge seven or eight divine attributes was considered an apostate and was to be put to death. Kursavi was sent to prison, but his execution did not take place – his former teacher, the very authoritative Sheikh Niyazkuli, interceded for him. Kursavi was forced to deny his words, and his works were burnt. He then fled from Bukhara to his homeland.

“If they disbelieve you so did the Peoples before them (with their Prophets), – the people of Noah, and ‘Ad and Thamud; and those of Abraham and Lut; and the Companions of the Madyan people; and Moses was rejected (in the same way)” [22:42–44].

The market of slaves in Bukhara at the time of Kursavi’s sojourn there was full of Shiites from Iran. According to the tradition, they were considered to be *kufir* (unfaithful); therefore, the principle “*kulluh muslim khurr*” (every Muslim is free). But neither the Quran nor Sunnah contain an exact definition of *kufir*. So if some people condemn others as *kufra* without having the right to do so, why they are better in than others? “Their *mazhab* – is a passion (*hawwa*) just like yours... A refuge for you, apart from guidance of Allah, is in following the path of the Sunnah,” wrote Kursavi.

Turning to the Quran or Sunnah virtually denies any kind of *mazhab*. In the eyes of contemporaries, taqlid did not become a method of salvation. An independent search – *ijtihad* – was necessary. At the same time, Kursavi did not consider public opinion to be a criterion for truth. He believed that a scholar convinced in the verity of his arguments, their accordance with “the direct way,” could himself be reckoned *jama‘at* (a community of Muslims), and that is why he had the right to act

⁴⁹ Seyid Kutb, *Budushee prinadlezhit islamu...* – P.9.

⁵⁰ Jadidism is a social and religious trend among the Tatars. The term originates from the Arab word *al-jadid* (renewal, reform).

with discretion, even if his deed was condemned by the majority. A man upholding truth is of equal value with the community. This was a revolution in theology. Kursavi's ideas were picked up by a brilliant pleiad of Tatar theologians.

Two centuries have passed since the appearance of Kursavi's first critical thoughts, but debates about the problems they raised do not stop. Khaidar Bash writes: "The appeal for turning directly to the Quran and Sunnah in the epoch *Asr Saadat*, denying the principles of the *mazhabs* and *mashrabs*, means denying *ijma-i ummat*⁵¹ and *kiyas-y fukakha*⁵², which themselves are determined by the Quran and Sunna... Although in fact all the religious problems were analyzed long ago by the *mazhabs* and *mashrabs Akhl as-Sunna*, on the basis of most trustworthy principles."⁵³ Has time ceased its course, so that we think all problems are resolved? Khaidar Bash writes further on: "The fact that *umma* without any doubt was guided by *mazhabs* and *mashrabs* for centuries and imams of *mazhabs* and *mashrabs* remained the indisputable authority, is historical evidence showing that *mazhabs* and *mashrabs* were notable and still are for the thoroughness of their point of view, and they have represented the truth."⁵⁴ If mankind kept to the same logic, then the solar system would still be explained according to Ptolemy, not Copernicus.

A passionate defense of *mazhabs*, the principle of *taqlid* as a whole, and *ijma* as well are based on a simple idea – every Muslim should follow his teacher without arguing. "For the victory of truth (haqq) believers must show obedience (ita'at)" to the authority centre of their environment. This obedience (ita'at) is a part of obedience (ita'at) to Allah and His Prophet..."⁵⁵ But how can an authority center take upon itself the function of representing God and His Prophet? Farid Isak is right in writing: "There can be mentioned as well those who became beguiled by demagogic talk of some religious leaders upholding the idea that democracy is impossible in Islam and that all power comes from God, and thus naming themselves God's agents and reducing the rest of people to simple doers."⁵⁶ Every person has his or her own path to truth, and it cannot be replaced by either a teacher or an imam. A minister of religion can help in this search for truth if they are not trapped by *taqlid*.

The Prophet Mohammed said: "Indeed, Allah will send a man to *ummah* in the beginning of every century for the renovation of religion." What did He mean? Probably, the idea that interpreting the Quran should be done according to the current time and concrete circumstances. Islam is a changing ideology. This is one of its strong points. Literal reading of the Quran cannot convey its sense in the most exact way, because its principles must be acceptable in a given place and time and for certain people. Norms change as time goes by, but the spirit of the Quran remains the same. Habdullah Bubi wrote: "If we turn to the old tafsirs only, this will mean that the Quran is limited by itself and exhaustible, and words of the Prophet are lies." Words of particular people, even the most authoritative ones, cannot be placed above the Quran. No one has the right to pretend to the truth; one can only show a way to the understanding of it.

Fanaticism of the *mazkhabs* has become "the damnation of the Islamic peoples," as Habdulla Babi says. And the founders of the *mazkhabs* were never going to divide Muslims into different groups. Abu Khanifa warned: "It is forbidden for anyone who does not know my evidence to pass judgments – fatwas – appealing to my words." He understood his own position and destination, but followers did not understand their teacher.

We still repeat that the Tatars are Muslims of the Hanifite trend. What does this mean? Probably that we agree with Aby Hanifa that the term of pregnancy is two years or that we have found the only way to truth and our interpretation is the most correct one? Or that we want to introduce historical

⁵¹ *Ijma-i ummat* – the decision of authoritative Muslim scholars on a certain issue.

⁵² *Kiyas-y fukakha* – comparison by analogy in solving some issues.

⁵³ Khaidar Bash. *Makalat...* – P. 160-161.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* – P. 161.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* – P. 199.

⁵⁶ Farid Isak. *Byt' mulul'maninom...* – P. 157.

shar'ia, which is unthinkable in a modern state? Following a *mazhab* of some kind, frankly speaking, means nothing else but imposing limits on the Quran. But the Holy Book is broader and deeper than all the *mazhabs* taken together, and every new generation can draw new ideas from it. This process is endless just as the eternal wisdom of the Quran.

Great Saadi asked: "How can a man that is asleep wake up another sleeping one?"

The role of Islam in preserving the Tatar people can hardly be overestimated. In the age of Christianization, culture and religion saved the people from assimilation. Islam helped the Tatars to unite into communities and promoted mutual support. It conserved traditions and, therefore, ethnic identity. But by the 19th century, our people were facing another task: not to survive but to develop. Conservation could not solve this problem. It became a hindrance, and jadidism helped to find a way out.

The movement of jadidism resulted from the comparison between the backward East and a rapidly-developing Europe. Jadids considered up-to-date education and openness to cultural progress of other nations. They harkened to learning from Europe. The best Tatar madrasah were Jadid ones. Prominent Tatar thinkers, writers, and public men of the 19th and 20th centuries came out of this particular milieu.

Until the early 20th century, there had been some limitations for the Tatars, among which were the ban against some professions, secular universities and some economic restrictions. The Orthodox obviously enjoyed more advantages. Nevertheless, due to the modernization of Islam, the Tatars became able to compete and made a great leap forward in culture. It was not the conservation of traditions but the modernization of Islam that strengthened the Tatars.

After hundreds of years of stagnation, the East found it difficult to accept the ideas of jadidism. The works of Musa Bigiyev were condemned by the head of the Osman Muslims as heresy, and he had to flee from Soviet Russia.

"Never did We send a warner to a population, but the wealthy ones among them said: "We believe not in the (Message) with which ye have been sent" [34:34].

Much has changed from the times of Muhammad the Prophet. Rapidly developing science, modern technologies and devices do not leave any place for out-of-date traditions. Sometimes, it seems that religion and science exist separately or that science forces religion out. In fact, scientific thought does not contradict Islam, because Islam is faith and knowledge simultaneously. It is a culture that comprises both. The Prophet Muhammad gave this advice: "Who accumulates knowledge to teach it to other people will get from God the salvation of seventy saints." Therefore, science is an organic part of Islam.

Some theologians are looking for proofs of the latest scientific discoveries in the Quran. Indeed, some verses can be found confirming the theory of the expanding universe or the divisibility of the atom. But the Quran is not an encyclopedia of concrete knowledge, and it does not need any justification in the face of the latest discoveries. It would be strange to rely on the Quran where issues of structure of the universe or human evolution are concerned. It contains the most general and approximate information. It is the function of science to create a complete picture of the universe.

A true Muslim is an educated man respecting and studying the sciences. The Prophet Muhammad said: "Acquiring knowledge is a pivotal responsibility of a Muslim." This is a categorical imperative. Aspiration for understanding oneself, the world around, and the universe is the very understanding of truth that is Allah Himself. It is said: "Allah comprehends all things in (His) knowledge" [65:12]. He embraces everything because He is the universe. Science or knowledge of any kind is a step to God, who does not expect blind worshipping from a man but some good from his deeds. Even a little education applied for the good of the society is enough for God to prefer you to seventy saints. The Prophet said:

“Verily Allah knows the Unseen of the heavens and the earth” [49:18].

Some believers demand miracles and prophecies, and theologians attempt to find their evidence in the Quran and the Prophet’s life. But miracles are like toys for children and naive people. Nature as such is a miracle. A miracle lies in man’s potential, in overcoming gravity and in making space flights. It is a miracle that doctors have learned to bring to life people after clinical death.

When I was in the Vatican, I had to talk with the mufti of Tatarstan, so I called him from my mobile phone. He turned out to be in Jidda. We could talk, being thousands of miles away from each other. Space satellites have united mankind in a web of communications. Throughout many centuries, people have developed means of communication. Thousands of couriers and whole hosts of horses provided postal service. Later there appeared the telegraph, motor cars, airplanes and, finally, wireless communication. And today, the system of electronic and mobile communication is a true miracle, with satellites hovering like angels high above mankind and stretching the nerve strands of the planetary intellect.

Ignorance wants a miracle, but knowledge does not need it. Knowledge itself generates miracles. The human genius has managed to create the devices and technologies about which we read in fantastic novels as young people. Should we search for something that cannot be explained and that is beyond our comprehension? Should we believe in inexplicable things? Just the opposite. We should believe that everything in nature has its own explanation, except for infinity, perhaps.

All of the civilized countries put the issues of education in the first place, and not only in words but in practice as well. The first items in developed countries’ budgets are devoted to education. Perhaps true Muslims live in these countries and not in Sudan, for instance? The Prophet said: “Everything has got its own path. But a path to heaven is revealed by knowledge.”

The world is changing swiftly. And while the East is reflecting on its destination, criticizing America and Europe, the West keeps going further with its development.

Where is our Mecca?

The West is too rational, individualized – this is what the East thinks. But there is nothing to be blamed. It is an objective situation. This is a dictate of time. Competition requires educating developed personalities. The masses and collectivism will not promote anything prominent today.

The difference between the 21st and 20th centuries lies in the priority of information. The symbol of the 20th century was the conveyor invented by Ford, but among the symbols of the new era must be mentioned the computer, the Internet and new communication technologies. Knowledge has become a highly important productive resource. At the same time, the role of the human is changing as well, with the importance of creative thinking growing.

One of the reformers of Islam, Gamal ad-Din al-Afgani, was convinced that “it is necessary to borrow technologies and instruments of modern civilization, protecting intellect and culture against the influence of rationalism and secular values.”⁵⁷ From a consumer’s point of view, such a principle is quite acceptable, but if we aim at developing technologies, rationalism can by no means be ignored.

The nature of the Western world is determined by scientific and technological progress and the level of development of society. Opposing collectivism to individualism and denying rationalism obviously result in backwardness.

If Islam is to retain its influence in society, it must be able to meet the requirements of time. It does not mean turning the back to the East and the face to the West. The point is in borrowing everything that is valuable in the world. If the USA, European and Southeast Asian countries are developing rapidly, then we must learn from their example. We should go there for knowledge.

⁵⁷ Quoted and translated from the book: Sukheil' Farakh. Hristianstvo i islam (opyt sekuliarizatsii). – N. Novgorod, 1999. – P. 73.

Many people in Muslim countries have started simply imitating the Western model. Musa Bigiyev called this a “new *taqlid*.” He wrote: “It is by no means acceptable to sacrifice Islam and shar’ia for the sake of fancies about “esteeming” one of the *mazhabs*. Another, perhaps more severe, vice that has affected our thinking is a shameful and humiliating *neotaqlid*. When traditional *taqlid* is sacrificing shar’ia by means of revering the sanctity of *mazhabs*, the above-mentioned modern *taqlid* has turned into a denial of Islam and sacrificing of the Muslim *ummah* based on self-abasement because of the fascination with the great Western civilization and its political achievements.”⁵⁸

The West cannot be extended to the East. It has a different kind of base. The East does not accept liberalism in its pure form. The East should interpret it in the light of its own traditions. *Taqlid*, whether it is Eastern or Western, is unacceptable, for it contradicts the spirit of Islam. But what brings the East and the West together is *ijtihad*, which is nothing other than the beginning of liberal thinking. If a free personality strives after education, science and progress, then it is quite permissible both for Western and Islamic cultures.

“*He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed*” [67:2].

Muslims start doing everything by saying “In the name of Allah gracious and merciful.” What does this mean, aspiring to Allah, living or His sake? The question is easy, but the answer is not at all... It is said: “We created not the heavens, the earth, and all between them, merely in (idle) sport: we created them not except for just ends: but most of them do not know” [44:38-39]. The universe, living by the laws of nature and filled with its sense, is the truth itself. “Verily this is no less than a Message to (all) the worlds: (with profit) to whoever among you wills to go straight. But ye shall not will except as Allah wills, – the Cherisher of the Worlds” [81:27-29]. The Quran is a “reminder to the nations” [6:90], a warning for those inhabiting the Earth, and the Lord of the Universe is the sense of its existence, in other words, the spirit of the matter, the primordial and terminal sense of the universe. This is what puts everything in order and sets limits for the infinity of time and space. “The Mother of all Books” contains and accumulates this sense as the experience of generations and the universal mind which is constantly enriched by mankind. “The Mother of all Books” is the mystery of immortality.

Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas thinks that “being initially perfect according to its own *fitrah* (*nature*), the world is unable to develop.”⁵⁹ He uses the concept of the “world of ideal realities,” which are “invariable entities in God’s consciousness.” Such an interpretation of the world makes it stark in the splendor of its perfection. At the same time, the author identifies God not as a symbol or myth but as reality. It is difficult to admit a reality that is not changing with time. It would be enough to remember that the Muslim community first did not go beyond Medina, and then its boundaries expanded till Arabia, and after Muhammad’s death, Islam spread in dozens of the world’s greatest countries over a very short period of time. Islam changed the face of the world. In the history of mankind, perhaps only the rush of Genghis Khan from Asia to Europe was more impetuous and large-scale.

God is a reality that reveals itself in the universe. It is said: “He created the sun, the moon and the stars which by His will are subject to certain laws. Is it not Him that creation and power belong to? Blessed is God, the Lord of the universe!” The Prophet said: “The one who sees himself will see his Lord.” These are signs that are constantly changing and developing. As Muhammad Ikbal truly writes, “the world according to the Quran is prone to growth. This is a changing world, not a finished product that the hand of the Creator left many centuries ago and which lies stretched in space and time like a mass of dead matter unchangeable and, therefore, is nothing.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Musa Dzharullah. *Moi vzgliad na islamskii shariat // II'*. – 1913. – #3 (Peterburg).

⁵⁹ Seid Muhammad Nakyb al-Attas. *Vvedenie...* – P. 27.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Ikbal. *Rekonstruktsiia...* – M., 2002. – P. 68.

The universe itself is not a rigid gathering of celestial bodies. It is developing. New stars and planets appear, and some become extinct. Astronomers have proved that the Universe is expanding. Is it not what the Quran says: “So verily I call to witness the planets – that recede, go straight, or hide” [81:15-16]. If there is a permanent development of galaxies, life on the Earth, the human mind and society, why is the One who determines this movement unchangeable? Development is absolute because God is developing, and new truths are emerging therewith. Rigid means dead.

What are life and death for? It is said: “Every soul shall have a taste of death: and We test you by evil and by good by way of trial. To Us must ye return” [21:35]. Why is this trial by good and evil necessary?

The purpose of man lies in spiritualizing the dead matter and thus overcoming the existing world (*dunya*), and one should not alienate oneself from it but make it alive. Man builds stone temples, makes metal machines fly, and grows new plants which feed the rapidly increasing population of the planet. Resources are used for people’s good. A trial by good and evil is necessary to accumulate experience for generations to come. Only this way can the Judgment day – the planet’s catastrophe – be postponed.

“When the Sky is cleft asunder; when the Stars are scattered; when the Oceans are suffered to burst forth; and when the Graves are turned upside down; – (then) shall each soul know what is hath sent forward and (what it hath) kept back” [82:1–5].

At present, changing climate as a result of industrial activity, arms created by man and abuse of nature can destroy the planet and turn it into hell.⁶¹ God warned: “When the earth is pounded to powder, and thy Lord cometh, and His angels, rank upon rank, and Hell, that Day, is brought (face to face), – on that day will man remember, but how will remembrance profit him? He will say: Ah! Would that I had sent forth (Good Deeds) for (this) my (Future) life!” [89:21–24]. Hell does not mean physical fire where sinners are burnt. It is the feeling of spiritual emptiness, torments of conscience for the mean deeds – for what man tried to escape in the earthly world but could not avoid in the future. It is realizing the vanity of wealth and luxury, of deceit and murder, of wasting time and efforts on personal needs. And torments of conscience are much worse than physical flame. It is said: “Thou wilt see the wrong-doers in fear on account of what they have earned, and (the burden of) that must (necessarily) fall on them” [42:22]. The other world will not have physical Gehenna.

If an ecological catastrophe or a nuclear war take place on the Earth, their results will be much more terrible than the images of hell depicted in the Quran.

The Judgment Day does not imply a predestined, exact date. It is a warning. It is said: “Therefore do thou remind for thou art one to remind. Thou art not one to manage (their) affairs” [88:21–22]. This is a possible catastrophe, “when mountains fly apart like locks of dyed wool” and “the skies will be torn off their places.” And if men remain unwise, if conflicts prevail, then the catastrophe will be inevitable. Man must live in harmony with nature and other men and prevent thus the coming of the Judgment Day.

“They ask thee about the hour, – ‘When will be its appointed time? Wherein art thou concerned with the declaration thereof? With thy Lord is the final end of it” [79:42–44].

The image of paradise given in the Quran is rather naive. Naturally, it is designed for the people of deserts who dream about cool shade and irrigated waters. For it is said: “But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, we shall soon admit to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, – their eternal home: therein shall they have spouses purified we shall admit them to shades, cool and ever deepening”

⁶¹ The United States consume half of the world’s natural resources. If several more countries achieve the same level, the planet will simply not be able to bear the burden of the “golden calf.”

[4:57]. In another place we read: “Allah will admit those who believe and work righteous deeds, to Gardens beneath which rivers flow: they shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there will be of silk” [22:23]. In the north, irrigation is perhaps less important, because it rains regularly there, and one rather dreams of sun than of cool shadow. Clearly, the Prophet expressed the truth by the means of language which his people could understand.

Generally speaking, the level of comfort in many countries has reached or perhaps even surpassed that of paradise, so for lots of people, gardens of paradise are not as attractive as they were to the Arabs leading caravans across the Arabian Desert some time ago. It is difficult today to astonish one with the carpets and green pillows that await the faithful in paradise. Living in paradise gardens and talking to gurias cannot be called a sensible life. For a modern intellectual, spiritual demands are much more important than physical pleasures. The eternity when one “will recline (at ease); therein can they call (at pleasure) for fruit in abundance, and (delicious) drink” [38:51] becomes senseless. God could not plan such a predestination for mankind. The images in the Quran were designed for the people of the Middle Ages who needed to be turned away from heathen idols. But they do not suit people who are developed and spiritually rich.

“But the chosen servants of Allah, – for them is a sustenance determined, fruits; and they (shall enjoy) honor and dignity, in Gardens of delight. Facing each other on raised couches. Round will be passed to them a Cup from a clear-flowing fountain, crystal-white, of a taste delicious to those who drink (thereof), free from headiness; nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom. And besides them will be chaste women; restraining their glances, with big eyes (of wonder and beauty). As if they were (delicate) eggs closely guarded. Then they will turn to one another and questions one another” [37:40–50].

One should not think of paradise and hell materialistically, from the point of view of earthly horrors and man’s joy. They should be understood as symbols, images the essence of which lies beyond the limits human knowledge.

Omar Khayyam wrote:

In cell and cloister, mosque and synagogue,
Are men whose steps the fear of Hell doth dog;
But he who carries God within his breast
Is independent of the Pedagogue.

A man of deeds will not dream of paradise where time is spent on idle talk. Therefore, God defined paradise differently, that is, the possibility to have what one desires or uncountable gifts in “the eternal dwelling.” “But those who believe and work righteous deeds will be in the Meadows of the Gardens: they shall have, before their Lord, all that they wish for. That will indeed be the magnificent Bounty (of Allah)” [42:22]. Paradise is a spiritual world filled with the experience of the existing world. Paradise means the state of bliss when realizing the sensible life which was lived on the earth.

“Who believes in Judgment Day and does good will be rewarded by Allah,” says the Quran. Should one haggle over this? If I am a believer and follow the rules by my own free will, why do I need to be rewarded for the good? Virtue does not need to be rewarded both in this life and in that to come. It is a reward itself. It is said: “Allah bestows His abundance without measure on whom He will” [2:212]. And one gets such gifts as one sees and expects them to be. Then what is the sense of righteous life? What is it for if neither aspiration for one’s reward in paradise nor for the fear of the infernal flame? The sense is different. It is said: “No frivolity will they hear therein, nor any mischief, – only the Saying, “Peace! Peace!” [56:25–26]. Understanding this truth, promoting spirituality and saving the planet from a catastrophe constitutes the essence of the righteous life.

“No people can hasten their term, nor can they delay it” [23: 43].

Every country, every nation has its own history and predestination. It is said: “It is He who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures” [55:10]. Indeed, Allah has created different peoples not because He was not able to create one single nation, not so that some nations would surpass others in good deeds. Life out of my people does not make sense. If God desired, He could make all people Arabs, and everyone would speak Arabic. But He created languages in diversity. The universe represents the realization of the divine mind and will. It accumulates experience from ever-changing generations of the whole variety of cultures.

The Tatars, living on the border between the East and the West both geographically and culturally, have formed their own subcivilization. Shar’ia does not function in Russia, and the majority of the population is made up by the Orthodox. So Muslims have to adjust to this way of life.⁶² They do not find themselves new to the Russian conditions or feel forced to adjust to them. They are born in this country and consider it to be their home, not a foreign land. This country is neither worse nor better than the Muslim states; it is just different. Our destiny and purpose lie in working out the experience of righteous life in these conditions. We will not turn into Saudi Arabia and are unlikely to become like Christian Europe either. We are what we are. Date palms do not grow on the Russian soil.

Millions of Muslims grew up in Russia convinced that they had to live in a secular country, taking into consideration that culture which has been developing for ages. Theologians from Muslim countries are unable to teach us how to live. Imams educated in Saudi Arabia who blindly follow their foreign teachers can bring only misunderstanding and contention. They will urge us to adhere strictly to the norms of the medieval shar’ia, many of which cannot actually be observed in Russia.

The Muslims of Europe live in similar conditions. They are like small islands in the immense Christian world.

The world is becoming mixed. What may be treated as a deviation from “pure” Islam in Tatarstan will become normal for most countries in the future. The era of Islamic caliphates is over. The world is no longer homogeneous. Everything is interrelated. No one can create an isolated, purely Islamic environment. And there is no need striving for such an “ideal,” because Islam does not deny Christianity or other peoples’ way of life. It teaches us to understand them.

Tatarstan produces high-technology goods, and that is why local scientific schools and the system of higher education should be developed. Our helicopters, buses and airplanes are no worse than those in Europe, and so we have to introduce standards close to those in Europe. Otherwise, our products will be inferior to the European ones. Islam in our country is bound to become Westernized. It will be Euroislam. Such are the requirements of life.

Indeed, whom shall we choose as an example to follow? Sudan, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia? The greater the backwardness of a country, the more severe the historical shar’ia there. Countries of this kind can afford themselves such experiments, but for the Tatars, regressing means extinction. Thus far, Muslim states buy heavy-duty trucks and helicopters in Tatarstan and not vice versa. How, then, can they help us to become competitive with Western countries? The purpose of an existing nation is not to die out being faithful Muslims but to find means of becoming progressive without losing Islamic roots.

Some contemporary theologians who realize the importance of progress and are not afraid of the influence of the Western world treat the present-day globalization quite tolerantly. For instance, Farid

⁶² Traditional Islamic jurisprudence divides all states in three types: “dwelling of Islam” – where the power belongs to the Muslims and Islamic laws prevail; “dwelling of war” (Dar al-Harb) – where the state strictly opposes the Muslims living in it, and “dwelling of peace” – where Muslims live freely, observing the norms and rules of their religion, in spite of the non-Muslim character of the state.

Isak writes: “While some take under their control *mimbar* (a preacher’s pulpit), others can take advantage of the Internet and television. And it does not matter that television is sometimes called *haram* (forbidden). We know that not so long ago, the same were called loudspeakers which help to amplify *adkhan* (a call for praying). So ‘the devil’s box’ will soon be proclaimed good as well.”⁶³ At first sight, such a viewpoint looks highly progressive because it differs greatly from the traditional one. But in fact, it is defective from the very beginning. It already contains the idea that Islam drags behind progress. If we do not start inventing new devices and technologies, we will never become a prosperous nation. Saudi Arabia is able survive thanks to its oil, and we can exist only owing to our knowledge and new discoveries. We cannot afford wahhabism or any other archaic and radical trends of Islam.

The present-day situation is such that it is impossible to ignore global tendencies, even if one wishes greatly to do so. Globalization gives way to new technologies and changes the mode of life. We must find some ways of adapting our culture to these processes.

Islamic globalization is also taking place in the world. Gradually, it is involving not only the East but the West as well. Great parts of the population in Central Europe are Muslim. France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Italy have to reckon with their growing Muslim communities. At the same time, Turkey wants to become a member of the European Union, and this would strengthen the EU’s Islamic element.

Western globalization meets with resistance, whereas Islamic globalization often causes fear. Whether they unite in global harmony or end in a conflict depends only on us. Since September, 11, islamophobia has been increasing in the world, though terrorism is not generated by Islam and does not have a religious nature.

The world has split up into Christians, Jews and Muslims. There has appeared a breach that can grow into an abyss. This breach also touched the souls of people, filling them with anxiety and fear. This divided world can be put together only by new values. They can be neither purely liberal nor traditionally Islamic.

“Verily, this Ummah of yours is a single Ummah and I am your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me (and no other)” [21:92].

According to the Quran, there is one God but different religions. Except for the revelations of the Medina period, which are peculiar due to the need for creating a viable Islamic community in a hostile environment, the rest of the Quran is very tolerant towards all other religions and all the people of good. It is said: “Those who believe (in the Quran). Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians, – any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, – on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve” [5:69]. Some *tafsirs* interpret this *ayat* deviating from the literal text. For instance, the “al-Muntakhab” interpretation of the Quran contains a slightly different variant: “If those who believed in Allah, and those Jews and Sabaeans who followed Musa, and those Christians who followed ‘Isa, sincerely believed in one Allah in Resurrection day and oblation and did good, following the shar’ia of Islam – to them there will be no suffering, but will be bliss on Resurrection Day.”⁶⁴ In fact, it is not the requirement to follow shar’ia that matters here but the requirement to do good which is important.

“He that works evil will not be requited but by the like thereof: and he that works a righteous deed – whether man or woman – and is a believer – such will enter the Garden (of Bliss): therein will they have abundance without measure” [40:40].

⁶³ Farid Isak. *Byt' musul'maninom...* – P. 340.

⁶⁴ Al-Muntakhab fi Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim. – Kazan’, 2001.

To adhere to the right faith is better in the eyes of God, but it is not a categorical condition. Doing good to people is what Allah orders, for it is said: “Those who believe (in the Qur-an). And those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, – any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve” [2:62].

All religions appeal for good. When a Jew, a Buddhist or a Christian or someone else says “Be Kind, my son, for God’s sake,” then God, who leads people to the truth by different paths, is in his or her heart.

God is one, but religions are different, and these differences become apparent mostly in rites, rituals and ceremonies. It is said: “To every People have We appointed rites which they must follow” [22:67].

The Prophet Muhammad did not assert that he brought a new religion. He continued the monotheistic tradition and commanded respect of those who were followers of different faiths. Islam does not humiliate other nations. It does not claim the privilege of divine blessings. These are sent down to all nations and all people without exception, for Allah is gracious and merciful. That is why Musa Bigiyev wrote: “So that none of the miserable would be deprived of this infinite mercy, and the wide open gates of His never-ending grace would not close, I declare that all of mankind will be saved. This is what I believe in.” He worked out a theory of “God’s absolute grace” which embraces all divine creations, including men regardless of the religions they adhere to in earthly life. It is said: “Our Lord! Thou embracest all things, in mercy and knowledge” [40:7]. This verse shows that God’s mercy applies not only to Muslims but to all people without exception. Our life is just a second as compared to eternity. And if God decides to subject all non-Muslims, that is the major part of mankind, to never-ending torments then divine wrath will be much greater than the divine mercy.

“Say: “O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is oft-forgiving, Most Merciful” [39:53].

Punishment is inevitable, but it is not for eternity. Musa Bigiyev considered that “the existence of hell will cease” because God’s mercy has no limits. It is impossible that God will punish a man’s soul for eternity because of his sins during a short earthly life. He wrote: “To show the boundless ocean of His grace and perpetuate it, Allah grants His common mercy to all the people. It does not know any limits and will last forever. He grants a particular grace destined to save people from sloth and idleness in earthly life and to forbid evil deeds to those who do good, lead righteous and good lives, keep themselves from doing harm to those around and follow the path of self-perfection.”

Mankind, despite all internal differences, is one community, *ummah*, which includes Muslims and people belonging to other confessions as well as unbelievers. If they do good deeds, then we should not call them enemies thinking that this pleases God. In fact, this is convenient to extremists who do not understand the profound meaning of the Quranic verses. God will accept those who do good. And believers will be especially welcome by Allah.

“Allah is our Lord and your Lord! For us (is the responsibility for) our deeds, and for you for your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and to Him is (our) final goal” [42:15].

Islam was sent down to earth as progress, delivering man from slavery and lack of freedom. Islam means justice, freedom of spirit and aspiration for knowledge. Islam appeals for tolerance and condemns violence.

At some point in the past, belligerence was a feature of every religion. Muslims founded their caliphates armed with swords. Christians of Europe waged crusades. Catholics and Protestants fought

against each other with particular cruelty. But swords are sheathed now. And one should not unsheathe them again, lest one is the first to suffer from them. Each religion contains an appeal for kindness and mercy, and this is what makes the mankind one *ummah*.

“And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except in the best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong but say, “We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we submit (in Islam) [29:46].”

Every seeker of truth has his own way to it. Every nation has its own predestination. The salvation of the Tatars lies in the future, not in the past, and our movement to progress was started by the Jadids who initiated a reform of Islam, following the precepts of the Prophet. We must continue this reform at the same time considering all valuable achievements of mankind.

For us, Europe has always been a source of wisdom and knowledge. And it remains so today. Our task is not to set boundaries that separate the Tatars from other nations; not to isolate ourselves in a made-up ethnic and confessional reservation, but to establish ties between different religions, different conceptions of Islam, and between Islam and Christianity. Our mission lies in promoting tolerance, which will help to unite all of mankind.

“Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” [13:11].

Allah will not change anything in people’s lives until they start doing it themselves. The Prophet said: “Take upon yourselves only those tasks that you are able to do, for Allah will not get tired of it unless you get...” One cannot demand that I through all Muslim rituals. I can burden myself with only those things that I am able to carry. For me, this is studying sciences and helping people to become closer to the truth. For the Prophet said: “He who learns at least anything of a science in order to teach other people will get from God the salvation of seventy saints.” My salvation is in promoting mutual understanding between people of different confessions and cultures. I know that many of clergyman will not like it. Life is easier when you are being praised, not criticized. But it is said: “Therefore stand firm (in the straight path) as though art commanded” [11:112].

Having written these thoughts I do not mean to reproach anyone or deny anything. I am just searching for a true path. And I have no doubts that the Prophet’s words about the modernization of Islam are right. This is the most important point for today, since a new century has already begun.

It will be easiest to call all that I have written *bid’at*. But we should remember the Prophet’s words: “Look at your own mistakes. This will prevent you from looking for the mistakes of others. Never look for mistakes in the deeds of other men, for it is a sin to point at the mistakes of others when yours are still with you.”

“Allah! There is no god but He, – the Living, the Self-subsisting, Supporter of all. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is thee can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) Before or After or Behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, The Supreme (in glory). Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error” [2:255–256].

Man has never been forsaken by God, neither in ancient times nor in present-day life. He is always with man in the search for the spirit, for eternity and for absolute good; in the understanding of infinite space and time, of the complexity of matter and spirit. If you want to be saved, you will believe

in eternal life. “This life of the present is nothing but (temporary) enjoyment: it is the Hereafter that is the Home that will last” [40:39]. Religion brings the human soul closer to lofty ideals. It elevates the soul above the level of ordinary virtues and provokes aspiration for a better life.

The symbol of faith is confined to simple words: “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.” Everyone who says that is Muslim. An unbeliever is one who denies it, and only God can see men’s hearts and judge whether a man is righteous or not.

When Noah was 950 years old he said, sighing:

– Lord, how short life is! Man has only just been born and has to die right away!

Each of us has his own Path, and we must manage to do plenty of good deeds during the time we have left.