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Are We Facing a Global Spiritual Crisis?



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Editorial

Mohammad Abdus Sabur



Space for Spirituality in Our Times

In this age of communication and technological revolution everything is fast-

paced. One has to be competitive and fast in order to survive, sustain, compete and secure a better position. In the process millions of poor and marginalized are left behind. In this context space for spirituality is our concern.

We live in this vast universe which makes it difficult for us to locate our own place, space and identity. Similarly we debate about spirituality at length but at the end, we end up with abstract statements. We find ourselves forced to continue our search for the sacred.

It is possibly easier, in our respective traditions, to feel and have a sense of the word spirituality in silence and prayer as reflected in mystical traditions. But even in the practical world, people do relate to one another as human beings and also act as vice-regent for protecting nature. This implies that an individual or self is aware of being part of the greater creation and the cosmos in which an organic sense of solidarity does exist and there is a circularity of love, compassion and common concern within and beyond. In other words, spirituality is a higher level of quality of the human person, which one can acquire and put it in practice. It is a self-assigned sacred mission to search and nurture the intangible nature of spirit that generates vibration in the soul of human beings to respond to calls for the causes of justice, peace and social harmony.

Birds collect food and fly back and forth to feed their little babies until the baby bird is able to fly. Our mothers do the same

This does not happen automatically in our complex world. The sense of self is incomplete. Greater solidarity and active engagement in silence and in

prayer, rather than expressed in words can help create a sense of belonging to both inner and outside worlds.

In the midst of intolerance, violence, and war around the world, some scholars and religious leaders have expressed their optimism that the third millennium will be dominated by the religion/spirituality paradox (Caleb Rosad). The reasons being the decline of organized religions which are seen as being focused more on religious rituals, and are therefore becoming increasingly less relevant to meet the challenges of the present and the foreseeable future. Religious institutions, faith leaders, scholars and preachers ought to prioritize and address issues that are affecting people at the present time with long term consequences.

Spiritual pursuits cannot be the monopoly of only the followers of institutionalized religions. What we witness is that many people have opted to be outside of religious institutions but are actively responding to social issues with alternative ideas. Some would term this secular spirituality. This is a space that individuals create out of necessity when space and dynamism is shrinking within some religious institutions. This secular space offers the opportunity to be transcendental.

This issue of AMANA Magazine contains short pieces on spirituality written by distinguished scholars which I am sure will create waves of interaction on contemporary concepts of spirituality and their application. It also covers statements from the annual commemoration event organized by Nagasaki survivors of Atomic Bomb. These events continue to build awareness among the younger generation and inspire them to be aware of human tragedy and why we should remain vigilant to prevent such acts in the future. The article on Apologies and Forgiveness as Factors in Peace-Building raises important challenges to not only political leadership but ethical and spiritual empowerment as well.

Mohammad Abdus Sabur is Secretary General of the Asian Muslim Action Network and Asian Resource Foundation, Thailand

Are We Facing a Global Spiritual Crisis?

Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer



This is very complex question with global sweep and hence it is difficult to answer in black or white. There have been both trends, i.e. material and spiritual crises, throughout the known history of humankind and there has hardly been any period when humanity did

not face one kind of crisis or another.

Yes, it is true that today we are far more connected with each other than ever before as indeed the world has become a global village. The time once taken to travel between two villages is now enough to travel between two continents. Also, what happens in the USA is known in Australia at the same moment where previously it took months, even years. Has this connectivity added to the crisis? This connectivity is also of no less complex nature - a boon as well as a bane.

If we say we are facing a spiritual crisis we have to explain what we mean by this. Spiritualism is thought to be the opposite of materialism. When we are overwhelmed by materialism and think of nothing but material benefits we probably call it a spiritual crisis. We become greedy, ruthlessly exploiting others, dividing our society into high and low, and never hesitating to use violence. In fact whenever we forgot our duties and obligations towards others - a Buddha, a Christ or a Mohammad reflected deeply on the situation around them and exhorted us to control our desire, our greed and fulfill our obligations towards our fellow human beings. They took the 'lowest' people from society as their companions to show that all human beings are equally respectable and adopted very simple and frugal lifestyles.

But did it make a great difference to society at large or particularly to ruling and elite classes? Of course they went out of their way to show their respect to these holy personalities and built grand temples and mosques and churches but cleverly and effectively

sabotaged the real message of these great thinkers and teachers so these places became great centers of pilgrimage for the poor and suffering people while the world continued as before. What was thought to be spiritual healing for humankind became inner spiritual solace for the poor. The Holagus, Nadir-shahs and Hitlers (or modern day Bushes) continued to rule the roost.

In the past, with a few exceptions, the impact remained more or less local. Today (or rather since the advent of the 19th century) the impact of such deeds (or rather misdeeds) have become far more widespread than before. Today we consider ourselves far more 'enlightened' and aware, thanks to the universality of education and political awareness and we feel we are far more respectful of human rights and dignity. However, just as the rich and powerful sabotaged the message of great teachers they have been no less successful in hijacking the teachings of modern day enlightenment leaving the poor and exploited in 'spiritual crisis'.

What is worse is that even the tools for creating enlightenment such as education and textbooks etc. are controlled by the rich and powerful and are cleverly manipulated. As for elections, one section of the rich and powerful defeats another and nothing much changes. No wonder that our modern society has seen so much more violence than in the past.

The message though is not to despair. There has been some progress and there can be more if we are honest and sincere in establishing a spiritually stable society. We have to work out a creative synthesis of science and spirituality and also understand the core teachings of great teachers and masters, not reducing them to mere rituals but struggling to transform our societies. Such sincere struggles will make us spiritually triumphant over materialism.

The Late Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer was a Founding Member and Chairman of Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN).

Are We Facing a Global Spiritual Crisis?

Prof. Anisuzzaman



Yes, despite spectacular development in science and technology and its consequent impact upon the material life of human beings around the globe, humanity undoubtedly faces a serious spiritual crisis. This finds expression and easily catches the attention of con-

scious and sympathetic minds all over the world. Our very conference (Young Scholars' Conference) is a glaring pointer to that effect; otherwise, we would not have been here, leaving aside normal duties at our own places.

One may still ask about the signs of this moral and spiritual decadence. This becomes obvious from the fact that the present world is torn between the haves and have-nots. On the one hand, there has been an accumulation of almost unlimited wealth in a few hands and facilities for their ease and comfort; on the other hand, millions of people are devoid of basic food, clothing, shelter, education, medical facilities and even clean water.

The heart-rending sounds of fighter planes, missiles and mines, drugs and guns; are each day taking the lives of hundreds and leaving thousands of innocent human beings wounded for faults quite unknown and unintelligible to them. Technological advancements are often being used for the quick destruction of opponents. This is why I suspect one of the key themes of this conference has been xenophobia. A good number of intellectuals are being purchased or scared into using their talents towards annihilation of their fellow human beings. Why is this happening? My answer is simple: Humanity has not adequately

developed mentally and spiritually, at least not at the same or similar speed as they have progressed outwardly.

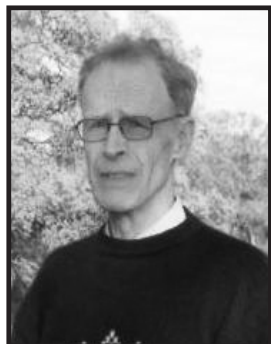
How are we to bring about change in the moral and spiritual dimensions of human beings? One may claim that to just return to our respective religious traditions and moral values will do the job. I think this is not enough, even at times this kind of revivalism may lead to a repetition of similar kinds of fight and feuds to those that took place during the medieval times in the name of religion. Therefore just a return to the past will not suffice; we need to rethink our respective religious and moral traditions because we cannot build any future human society without completely denying our past nor can we afford to ignore the present.

Today's world is a globalized world, a global village as it is often called. We, therefore, need to delve deep into our past and analyze the present situation with an eye towards the future. We need to redefine our identities in the sense of rediscovering ourselves as citizens of the world and, concentrating more on the spirit of religions and morality rather than their letter, bringing out commonalities rather than differences. We should, in other words, try to develop a holistic spiritual environment and humanity-friendly spiritual and moral values and try to apply them creatively to our different situations.

Professor Anisuzzaman is Director of the Centre for Moral Development, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Apologies and Forgiveness as Factors in Peace-building

Staffan Bodemar



Moving from the Intra-Personal to the National and International Dimension

To genuinely apologize, to ask forgiveness, or to grant forgiveness to someone else, are some of the most important and most positive expressions of human inter-

action. They are normally thought of on a personal level, as actions by one individual towards another. Starting in the family, a child is expected to say sorry to his/her parents for wrong-doings. And at times a parent - maybe after having swallowed some pride - also has to apologize to a child.

In the Qur'an there are numerous references to "God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful". Furthermore, in verse 42.43 it is stated; "But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs." Jesus told his disciples to forgive an offending brother, "not seven times, but seventy times seven times". Buddhism and Judaism also lay great importance on forgiving, and while maybe rooted in faith, forgiving is not the prerogative only of persons of faith. As expressed by a Jewish survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp; "My forgiveness has nothing to do with God or religion; it has to do with our ability to heal ourselves by forgiving. I believe that people do not have to believe in God to forgive."

The writer Michael Henderson defines forgiveness as simply 'surrendering the right to get even.' According to Lew Smedes; "The first and often the only person to be healed is the person who does the forgiveness. When we genuinely forgive, we set the prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was ourselves."

Yet, actions of apology and forgiveness at times have far wider implications and results beyond the personal, as in Europe after World War II - they have also helped to shape part of post-war developments in Asia and resolve conflicts between and within other nations.

There are many foundation stones of modern Europe. But two of them are the apologies made by Germany to its western neighbors in the late 1940s and 1950s and then to its eastern neighbors in the early 1970s and the acceptance of these apologies.

The immediate post-World War II period was a unique period. The most extensive and destructive war in history had just ended. There was an enormous opportunity for renewal, but there was also a great potential for political and economic acts of revenge, as had been the case after the First World War. If the bitterness and hatred of such a large-scale conflict as World War II, with its massive atrocities, can be healed - as to a large extent they have in fact been healed - its lessons will always remain relevant.

Japan and the Rest of Asia in the Post-World War II Period

It took five years after World War II until, in 1950, the first Japanese delegation of some 64 persons, from various walks of life, could visit an international conference in Europe dealing with reconciliation. This was followed by a visit to the United States of America, where two members of the Japanese Parliament (the Diet) made a public apology in an address to both houses of the U.S. Congress. They spoke at various other forums across the country, thus helping to prepare the American public for the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty.

In 1957, the then Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke visited 15 countries in Asia and Australia. His visits were the first ever by a Japanese Prime Minister to

any of these countries. Kishi's mission was initially conceived as a trade promotion trip, but against the opposition of many politicians, as well as Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials, he decided to make it a priority to apologize for Japan's actions during the war. In Australia he said; "It is my official duty and my personal desire to express to you our heartfelt sorrow for what occurred in the war." Then in Burma he said; "We view with deep regret the vexation we caused to the people of Burma in the war."

His missions had an enormous impact in the countries he visited, notably in the Philippines and Australia. They contributed to the building of trust and to resolve issues of war reparations. During his visits Kishi, in expressing his apologies, often departed from the texts prepared by MFA. Yet, upon his return he revealed little about his references to the war. As a result the Japanese public was not fully informed of the impact his visits had had in each country, and this may have contributed to a subsequent perception gap as to how Japan regards historical issues.

Why did Kishi decide to apologize? Two people were influential; one was a politician in his own party, the speaker of the Diet, Mr. Niro Hoshijima, the other an opposition Socialist Diet member, Ms Shidzue Kato. Both had been exposed to international reconciliation efforts since the early 1950s. After a meeting in Manila in 1957, where Koreans were also present, they had returned to Japan with a deep conviction that Kishi must make apology a priority above trade.

Ms Kato had been a well-known advocate for women's rights and in 1946 was one of the first women ever to be elected to the Japanese Diet. Her own experience of the role apologies can play in reconciliation had started on a personal level, when she apologized to her stepdaughter, a step which she later referred to as, "almost like the funeral of an arrogant woman". This personal experience influenced her convictions as to what Japan must do, and she felt that the economic future of Japan depended as much on trust as on trade.

South Korea was not included in Kishi's visits. Instead, in 1953, a Japanese delegation had taken an

opposite approach reiterating Japanese property claims in Korea. Kishi reversed this position; "I have no intention of holding to our past legal interpretations ... but try to solve ... issues on the basis of a humble heart," a statement which helped coin the phrase 'the statesmanship of the humble heart'. In 1965, a Treaty of Basic Relations was concluded, normalizing diplomatic relations for the first time since the early 1900s.

Most subsequent Japanese leaders, as well as the emperor, have reiterated Japan's 'deep remorse', as expressed in 1995 by the Japanese diet and subsequently the 'heartfelt apology' issued by Prime Minister Murayama on behalf of the government, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of WW II. Since 1972, Japan has also recognized its 'responsibility for the serious damage that Japan caused in the past to the Chinese people through war, and deeply reproaches itself'. As recently as 3 March 2011, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Seiji Maehara, offered an apology to five aged Australian ex-POWs for their suffering in Singapore's Changi Prison and as diggers on the Thai-Burma railway.

There have been setbacks such as under Prime Minister Koizumi, when there were no heads of state meetings for five years, and considering his visits to the Yasukuni shrine, which since 1978 also enshrines 14 Class-A war criminals.

Historical 'revisionism' in some Japanese history school books, such as the coverage of the 1937-38 Nanking massacre and of the 'comfort women' who were virtual sex slaves during Japanese occupations, have also caused great controversy with China and South Korea, but also within Japan. The government has stood firm, such as in 1984, in its recognition "of the fact that acts by our country in the past caused tremendous suffering and damage to the people of Asian countries, including the Republic of Korea and China." Following further attempts at historical 'revisionism', the most regressive text books have been rejected by most school districts.

Reconciliation is an ongoing process and as Diet member Fujita Yukihiisa wrote in 2006 there remains a challenge to build unwavering trust, especially with China and South Korea and certainly today, considering the current territorial disputes in the East

China Sea. The recently elected Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who ironically is a grandson of Prime Minister Kishi, has indicated that he may issue a statement revising the recognition of the treatment of 'comfort women' and the 1995 landmark apology.

While nationalistic fever is never far away, the co-hosting, by Japan and South Korea, of the Football World Cup in 2002, the current popularity of Korean pop music in Japan and, in 2011, the support given by South Koreans to Japanese tsunami victims may also be examples of growing grass-roots support for a healing process.

In East or South East Asia, the act of forgiveness or of seeking forgiveness may have been less common. Yet, during a state visit in 1968, when President Carlos Garcia of the Philippines became the first ever foreign dignitary to address the Japanese Diet, he stated on Japanese TV; "It may be truthfully said that the bitterness of former years is being washed away by compassion and forgiveness."

Within South Korea itself, the previous president, former dissident Kim Dae Jung, at his inauguration in 1998, stood alongside several ex-autocrats who in 1973 had arranged his kidnapping and even attempted to kill him. He had had a personal experience of forgiveness while in prison waiting for his execution, and proclaimed that the "politics of retaliation" was over, seeking no revenge against his previous jailers.

In the 1998 Japan-Republic of Korea Joint Declaration, a Japanese apology was followed by a Korean statement of acceptance. Due to mutual fear and suspicion, a subsequent visit by President Jiang Zemin of China did not result in a similar exchange.

There were of course other factors – political as well as economic ones - contributing to the post-World War II reconciliation. Important national and international institutions were developed but the importance of the Japanese apologies cannot be overestimated.

So, while we watch with great apprehension for possible retractions from the current Japanese government, and current developments in the East China Sea, it is worth considering a scenario in East and South East Asia without the repeated issuance

of apologies by successive Japanese governments. Most countries in Asia have to a large extent reconciled themselves from the bitterness of the war period. Yet with China, a long-term process of implicit forgiveness may be the best that can be hoped for to reach what one author refers to as deep interstate reconciliation, which arguably is what has been attained between previous enemies in Europe.

Current Asian Situations – Timor-Leste and Myanmar

In Asia, apologies and forgiveness are particularly relevant for Timor-Leste (East Timor), the youngest country in Asia, which since its independence in 2002 has faced difficult reconciliation issues both internally as well as externally with Indonesia following 24 years of occupation, atrocities and the liberation struggle. In Myanmar a Burmese political analyst wrote a few years ago, even prior to the recent democratic openings; "All protagonists in the conflict, except the Burmese military, have talked about reconciliation. I have not heard anyone in the opposition movement or among the ethnic groups talk about revenge. And the Burmese are forgiving people. Buddhism teaches forgiveness and tolerance too."

Concluding Remarks

In building peace, apologies and forgiveness are only two factors among many. Attaining justice and dignity are others, as are dealing with the concrete issues and grievances behind the conflict through economic, political and social actions, such as reparations, assistance and institutional development. It is not possible to measure the relative importance that apologies and forgiveness have had or may have in a given situation. The purpose here has only been to demonstrate that apologies and forgiveness have played a role, and can do so in the present and the future.

Martin Luther King once said; "Forgiveness is not just an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude ... The person who is devoid of the power to forgive is also devoid of the power to love." In 1983, the Dalai Lama wrote; "You cannot learn tolerance and forgiveness from him [your guru]. You can only learn these things from your enemy." In an article for the AMAN Assembly in 2006, Dr Asghar Ali Engineer wrote; "Forgiving is the great moral virtue. Retaliation may be human but forgiving is divine."

Who should start the process of apologizing and forgiving? The obvious answer must be - anyone. It is not a tit-for-tat dimension; apologies and forgiveness may often be stand alone initiatives with no demands attached. They may or may not be reciprocated but if genuine, they make the initiator a freer person.

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Mr. Staffan Bodemar is a former UNHCR Regional Representative (ret.).

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“As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison.”

Nelson Mandela

PLEDGE FOR PEACE

Shohei Tsuiki

This year's summer is also a hot one. I will never forget that day. I was 18 at the time, a second grader at Normal School. Every day I worked at the Mitsubishi Sumiyoshi Tunnel Arms Factory as a mobilized student. On August 9, 1945 I completed a night shift and returned to my dormitory (located 1.8 Kilometers north of the hypocenter). It was 7 a.m. After eating some pumpkin, a staple food at the time, I soon feel asleep.

I woke up to a cacophony of sound and in that instant I was blown back by the blast winds. When I came to, I noticed I had slammed into the wall. My friend who had been sleeping next to me was covered in blood. I too, suffered from bad burns on my left wrist and leg and blood flood from the parts of my body cut by glass fragments. Although barefoot and covered in blood I managed to take refuge in an air raid shelter twenty meters away.

The air raid shelter was already full of people. In front of the shelter there were people who were charred black, people whose skin was peeling off their bones, people without noses and ears, a mother in a state of shock holding her dead child, and completely charred bodies standing expressionless. Just like straight out of a scene in Hell.

Before long, I was forced out by the spreading fire and I arrived at the temporary aid station in Nagayo. I received medical treatment at my house, located away from the hypocenter, from the following day. In those two months, I suffered from a fever, had bloody stool, and I couldn't even stand. My hairs fell out and I struggled from the pain of my wounds. After hearing that people nearby were dying one by one, I prepared for my own death, fearing I would be next. At the time, I still did not know the true fear of radiation.

I have been lucky to have lived as long as I have. What I desire the most is the immediate removal of these genocidal weapons of mass destruction from the face of the earth. However, nuclear tests are still being carried out today and nuclear weapon development continues. If one of these nuclear weapons were to be used, there is no way to be protected from the radiation. It will surely mark the end of humanity as we know it.

Japan, as the only country to suffer from a nuclear bombing, has a responsibility to stand at the forefront of the abolition of nuclear weapon movement. Other atomic bomb survivors and I have continued to call for the abolition of these weapons under the slogan, "Nagasaki: The Last Atomic Bombed City." Unfortunately, Japan did not sign the joint statement at the last NPT Preparatory Review Conference calling for the recognition of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. As atomic bomb survivors from Nagasaki, Rather than being surprised, we cannot hide our resentment.

Meanwhile, due to the Tokyo Electric Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear power plant disaster, a new group of radiation victims was created, showing that even the peaceful use of this technology isn't safe.

Notwithstanding, actions are being taken place to restart nuclear power reactors and sell nuclear power to other countries even though disaster recovery is still underway.

It is clear that the lesson we can take from Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Fukushima is that humanity cannot coexist alongside all things nuclear. I call on the government to make sincere, proactive efforts to further the movement towards abolishing nuclear weapons and shutting nuclear power plants.

Even now, changes are being proposed to our peaceful Constitution. Please, all atomic bomb survivors and those who have experienced war, tell the people around you of your experience so that our country does not revert to the generation of warfare from the past and so that another tragedy does not occur again. There are young people in Nagasaki who desire a peaceful world without nuclear weapons that are working hard to achieve this goal. Their signature drive totals nearly 1,000,000 signatures.

I intend to continue telling my story to future generations, encouraged by these high school children. It is the responsibility of us adults to create a peaceful world safe from nuclear weapons and war.

Shohei Tsuiki is an Atomic Bomb Survivor Representative

Nagasaki Peace Declaration

Tomihisa Taue

Sixty-eight years ago today, a United States bomber dropped a single atomic bomb directly over Nagasaki. The bomb's heat rays, blast winds, and radiation were immense, and the fire that followed engulfed the city in flames all through the night. The city was instantly reduced to ruins. Of the 240,000 residents in the city, around 150,000 were afflicted and 74,000 of them died within the year. Those who survived have continued to suffer from a higher incidence of contracting leukemia, cancer, and other serious radiation-induced diseases. Even after 68 years, they still live in fear and suffer deep psychological scars.

Humankind invented and produced this cruel weapon. Humankind has even gone so far as using nuclear weapons on both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Humankind has repeatedly conducted nuclear tests, contaminating the earth. Humankind has committed a great many mistakes. This is why we must, on this occasion reaffirm the pledges we have made in the past that must not be forgotten and start anew.

I call on the Japanese government to consider once again that Japan is the only country to have suffered a nuclear bombing. At the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, held in Geneva in April 2013, several countries proposed a Joint Statement on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons for which 80 countries expressed their support. South Africa and other countries that made this proposal asked Japan to support and sign the statement.

However, the Japanese government did not sign it, betraying the expectations of global society. If the Japanese government cannot support the remark that "nuclear weapons [should never be] used again under any circumstances" this implies that the government would approve of their use under some circumstances. This stance contradicts the resolution that Japan would never allow anyone else to become victims of a nuclear bombing.

We are also concerned about the resumption of negotiations concerning the Japan –India Nuclear

Cooperation Agreement. Cooperating on nuclear power with India, tenet is to stop the increase of the number of nuclear-weapon states. Japan's cooperation with India would also provide North Korea, which withdrew from the NPT and is committed to nuclear development, with an excuse to justify its actions, hindering efforts toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

I call on the Japanese government to consider once again that Japan is the only country to have suffered a nuclear bombing. I call on the Japanese government to enact the three Non-Nuclear Principles into law and take proactive measures to exert its leadership by creating a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, Thus fulfilling its duty as the only nation to have suffered an atomic bombing.

Under the current NPT, nuclear-weapon states have a duty to make earnest efforts towards nuclear disarmament. This is a promise they've made to the rest of the world. In April of 2009, United States President Barack Obama expressed his desire to seek a nuclear-free world during a speech in Prague. In June this year, President Obama stated in Berlin that he would work towards future reduction of nuclear arsenals, saying "So long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe." Nagasaki supports President Obama's approach.

However, there are over 17,000 nuclear warheads still in existence of which at least 90% belong to either the United States or Russia. President Obama, President Putin, please commit your countries to a speedy, drastic reduction of your nuclear arsenal. Rather than envisioning a nuclear-free world as a faraway dream, we must quickly decide to solve this issue by working towards the abolition of these weapons, fulfilling the promise made to global society.

There are things that we citizens can do to help realize a nuclear-free world other than entrusting the work to leaders of nations only. In the preface of the Constitution of Japan, it states that the Japanese people have "resolved that never again shall we be

visited with the horrors of war though the action of government.” This statement reflects the firm resolution of the Japanese people to work for world peace. In order not to forget this original desire for peace, it is essential to impart the experiences of war and atomic devastation to succeeding generations. We must continue to remember war has taken many lives and caused the physical and mental anguish of a great many more survivors. We must not forget the numerous cruel scenes of war in order to prevent another one.

People of younger generations, have you ever heard the voices of the hibakusha, survivors of the atomic bombings? Have you heard them crying out, “No more Hiroshimas, no more Nagasakis, no more wars, and no more hibakush”?

You will be the last generation to hear their voices firsthand. Listen to their voices to learn what happened 68 years ago under the atomic cloud. Listen to their voices to find out why they continue to appeal for nuclear abolition. You will find that, despite much hardship, they continue to fight for nuclear abolition for the sake of future generations. Please consider whether or not you will allow the existence of nuclear weapons in the world today and in the future world of your children. Please talk to your friends about this matter. It is you who will determine the future of this world.

There are many things that we can do as global citizens. Nearly 90% of Japanese municipalities have made nuclear-free declarations to demonstrate their residents’ refusal to become victims of a nuclear attack and their resolution to work for world peace.

The National Council of Japan Nuclear Free Local Authorities, comprising of these municipalities, plan to take any action in accordance with the declaration they have made, they shall have the support of the National Council, as well as that of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

In Nagasaki, the Faith Nagasaki Global Citizens’ Assembly for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons will be held this coming November. At this assembly residents will play the key role in disseminating the message for nuclear abolition to people around the world.

Meanwhile, the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant operated by the Tokyo Electric Power Company, Inc. has yet to be resolved and radioactive contamination continues to spread. In an instant, this accident deprived many residents in Fukushima of their future. The residents of Nagasaki truly hope for the earliest possible recovery of Fukushima and will continue to support the people of Fukushima.

Last month, Mr. Senji Yamaguchi, a hibakusha who called for nuclear abolition and for better support for hibakusha, passed away. The number of hibakusha continues to decrease with their average age now exceeding seventy-eight. Once again, I call for the Japanese government to provide better support for these aging hibakusha.

We offer our sincere condolences for the lives lost in the atomic bombings, and pledge to continue our efforts towards realizing a nuclear-free world, hand-in-hand with the citizens of Hiroshima 2013.

Tomihisa Taue

Mayor of Nagasaki

August 9, 2013

IS SHARI'AH IMMUTABLE?

Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer



It is believed by millions of Muslims across the world that Shari'ah laws are immutable and represent divine will. It is based on serious misunderstanding. Shari'ah is not and cannot be immutable. Recently I was invited to what is called Jaipur Literary Festival

held in Jaipur (Rajasthan) from 24-29 January to be part of a panel discussion on the book *Heaven on Earth....* by Sadik Kadri of London which is on application of Shari'ah laws across the Muslim world. He has travelled to different Muslim countries and talked to various Ulama and Muftis about Shari'ah laws as applied to their respective countries.

All of them were defenders of conservative Shari'ah formulations and refused to admit any change. They maintained that Shari'ah being divine, cannot be changed. It is from this rigidity of our Ulama that this misunderstanding among common Muslims emanates that Shari'ah is divine and hence immutable. In fact our Ulama forget that *ijtihad* is not only permitted but encouraged by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and the hadith pertaining to Ma'adh Ibn Jabal is well known that when Prophet (PBUH) appointed him to the governorship of Yemen and when he came to take leave of the Prophet, he asked him How will you govern? Ma'adh said according to the Qur'an. The Prophet (PBUH) thereupon said if you do not find the solution to the problem in Qur'an? Ma'adh bin Jabal said according to Sunnah. But if you do not find it in sunnah also? He said *ana ajtahidu* (i.e. I will exert myself to find the solution. The Prophet thereupon patted his back and said you are right.

All Ulama accept this hadith and yet while they theoretically admit permissibility of *ijtihad*, they refuse to do it or allow it saying there is no one capable of doing it. In fact what is unalterable is principles and values underlying Shari'ah laws i.e. *usul al-fiqh* cannot be changed but laws based on these *usul* and values must be changed with the

change in the social and cultural context. In fact cultural context plays very important role in formulation of Shari'ah laws. The Arab *adaat* (customs and traditions) form an important part of Shari'ah formulations.

Late Abdur Rahman Wahid, President of Nahdat al-Ulama in Indonesia who also became President of that country told me once that there was great debate among the Ulama of Indonesia whether the Indonesian customs and traditions can become part of Shari'ah laws as applicable in Indonesia and those who advocated Indonesian *addat* ultimately one.

Let us remember that what was called Muslim *ummah* (community) during the Prophet's time was limited to Arabia only but when Islam spread to different areas *ummah* was no more confined to Arabs alone but to Iranians, Uzbeks, Turks, Chinese, Indians, Indonesians also. Thus there were various linguistic and cultural groups with so many different linguistic and cultural communities. The Shari'ah laws were influenced by these factors. Thus *ummah* was no longer a homogenous group but comprised of various religious and cultural communities with their own age-old customs and traditions.

However the values, *maqasid* (intentions) and *masalih* (welfare) of human beings did not change. *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* and *Masalih al-Shari'ah* do not change but in order to maintain these values, *maqasid* and *masalih* in fact the rules framed by Ulama must change.

When Imam Shafi'I moved from Hijaz to Egypt which was the confluence of Arab and Coptic culture, we realized this and changed his position on several issues.

However, what I am saying does not apply to '*ibadat* i.e. matters pertaining to worship, world hereafter etc. but only to matters pertaining to *mu'amalat* i.e. inter-personal relations like marriage, divorce, inheritance and many other similar socio-economic matters. Most important of course among these is

matters pertaining to marriage, divorce etc. In Jaipur I spoke mainly on women's position in Shari'ah and women's position in Qur'an.

The fact that the pandal was packed with people shows the interest the women's position in general, and that of Muslim women, in particular, generates. I said the book deals with only status quo and application of Shari'ah laws of patriarchal and feudalized Islamic societies. It very much misses what I call transcendental Qur'anic vision. Qur'an gives absolutely equal rights to man and woman without any discrimination.

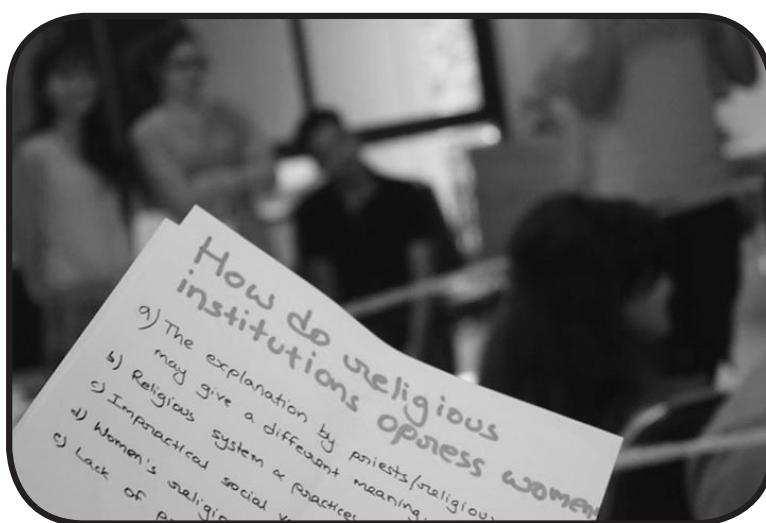
However, Qur'an was revealed in a highly patriarchal society and also later got feudalized when khilafat turned into feudal empire. Thus patriarchy and feudalism completely distorted the fundamental Qur'anic vision of gender equality and women's individuality and dignity. Unless we understand this sociological and cultural aspect and relate it to theological ones, we will miss the very revolutionary role which Islam wanted to play in totally transforming women's status.

However, it is highly regrettable that Muslim societies could not produce ulama who could have had capacity to relate sociology with theology. Even in modern and post-modern societies our ulama totally lack transcendental vision of Islam. They have become prisoners of the past and have frozen Islam into feudal patriarchal society.

We need theologians with future vision to fulfill Qur'an's mission of going beyond present which is full of injustices. Our society is full of gender injustices and Qur'an's central value is justice, justice in all areas of life. Gender justice is as emphatically emphasized as justice in social and economic matters. In order to emphasize gender justice it is high time that we produce female theologians with profound knowledge of Arabic language. Even the most conservative ulama cannot oppose the concept of female theologians.

The Late Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer was a Founding Member and Chairman of Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN).

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An Interview with Prof. Azyumardi Azra, Chairman of AMAN



Eminent Islamic Scholar Prof. Azyumardi Azra in conversation with Mushtaq Ul Haq Ahmad Sikander about his life, his works, being elected the new Chairperson of Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN), Thailand, and the challenges this new post offers:

Tell us something about yourself?

I was born in Lubuk Alung, West Sumatra, Indonesia, on March 4, 1955. I graduated from the Department of History, Columbia University in 1992. I am a member of the advisory boards of a number of international organizations such as UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF), and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). I am presently Director, Graduate School, State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia. I have written and edited more than two dozens books related to Islam, Islam in Indonesia and other such topics.

How long have you been associated with AMAN?

I can't exactly recall, but it certainly must be more than a decade old relation with AMAN.

What was your reaction when AMAN Council members on 31st August, 2013 elected you as the new Chairperson?

I was really surprised because the move was quite unexpected. Now that I have been chosen to bear this responsibility, I am quite worried about being able to do justice to the responsibilities that accompany the chairmanship of AMAN. I may not be able to give my complete attention to the obligations I am supposed to deliver, because of my tight schedule. I also travel a lot attending different conferences, delivering lectures, and I also teach at various universities.

What are the challenges facing AMAN as an organization?

There are various challenges at present. My initiative will be to strengthen and widen the scope of the existing programmes. I will also try to prioritize the Inter religious Dialogues and Peace Building courses. So far, AMAN has done good work, but there is still scope for its improvement. AMAN has good relations with other NGOs and civil society actors, but needs to have relations with governments too. I will also try to improve its revenue, by generating more funding using my contacts.

What steps are you going to take to broaden the sphere of AMAN activities?

I would like to continue and improve the existing programmes. Simultaneously, I will try to network and introduce AMAN among government circles and in Asia as a whole.

Being an academic, a researcher and an Islamic scholar, what efforts will you make to improve the research activities of AMAN?

I will try to improve the research conducted through AMAN, but this research will be action oriented rather than ivory tower scholarship. Young scholars will be provided with AMAN research fellowships. Also the Asghar Ali Engineer Memorial Fund has been established that will offer fellowships to conduct research on his scholarly legacy as well as South Asia.

How do you see the future of AMAN?

I am quite optimistic about our future activities and work. AMAN has been working now for more than two decades, and hundreds of people have participated in our programmes and we have fellows in most parts of the world. AMAN is a respected name among the NGOs and our work is well known in most countries and governments in Asia as well as other parts of the planet. I will try to build better liaison with these AMAN alumni, so that we can jointly work towards making the world better, safer and more peaceful for us to inhabit.

M.H.A.Sikander is Writer-Activist based in Srinagar-Kashmir and can be contacted at sikandarmushtaq@gmail.com





BISMILLAHIRRAHMANIRRAHIM

Statement of Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) in Response to Recent Shia-Sunni Conflicts

On the 1st of September 2013, a group of eminent scholars and activists from various parts of the world including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, and the United States of America met in Bangkok, Thailand to discuss the increasing violence between Sunni and Shia groups across the world. We, the participants of that Intra-Faith Consultation hosted by the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) agree that:

1. There are as many paths to reach Allah as there are human beings. Shia and Sunni are Muslims, believing in Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as his messenger, the one and only Quran, the Day of Judgment and one Qiblah. We as Muslims are not to judge each other's Islamic practices. Shia and Sunni schools of jurisprudence are equally valid ways of practicing Islam.
2. We abhor the exploitation of the differences in Shia and Sunni practices for political purposes and strongly demand such exploitation to cease. In particular its politicization in Muslim societies like Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and more recently Malaysia. This politicization of differences has led to the killing, expulsion, discrimination, and violation of the human rights of thousands of women, men and children.
3. We also recognize the divisive role played by outside powers in their pursuit of their own self-interest.
4. We condemn in the strongest terms the alliance formed by some Muslim rulers and such outside powers in pursuit of their divisive plans and stand against any foreign intervention in any Muslim land by outside powers.

We strongly call upon all Muslims to:

1. Be non-judgmental regarding different ways of practicing Islam. Judgment is reserved for Allah alone and the Day of Judgment belongs to Him alone.
2. Embark upon a journey of learning the principles of faith and the diversity of practice, "And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be
3. Act on our God-given responsibility as "His Khalifas" in this world by focusing our energies on issues that can benefit human kind.
4. We call on Muslim ulama, intellectuals and other concerned people to actively engage in intra-faith dialogue in a mutually respectful way.
5. We encourage civil societies to strengthen solidarity among Muslims by facilitating dialogues and help resolve the crises with humanitarian aid.
6. We encourage communal and sectarian conflicts among Muslims be resolved through grass-root efforts and with civil societies tied to those communities rather than involving non-relevant, outside parties.

We further call upon the politicians and Muslim governments to:

1. Put the welfare of the Muslim Ummah ahead of their personal gains and political gamesmanship and ahead of the interests of foreign powers.
2. Hasten educational and economic development in conflict-prone areas as part of the solution.

We, as members of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) shall expand our efforts in intra and inter faiths dialogues to strengthen relations among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer Memorial Fund

Background

Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer, the valiant and indefatigable warrior for understanding, tolerance, nonviolence, compromise and peace is no longer with us in person. But, his legacy of truth, compassion, integrity, humility, values, principles and beliefs has only just been bequeath to us this very day.

AMAN, which Dr Engineer Chaired from inception to date of his death, will honor his legacy by initiating an Asghar Ali Engineer Memorial Fund.

The objective of the Fund is to continue the work and mission of Dr. Engineer through young Asian scholars of Islamic and other Faiths, by continuing to expose them to the ideas, writings and work of Dr. Engineer and providing them with a modest support for research and writing on aspects of the legacy of Dr. Engineer.

Themes

The legacy of Dr. Engineer, in terms of values and concepts is vast. But, for a start, the Fund will focus on issues, concerns, challenges and opportunities relating to themes such as: spirituality, secularism, diversity, pluralism, women's and human rights, minority rights, transparency, nonviolence, and peaceful coexistence.

Goals

To empower young scholars to undertake collaborative action research and produce resources towards promoting inter-faith understanding, communal harmony, human rights with special emphasis on women, ethnic and religious minority rights.

Programs

I. Research Fellowship:

Every year two research fellowship will be awarded to one female and one male researcher for six months research work. Research monograph will be published for wider distribution. The fellowship is a research grant of US\$ 2000 depending on the scope of the research. Researcher will have an opportunity to have internship at the International Institute of Peace Studies at Nong Chok, Bangkok to present the research report and receive comments.

II. Asghar Ali Memorial Lecture

Annual lecture will be organized by rotation in different countries inviting distinguished scholars

The Asghar Ali Engineer Memorial Fund will be raised and managed by AMAN and under the guidance of a panel of distinguished scholars.

Advisers:

Prof. Anwar Fazal – Malaysia

Dr. Imtiyaz Yusuf- U.K

Ms. Kamla Bhasin- India

Prof. Azyumardi Azra - Indonesia

AMAN Activities

The Nasi Lemak Project



Nasi Lemak is undoubtedly the cheapest food after roti canai and cream-filled bun in Malaysia. It is cheap, (fattening) and actually nutritious, but some people can't even afford to have them for dinner. The homeless, for example.

The Nasi Lemak Project is a project initiated to feed the homeless, organized by AMAN IIUM alongside people who love to eat nasi lemak. This project is funded by the United States Embassy of Kuala Lumpur, with the collaboration of T450M (The Four-Fifty Movement).

The first project was from 15th March to 20 May 2013, feeding the homeless around KL on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. The ongoing Nasi Lemak Project 2.0 starts from November 8, 2013. We don't really feed them all nasi lemaks. We do sandwiches, drinks and nasi goreng (fried rice) or mee goreng (fried noodle) and packets of dry foods too.

Please contact Ms. Mastura at +60134667833 or check <https://www.facebook.com/thenasilemakproject> for more information.

Youth Workshop on Conflict Transformation



A total of 14 youths, male and female, Christians, Hindus and Muslims joined the local workshop on Conflict Transformation and Peace Build-

ing in Mannar District from September 29 to October 1, 2013. The workshop aims to train young women and men so that each one of them gains knowledge and skills to conduct inter-community dialogue to develop better relationships and to undertake programs for healing, reconstruction and peace, and development.

During the first day, all participants attended sessions on introduction of conflict transformation, critical thinking to analyze conflict and listening skills exercise. The sessions were conducted through various participatory methods such as lecture, group discussion, presentation and other related activities.

The following two days, the participants joined the local consultations at five selected villages which was the practical side of the workshop. The idea was to allow them to experience and participate directly in community dialogues on specific situations and concerns where participants observe and participate in the problem identification and solution finding method with real life scenarios.

Letters to the Editor

Kudos for this month's issue!

Not only is it able to provide a glimpse of the wide array of existing research studies by young scholars-- which are all refreshing and exciting to know-but the themes tackled here, notably on sustainable development, nation-building, and peace work, are all definitely relevant and certainly thought-provoking.

Good luck and I'm already looking forward to reading the succeeding issues!

Cheers,
Jasmine Ferrer
Manila, Philippines

The articles of AMANA magazine took me into a short trip through different peace topics which is really useful and helpful to me as peace builder in my country. First Mr. Sabur's inspirational words which give me magical power to continue working to spread peace everywhere. Then you go through different challenges, solutions and analysis to situations in some Asian countries like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, China which help me to understand the situation there and compare that to what happens in my country and learn from their experience.

Salam,
Dooa,
Cairo, Egypt

The AMANA magazine was initiated in 2005 following suggestions made at the first round of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) 'Peace Studies & Conflict Transformation' course. In Arabic, Amana means trust and embodies the primary objective of the publication in highlighting peace initiatives, peace collaboration, progressive Muslim action, and inter-faith cooperation and understanding. To ensure a wide distribution range and to connect with grass-roots communities, AMANA is printed in English, Bahasa Indonesia and Thai.

AMAN supports holistic development through awareness building with an overall aim of mobilizing and sharing resources in order to help marginalized groups in Asia. AMAN aims to build understanding and solidarity among Muslims and other faith communities towards people's empowerment, human rights, justice and peace. With over 1500 members, the network of AMAN spans Asia and is coordinated from Bangkok, Thailand.

Publications: AMANA Magazine and AMANA news online

Focus: Islam and peace; inter-faith partnerships; development initiatives; human rights; gender and peace.

Further information about AMANA magazine is available at www.aman-asia.org

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