

# Contracts with God

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 1 of 2]

Chapter 5, Al-Mā'idah starts by:  
“ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ ” ○  
You who Believe, *fulfill your contracts.*”

The most essential contract that we are required to fulfill is the contract of belief. This is followed by the most important contract which is the contract between man and God: God created us, He provides us with sustenance, and, in return, He, at the least, deserves to be thanked. How do we thank Him? One form of thanks that we owe to God is in the form of the rituals of worship. This is a form of thanks and obedience we must do if we are to fulfill our contract with God. We will be talking about this. Another form of thanks that we owe to God is in the form of refraining from the prohibitions spelled out in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an states that it contains two kinds of verses: 1) *Ayāt Muhkamāt* which are verses that are clear-cut, not vague, not subject to interpretation, and 2) *Ayāt Mutashābihāt* which refer to verses that are vague, and therefore, subject to different interpretations. [Imam quotes:] “Forbidden to you

are carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine...”<sup>1</sup> This is an *Ayāt Muhkamāt* and it clarifies the contract of the prohibitions. It states clearly that it is prohibited to eat a dead animal (المَيْتَةُ), to drink blood, and to eat pork meat. We are asked about pork too frequently. Just this morning we had visitors from a Sunday school from a church, and the teacher, as soon as she met me at the door, asked me about pork. It is prohibited to eat pork meat. In addition, it is prohibited to eat any animal which is slaughtered in a name other than God's name. It is prohibited to eat an animal which was choked to death, an animal beaten to death, an animal which fell from a high place and died; an animal attacked and killed by another wild animal (السَّبْعُ) – the Qur'an says السَّبْعُ – which is a lion, but this is understood to mean any wild animal such as the wolf, tiger, bear or whatever; there is an exception here: if you found the preyed-upon animal after it was attacked, and it is still alive and you slaughtered it properly, then it is legitimate

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<sup>1</sup> 5:3

to eat that. However, there is a difference of opinion in this respect between the Muslim ulama<sup>2</sup>: some have pronounced it fit for consumption while others disapprove of it. An animal which is slaughtered as an offering to idols is also prohibited. The Arabs, in bygone days, used to sacrifice animals to specific idols rather than in the name of God; it is forbidden to eat the meat of such an animal. Also forbidden is *al-azlām* – divination by arrows. Nowadays, flipping a coin, “if it comes heads, you win, if it comes tails, you lose,” has replaced divination by arrows. *Al-azlām* was something similar to that. Islam considers this a type of gambling, so it was put in the area of prohibitions. The verse of the prohibitions ends by saying that this day, those who deny your faith have despaired, and though they tried their utmost to divert you from your faith, all their efforts were unsuccessful. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Forbidden to you is carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than God’s has been invoked, and the animal that has been strangled, or beaten to death, or killed by a fall, or gored to death, or savaged by a beast of prey, save that which you yourselves may have slaughtered while it was still alive; and forbidden to you is all that has been slaughtered on the idolatrous altars. And you are forbidden to seek to learn through divination what the future may hold in store for you: this is sinful conduct.

Today, those who are bent on denying the truth have lost all hope of your ever forsaking your religion: do not, then, hold them in awe, but stand in awe of Me.

Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion.

As for him, however, who is driven to what is forbidden by dire necessity (فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ) and not by an inclination to sinning – behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace” [5:3].

The last part of this verse is said to have been revealed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, during *Hajja-tul-Wada’*.<sup>3</sup> The Prophet died 80 days later. This was the last verse of the Qur’an to be revealed.

Nowadays, there are Muslims in America who go to a

restaurant and ask the waiter or waitress, “Is that halāl meat?”<sup>4</sup> And maybe they were drinking whisky just prior to that to prepare themselves for dinner! It has happened! It’s not a joke. It happened here in Toledo.<sup>5</sup>

What kinds of foods can we eat and what kinds of food are prohibited, and why? Islam made it very, very simple. You know the word *tayyab* – I think it is an Urdu word also – means “good” and *khabeeth* means “bad”. The food we eat is categorized by the Qur’an as either *tayyab* or *khabeeth*, and God legitimized *tayyab* and forbade *khabeeth*. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The English translation is:]

“Those who shall follow the last Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them, and in the Gospel: the Prophet who will enjoin upon them the doing of what is right and forbid them the doing of what is wrong, and make lawful to them the good things (*tayyibāt*) of life and forbid them the bad things (*khabā’ith*)...”<sup>6</sup> That is the job of the Prophet: “to enjoin upon them the doing of what is right and forbid them the doing of what is wrong, and make lawful to them the good things (الطَّيِّبَاتِ) of life and forbid them the bad things (الْخَبَائِثِ)...” Let us take these one by one.

It is prohibited for Muslims to eat carrion, and also to drink or to eat blood. Why is it prohibited? When the blood remains inside the animal it will start the process of decay in the animal very quickly. You know, nowadays, they even drain the blood from the human beings after they die, so the body will not decompose quickly. That’s what they call embalming – removing the blood from the body, especially if the body has to be shipped to some other country. Slaughtering an animal, according to the law of Islam, means, you have to cut the main vein in the neck while pronouncing the name of Allah, and allow the blood to drain. When an animal dies before it can be slaughtered properly, the blood stays inside the body, and it mixes with the meat, so you cannot eat it because blood is prohibited. Some may ask how we can eat liver, because it is full of blood. There is an exception here, based upon the saying of the Prophet, peace be upon him: “Two dead are legitimate for us, and two blood. The two dead are the fish and the

<sup>2</sup> Scholars

<sup>3</sup> The Farewell Pilgrimage (the last Pilgrimage of his life)

<sup>4</sup> Duly and ritually slaughtered in the name of God

<sup>5</sup> Whisky is in the same category of prohibitions as pork

<sup>6</sup> 7:157

locusts. The two blood are the liver and the spleen.” We eat fish, though they don’t slaughter fish, isn’t it? Except, in Saudi Arabia, sometimes. In Saudi Arabia they require that every shipment of meat going from America should carry a sticker from an imam, testifying that the animal was slaughtered according to the Islamic Law. So, one day they received a shipment of *fish* with a sticker “Slaughtered according to the Islamic Law.” Then they started to think!

Pork meat – لَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ . A Muslim, one day, told me that the Qur’an states لَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ – the *meat* of the pig – but it does not mention the bones, so I can make a soup of the bones? See, how very precise we are, sometimes? At the other extreme, there are books here in our library, which say that *Colgate* toothpaste has some ingredients derived from pigs, so it is prohibited to brush your teeth with that toothpaste. This is written in books, and we read and accept what is written in them. Others point out that the brush used for lathering one’s face before shaving is made of pig bristles, so it is prohibited to use. So people are either on the very far right, or on the very far left, and there is no middle.

There is an opinion from a group of Muslim scholars from the olden times which says, “Prohibited material mixed with chemicals or burned to the extent that its nature is changed renders it *halal*.”<sup>7</sup> Say, for example, I take a handful of pig bones and burn them until they turn into ash. That ash is *halal*. I could pray on it. That is because the nature of the prohibited thing is fully changed.

Some people have asked, “What about cough medicine which has alcohol in it?” Some of our “very good” Muslim brothers declare such cough medicine as *haram*,<sup>8</sup> because they quote the Prophet as saying: “God will not make the cure of my *ummah*<sup>9</sup> by means of something prohibited for them.”

We have a general rule in Islam: *Anything that is prohibited, if used as medicine, is legitimate. Take it as a rule. There is no exception.*

There are people who refuse blood transfusions – Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example – and the person dies, because “it is against religion,” and some Muslims also hold the

same views. How can we reconcile this attitude with the Qur’anic verse: [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The English translation is:]

“...If anyone slays a human being unless it be in punishment for murder or for spreading corruption on earth – it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind” [5:35:].

Therefore, anything that cures disease is legitimate. It falls under فَمَنْ اضْطُرَّ – the one forced by necessity; if it is beyond his will, or it is essential to save his life, he is not committing a sin. See how Islam is very simple, and we complicate it, sometimes? And sometimes, when we would like to make it simple we go overboard; we go beyond the limits and justify ourselves by saying “Islam is easy”. There is a middle ground that we are supposed to follow.

Pork meat – لَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ . Why is خِنْزِيرِ prohibited? That’s a question we are asked very frequently. “Why, why do you people not eat pork? That ham is very delicious. Why is it prohibited; it is delicious?” And, today, I even received an advertisement here in the mosque: I found it in our mailbox – an advertisement for a beautiful ham. I was going to pass it on to the kitchen. You know, an imam<sup>10</sup> was a good friend of a Catholic priest, and the Catholic priest invited the imam for lunch one day, and offered him a beautiful plate of pork, and said, help yourself. The imam asked:

“What’s that? Is that *halal* meat?”

The priest said: “This is ham; this is pork.”

The imam said: “We cannot eat that, it’s prohibited in my faith.”

The priest said: “That must be a funny faith because this is very delicious meat.” So, the imam swallowed his discomfiture, and decided to repay the ‘compliment’. The next week, he invited the Catholic priest for lunch. When the priest knocked at the door, the imam opened the door and said:

“Father, where is your wife?”

He replied: “I’m not married.”

“Why?”

He replied: “My faith prohibits that.”

The imam said: “It must be a funny faith to prohibit the beautiful women.”

Why is the meat of the pig prohibited? If you ask

<sup>7</sup> Halal: That which is permitted or allowed

<sup>8</sup> That which is forbidden or sinful

<sup>9</sup> People

<sup>10</sup> A Muslim religious leader

Muslims this question everyone will give you a different answer. Why? It is because Islam did not tell us the reason why. Islam put it in the category of *khabeeth* – bad. It is prohibited because it is *khabeeth*.

When I was a student,<sup>11</sup> they used to say that pork is prohibited because the pigs have tapeworms which can infect the person who eats it. Some scientists countered that by saying that freezing the meat to one hundred degrees below zero in the freezer, and cooking it in a microwave oven and heating it to a temperature of one thousand degrees above zero will rid it of tapeworms, because no tapeworm can survive such temperatures. Challenge! That's what we call the challenge of science to religion. So our brothers responded: You know, we don't eat pork because the swine is a dirty animal – it eats everything, including fecal matter. Then somebody countered that by saying the chicken does the same, but you eat it. The answer was, yes, "but the chicken. . . but the chicken is not an animal; it is a bird!" All this argument has resulted because the Qur'an says "pork meat is prohibited to you" and it did not tell us why. So we started to utilize our brain and think *why* did the Qur'an prohibit that? Everyone is giving his own interpretation. In America, sometimes, we learn more Islam than in our countries back home. Here we find ourselves a minority, and we have to preserve our own identity for ourselves and our children. So we start to learn Islam, we start to think, and we start to read Qur'an, to know what is the meaning of the Qur'an. There is another theory to explain the prohibition of pork in Islam which I call Khattab's theory. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Khattab's theory is my answer to all those American and Canadian people who ask that frequent question.<sup>13</sup> I could be right, and I could be wrong, but, at least, it helps me to get out of the trouble I am in, because people think that Khattab is a big 'alim<sup>14</sup> and he could answer any question, even in engineering and in medicine! My theory is: We don't eat pork because the pig eats meat, and it is prohibited for us to eat any animal that eats meat. I tell them we don't eat the dog, or the wolf, or the lion, or the human being because those are all meat-eaters. That is my answer to them and they find it

acceptable and it makes sense, also. Moreover, when I started to study psychology and sociology, I added a little bit to my theory – inserted some psychology in religion.

I have visited some pig farms. When I asked the owners of these farms about the behavior of the pigs, they informed me that one of the characteristics of pigs is that when the female pig delivers piglets, she will start eating them unless they are removed very quickly from her. Imagine, a mother devouring her children. I realized that could be a very good argument for religion. According to an Arabic proverb "We are what we eat." The type of food we eat reflects upon us. So, imagine when we eat pork, and our bones and flesh are formed of the pig meat, what type of a relationship will we have with our children? So I started to infer some theories. My daughter, from time to time, comes to me and says the kids are asking her in the university, "How come your father is still paying for you? How come he is still financing your education and your higher studies? Our parents, as soon as we finish grade 12, expect us to work during the summers, and finance our college education." I said, "And did you answer them?" She replied, "I don't know how to answer them." I said, "Really? Tell them, because I don't eat pig meat!" Knowledge of all kind can be enlisted in religion because religion, after all, is common sense also.

An animal which is slaughtered in a name other than God's name, or if slaughtered in the name of an idol, is prohibited to be eaten by a Muslim. *We, as Muslims, are ordered to do everything in the name of God.* We say *Bismillah-hir Rahman-nir Raheem*<sup>15</sup> before every action. *Every action* in our life we start with *Bismillah*;<sup>16</sup> it is not only the slaughtering of an animal.

Our imams and ulama in the past have said that an animal slaughtered naturally by *Ahlay Kitab* – the Jews and the Christians – is *halal* for us; all we need to do is pronounce *Bismillah-hir Rahman-nir Raheem* when we eat it, or when we cook it, and that will be more than enough. But, nowadays, we disagree with that ruling. I'll not buy my meat except from Ali. Did Ali slaughter it, or did Mohammad slaughter it? No. I'll tell you the secret. That place in Detroit, where there is a big sign "Halal Meat, Muslim Slaughtering House," who does their slaughtering? The *Jews* slaughter the animals for them. The Jews eat the front half of the cow because the hind half is prohibited to them, so they sell it to the Muslims. If you don't

<sup>11</sup> In the 1950's

<sup>12</sup> Imam could not continue talking because of loud and prolonged laughter

<sup>13</sup> Imam clears his throat with a slight hint of foreboding

<sup>14</sup> Scholar

<sup>15</sup> In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

<sup>16</sup> In the name of God

believe me, inquire. A young lady who just moved from the west coast last month, to reside here in Toledo, asked me, “Do you have a place for halal meat here?” I said, yes! She said, “Where?” I said, Kroger. She was stunned! I said to her Kroger is the place; go get your meat from there and I’ll sign for hell on your behalf. We complicate religion; we complicate our lives. Islam is very simple. The Prophet said, “The legitimate is obvious and the illegitimate is obvious.” And with your brain – if you use it – you will reach the right decision, but, if you follow the shaykh<sup>17</sup> who says, “If you don’t follow me you are *kafir*,”<sup>18</sup> then, that will be a problem. If you are following me blindly, I could lead you to the wrong thing, but if you use your own brain, you will reach the right decision. So don’t take every word I am saying for granted; use your brain! If my word doesn’t make sense to you, consider that you did not hear me. That is Islam.

After the Qur’an talked about these prohibitions – the dead animal, the blood, the flesh of pork, that which is slaughtered in the name of any other than God... it goes on to make an exception. The general rule is that those are prohibited, but they could be permissible under certain circumstances: if one is forced to eat these things because of necessity, with no intention of committing sin, then, God is most Forgiving, most Merciful. For example, if someone is in the desert and he is very hungry, and there is nothing in front of him except pork meat, he could eat it to save his life. Everything prohibited under normal circumstances is permissible for the sake of saving life. That is the simplicity of Islam. It is the same theory with the liquor found in some medicines: it is prohibited in the normal circumstances, but if it is a part of a medicine and will save the life of a person, then it is permissible. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“They will ask thee as to what is lawful (halal) for them. Say: ‘Lawful to you are all the good things of life (*at-tayyibat*). And as for those hunting animals (مُكَلِّبِينَ<sup>19</sup>) which you train by imparting to them something of the knowledge (تَعَلَّمُوا) that God has imparted to yourselves – eat of what they seize for you, but mention God’s name over it, and

remain conscious of God: verily, God is swift in reckoning’” [5:4].

Some people have special dogs that fetch their hunt. The dog picks it up in its mouth and brings it. It is halal food as long as it is not dead: while it is still alive you can say *Bis-millah-hir-Rahman-ir-Raheem* over it and slaughter it. Such dogs are called *al kilaab al mu’allama* – very clearly mentioned in the Qur’an: وَمَا عَلَّمْتُمْ مِنَ الْجَوَارِحِ مُكَلِّبِينَ تُعَلَّمُوا.

There are people who quote a hadith<sup>20</sup> that is, by the way, mentioned in Al-Bukhari,<sup>21</sup> which says, “It is prohibited for Muslims to have dogs in their houses; it is prohibited for them to have pictures – *tasaweer* – in their houses...” When you ask the people who quote that hadith, “Do you have a passport? Is there any picture on the passport?” They say, “That is a necessity so it is legitimate. But you should not have pictures just for the sake of pictures.” This is a very well-known hadith in certain areas, especially in the Gulf States, where photography is prohibited, period. When I went to India as an Al-Azhar missionary,<sup>22</sup> I had a camera with me. Everyone in the mosque looked at me and wondered how the shaykh possessed the equipment of the Shaytān.<sup>23</sup> They said “*tasaweer haram hay*.”<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the Indian shaykhs wrote an article in the newspaper, and I responded to it, and we argued in the newspaper for three months, but got nowhere. I did not convince them, they did not convince me, and I left India with my equipment.

Today, the situation has eased a little bit. They say, “Yeah, the photograph is okay, but *as-suwar al-mujassamah*<sup>25</sup> – if it is a tangible thing, if you can hold it, then it is prohibited.” The picture, they say, you cannot hold it.<sup>26</sup> So they eased off a little bit. Imagine! Every one of us has a kid, or a daughter, in the house, a Barbie in the house – “*haram*”, according to their thinking. Truly, if this hadith is right, then there must be a reason for it. In my opinion, the Prophet said this because the people were worshipping idols during his time – pictures of animals, of human beings, or statues of human beings; they

<sup>20</sup> A report or account of what the Prophet said

<sup>21</sup> One of the most authentic books of hadith

<sup>22</sup> Around 1960

<sup>23</sup> The devil

<sup>24</sup> Imam is talking in Urdu! It means “pictures are prohibited”

<sup>25</sup> Idols/statues

<sup>26</sup> The distinction is between a three-dimensional figure and a two-dimensional photographic image

<sup>17</sup> A religious leader.

<sup>18</sup> Unbeliever

<sup>19</sup> Dogs

worshipped them. Since the people were very close to this concept, at that time, it was easy to relapse, so the Prophet advised them to stay clear of pictures and idols. Exactly as the prophet had advised them in regard to liquor. The people used to drink liquor in place of water, and the Prophet intended to make the people perceive liquor as a terrible thing, so he said, “Those who drink it, and those who are sitting in the place where it is drunk, those who are squeezing the grapes, those who are selling it, those who are...” – a very big list – just to make it very difficult for them, so they will stay far away from it. But now, the times and the situation have changed. I was flying to Egypt two months ago, and there was an American man sitting beside me who was drinking. I thought, if I am to abide by that hadith, then I will have to jump out of the window. God himself has stated, in the Qur’an, that there are some verses which are not clear-cut.<sup>27</sup> These are the verses we can interpret in every time, and in every place, so as to make our life easy, as long as we are inside the framework of Islam, and don’t go beyond that framework. The Qur’an put it very clearly. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“... God wills that you shall have ease, and does not will you to suffer hardship...” [2:185].

When it comes to the sayings of the Prophet – the ahadith – we have, also, to remember that situations change, and circumstances change, so we cannot apply everything he said, today, in exactly the same way as they did in their time.

So this verse of the Qur’an [5:4] is telling us that we can have a dog, and teach him how to catch the hunt and fetch it in his mouth, and then you slaughter the hunt, and eat it, and it is halāl. And yet, some people, today, “quote” the Prophet as having said, “Having the dog in your house is, in itself, a crime.” I would agree with that in those cases where the people go to extremes and have their priorities misplaced. You know, nowadays, you see people honoring and loving dogs even more than their children. Someone has a child, and a dog, and it is quite likely that the dog will be treated better than the child. The family may go hungry, but they make sure to buy dogfood. Some people have the dogs sleeping in their beds, eating at their table, and some people kiss their dogs, and the dogs, in turn, lick their faces. Such things are beyond the acceptable limits. But, the essential point is that God created and harnessed everything in the sky and on this earth for the benefit of man, including the dogs.

The next verse continues to say something very interesting. [Imam quotes 5:5 and then explains:] Today, all the good things are legitimate for you. The food of *Ahlay Kitab* (the Jews and the Christians) is halal for you, and your food is halal for them. The women of *Ahlay Kitab* are halal for you, as well as the women of your own faith are halal for you, when two conditions are fulfilled: 1) you pay their dower; 2) and they are bound to you and not public for everyone – what we call prostitution, nowadays.

Lots of questions are asked about the topic of halal food, although, two things are mentioned in this same verse: 1) The food of *Ahlay Kitab* is halal for you and 2) The women of *Ahlay Kitab* are halal for you. While a lot of Muslim men are marrying, without any reservations, women from *Ahlay Kitab*, because they have blue eyes, but when it comes to meat, they ask, “Is that halal meat?” They seem to ignore the contradictions in their lives: how come you married that woman, but you refuse to eat the animal slaughtered by her? Sometimes a Muslim man marries a non-Muslim American who does not convert to Islam. Then, when she dies, someone will ask, “Can a non-Muslim be buried in a Muslim cemetery?” Yes! She was sleeping beside him in her life, so why can she not sleep beside him now that they are dead – both of them? Logic! You don’t need fatwa, you don’t need Qur’an, you don’t need hadith.

The subject of marriage with women of *Ahlay Kitab* is a very controversial issue, and people ask about it frequently. If you look at the history of Islam, we find that some prominent personalities had reservations regarding the marriage of Muslim men with women of *Ahlay Kitab*. Omar bin Khattab<sup>28</sup> said: “No. Although the Qur’an says the women of *Ahlay Kitab* are halal for you, but I’ll say no, because if every Muslim will marry a woman from *Ahlay Kitab*, what about the Muslim girls? Where will they go?” That’s the statement of Omar bin Khattab. He would not legitimize that. His son, Abdullah – Abdullah ibn Omar – looked at it from yet another angle. He said: “People, who are *Ahlay Kitab*?” He was told the *Ahlay Kitab* are the Jews and the Christians – if we may use those terms. He said, “*An- Nasāra* (the Christians), in the view of Islam, are the people who say: *La ilaha illa-Allah ‘Ika rasoolulallah*.”<sup>29</sup> And the Yahūd (Jews), in the view of Islam, are those who say *La*

<sup>27</sup> Ayāt Mutashābihāt

<sup>28</sup> The father-in-law of the Prophet, and the second caliph of Islam

<sup>29</sup> There is no God but one God and Jesus is His prophet

*ilaha illa-Allah Musa rasoolullah.*<sup>30</sup> Those are the *Ahlay Kitab* in the sight of Islam. These<sup>31</sup> are not Nasāra, and they are not Yāhūd: they are *mushrik*,<sup>32</sup> because, is there any greater *ishraak*<sup>33</sup> than saying that ‘Jesus is their God?’ That is what Abdullah ibn Omar said.

The Qur’an – revealed 700 years after Jesus – still called the followers of Jesus *Nasāra*. And, although the words *kafara* and *kufi*<sup>34</sup> are used in the Qur’an with different meanings, the Qur’an itself says:

“Indeed they are *kuffar* who say, ‘Behold, God is the Christ, son of Mary.’”<sup>35</sup>

“Indeed, they are *kuffar* who say, ‘Behold, God is the Christ, son of Mary’ – seeing that the Christ himself said, ‘O children of Israel! Worship God alone, who is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer.’”<sup>36</sup>

“Indeed they are *kuffar* who say, ‘Behold, God is a third of a Trinity’ – seeing that there is no deity whatever save the one God.”<sup>37</sup>

So this is a very controversial issue, and the argument started by Abdullah ibn Omar continues until this day. This means that the issue of intermarriage and food of the *Ahlay Kitab* is left to the discretion of the person. If the person is strict in his beliefs, he should follow the strict interpretation. If moderate, follow the moderate idea. If the person is liberal in his leanings, he should follow the loose interpretation. It’s open and left completely to the religiosity of a person, because there is no clear-cut opinion which says one plus one equals two. [The following is the English translation of the verse explained above by Imam:]

“Today, all the good things of life have been made lawful to you. And the food of those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime (the Christians and the Jews) is lawful to you, and your food is lawful to them. And lawful to you are, in wedlock, women from among those who believe in this divine writ (the Qur’an), and in wedlock, women from among those who have been vouchsafed revelation before your

time – provided that you give them their dowers, taking them in honest wedlock, not in fornication, nor as secret love-companions. But as for him who rejects belief in God – in vain will be all his works: for in the life to come he shall be among the lost” [5:5].

The next verse of Chapter Al-Ma’idah addresses another type of contract. This contract, when fulfilled, ensures that all the other contracts are fulfilled. This contract is a sort of an agreement between Man and God to thank Him. God created Man, and gave him provisions, so He has to be thanked. That thanks is in the form of prayer (*salah*), imposed upon Muslims, five times a day. This brings us to an examination of how it came into existence.

The longest hadith in Al-Bukhari talks about how the prayer was imposed upon the Prophet Muhammad. It was imposed upon him on the Night of Ascension – Isrā’ and Mi’rāj – when the Prophet went up to the heavens. According to this hadith, God imposed upon him 50 prayers every 24 hours. Imagine, if this command had prevailed, our friends who are now eating downstairs in the cafeteria, would have no time to eat. With only five prayers a day, they have no time to pray. The hadith in Al-Bukhari tells us that the Prophet Muhammad carried out the Henry Kissinger-style shuttle diplomacy of the kind that was conducted between Egypt and Israel.<sup>38</sup>

According to this hadith, it is said that when the Prophet went up to the heavens to meet God, He imposed upon him 50 prayers a day. So, the Prophet accepted it, and while he was coming back, according to that story, he met the Prophet Moses in the fourth heaven, and Moses asked him: “What did your God impose upon you and your followers?” He replied: “Fifty prayers every day.”

Moses advised: “That is too much. Your people cannot afford that. My advice to you, Muhammad, is to go back to God and ask to discount it a little bit.” So, Muhammad went back to the seventh heaven, asked God, and got 40 prayers. On his way back, he met Moses again, and he asked him:

“How much?”

He replied: “Forty now.” God reduced them – discounted them 20%.

Moses said to him: “Still too much. Go back.” So he went back. Another 25% discount – to thirty prayers. He came back. Moses asked:

“How much now?”

<sup>30</sup> There is no God but one God and Moses is His prophet

<sup>31</sup> The contemporary Christians and Jews

<sup>32</sup> One who sets up partners to God

<sup>33</sup> The sin of setting up partners to God

<sup>34</sup> See sermon on “*Shirk* and Explanation of Related Terms” (#2)

<sup>35</sup> 5:17

<sup>36</sup> 5:72

<sup>37</sup> 5:73

<sup>38</sup> Following the October 1973 war

He said: "Thirty."

Moses said: "No. Go back." So he went back. Twenty. Came back. And so it continued back and forth until the number was reduced to 5. Even then Moses said it was too much. But the Prophet replied:

"Moses, I am ashamed to go back to God and ask Him to reduce it more than this. That is from 50 to five. It is too much."

That is the hadith. I question this hadith for two reasons: first, why is Moses the one who advised Prophet

Muhammad? Why not the grandfather of the prophets – Prophet Ibrahim?<sup>39</sup> Why not Prophet Noah? Why not Jesus? Secondly, why was the Prophet Muhammad following that Kissinger-style shuttle diplomacy going back and forth to God? Why all this negotiation? When God makes a decree, and imposes obligations upon a prophet and his nation, *there is no room for negotiation, period*. This hadith is mentioned in Al-Bukhari, and it is mentioned in Muslim<sup>40</sup>; these are very authentic sources, but I question it, personally.

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<sup>39</sup> Abraham

<sup>40</sup> Al-Bukhari and Muslim - two authoritative hadith texts



## Contracts with God

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 2 of 2]

**T**he prayer (salah) is a contract with God. But, before you perform your prayer there is something to be done, and that something is a contract in itself. What precedes the prayer is *al-wudu'* or *al-hadathul 'asghar* meaning, the minor wudu'. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“O you who have attained to faith! When you are about to pray, wash your face and your hands and arms up to the elbows, and pass your wet hands lightly over your head, and your feet up to the ankles” [5:6].

These are the four items which are considered to be *fard*<sup>41</sup> for wudu'. The rinsing of the mouth and nose, rubbing the neck and the ears, is considered *sunnah*,<sup>42</sup> which the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to do, and that is to increase the cleanliness.

After mentioning the four obligatory items of *al-wudu'*, the verse describes another form of cleanliness, known in Islamic Fiqh<sup>43</sup> as *al-hadathul akbar* or *ghusl* which means “showering”. This is the major wudu'. A lot of people ask if they take a shower, do they have to make wudu' also?

According to Imam Abu Haneefah's school of thought, a shower is wudu' plus. So, if the water reaches every part of your body, then your wudu' is complete; you don't need to make wudu' separately. This brings us to another question that people sometimes ask when they wash the body of a deceased person: “Do we have to make wudu' for the deceased?” According to Imam Abu Haneefah, as long as the water reaches every part of the body it will be considered wudu', and it will be considered *ghusl* or shower at the same time.<sup>44</sup> The verse continues to clarify how we are to fulfill the contract of wudu' in some other circumstances.

Sometimes you have a wound, or you have an operation, and the doctor says to keep it dry. At times like that, you need not wash that part, and if the person is incapacitated to such an extent that he or she cannot do any part of wudu', then the wudu' will be replaced by *at-tayammum*, which we'll talk about shortly. If you are traveling and there is no facility for making wudu', then you can utilize the method of *at-tayammum*, also.

Then the verse states:

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<sup>41</sup> Obligatory

<sup>42</sup> The example of the Prophet embodied in his statements and actions

<sup>43</sup> Jurisprudence

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<sup>44</sup> It is an Islamic requirement to wash the body of the deceased before burial

## أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِّنْكُمْ مِنَ الْغَائِطِ

الغَائِطِ (*al-ghāit*). That's an Arabic word, but I'm sure a lot of Arabs don't know what it means. In the olden times, before the invention of toilets, bathtubs, sinks and running hot and cold water, people would attend to the call of nature in a low place – a depression in the ground – so nobody would see them: that is, in a state of *sathr* or covering. That is called *al-ghāit*. *Al-ghāit* is taken from the colloquial Arabic word *ghaweeth* which means “deep”. So, the Qur'an is using polite language to explain that if someone came from that place, *yā nī*,<sup>45</sup> did his job there, then he has to make wudu'; if there is no water, then he has to utilize at-tayammum. [Imam quotes the next part of the verse:]

أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ. The word *lāmus* means, “touch” and *أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ* means, “or you touched a woman” and you cannot find water, then also do at-tayammum.

What do we see happening among us nowadays? Sometimes a woman comes to shake hands with a man, who declining the offer, will say, “Excuse me, I am in wudu.” He thinks that if he touches her, his wudu' will be void and her wudu' will be void. So to save himself the trouble of refreshing his wudu', he will put his hand here<sup>46</sup> and say, “Excuse me, I am in wudu.” That happens; I have seen it. But, nowadays, they have gone further: they are doing it, be they with, or without, wudu'. So, what is this all about? From where did all this come? From this verse *أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ*. The ulama<sup>47</sup> of Islam debate that verse. Some Muslim schools interpret this to mean touching a woman by shaking hands with her or, even if, in JC Penny, for example, in a very narrow corridor, you inadvertently brush her hand while passing each other; then your wudu' is void. That's one school of thought. The school of Imam Abu Haneefah has made it easier for us. He said touching of hands will not void the wudu'. When he was asked on what basis he considered the wudu' to be intact,

he said touching a woman means sleeping with her, not just touching her with your hand, because Maryam<sup>48</sup>, *alayhi-s-salām*, said to Jibreel<sup>49</sup> “How can I have a child when no man ever touched me,” so, the word “touch” does not mean touching by hand, or casual touch, but means *sleeping* with a woman.” Imam Abu Haneefah also supported his view by quoting from this same verse that we are presently discussing [5:6]: “God does not want to impose any hardship on you, but wants to make you pure, and to bestow upon you the full measure of His blessings, so that you might have cause to be grateful.” See how the Qur'an is interpreted? These are opinions; these are *ijtehad*.<sup>50</sup> Take from every school of thought the part that will make your life easy; it is up to you to choose whichever school of thought you like, and you cannot say this school of thought is right and this one is wrong. It is up to you to take what makes sense to you. Personally, I take from every school of thought whatever will make my life easy. [The English translation of the verse detailing wudu' is:]

“O you who have attained to faith! When you are about to pray, wash your face, and your hands and arms up to the elbows, and pass your wet hands lightly over your head, and wash your feet up to the ankles. And if you are in a state requiring total ablution, purify yourselves. But if you are ill, or are traveling, or have just satisfied a want of nature, or have cohabited with a woman, and can find no water, then take resort to pure dust (*at-tayammum*), passing therewith lightly over your face and your hands. God does not want to impose any hardship on you, but wants to make you pure, and to bestow upon you the full measure of His blessings, so that you might have cause to be grateful” [5:6].

The whole objective of wudu' is to combine physical cleanliness with spiritual cleanliness. When you are entering into the prayer, you are contacting your Creator and that will be a sort of a spiritual cleanliness which is combined with the physical cleanliness or al-wudu'. But if we have no water, we can replace al-wudu' with at-tayammum. The wudu' is all about cleanliness, but at-tayammum has nothing to do with cleanliness. What is the tayammum?

Tayammum is a symbolic matter. In this life, there is nothing which comes from nothing; you have to *work* to

<sup>5</sup> An Arabic expression which has no equivalent in English and means, loosely, “I mean” or, “you know” or, “in other words” depending on the context.

<sup>46</sup> Imam puts his hand in his armpit by way of demonstration

<sup>47</sup> Scholars

<sup>48</sup> Mary, mother of Jesus

<sup>49</sup> The angel Gabriel

<sup>50</sup> A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam

achieve something, although God is able to make anything happen for the people without them exerting any efforts. When Sayyidnah Maryam,<sup>51</sup> *radiya-Allahu-‘anhā*,<sup>52</sup> was delivering Jesus under the palm tree, she was hungry, so Jibreel said to her, “Shake the trunk of the palm tree, dates will fall upon you.” God can make those dates fall down without that poor lady shaking the big trunk of the palm tree, especially just after delivering a baby. And imagine shaking the trunk of a palm tree. Can you shake it? What can you do? Nothing! But the idea is that you have to struggle to achieve something. There is no free lunch. You have to exert for it. So, in the same manner, you cannot go to the prayer without wudu’, saying you are sick, or traveling, or water is not available, or no facility is available to make wudu’. Islam made a symbolic ritual, called at-tayammum, under these circumstances. The word “tayammum” is not translatable into English because there is no tayammum in any other religion except Islam.

Tayammum means to tap your hands on the floor. In earlier times, tayammum was performed by tapping one’s hands on the sand of the desert. Nowadays, symbolically, you can tap your hands on the wall, then rub your face. Technically, maybe there is no dust at all on your hands, but it is the symbolism. This will substitute for washing the face. Then you tap your hands a second time and rub your right arm from the hand to the elbow, then repeat for the other arm. That, in essence, is tayammum. If you do this where there is no water, or when you are sick and you cannot use water, then your prayer is correct; you have performed and fulfilled the contract before entering into prayer.

After mentioning prayer, which is the relationship between man and God, the next verse proceeds to talk about the relationship between man and man. [Imam quotes Arabic verse.] This is the Arabic language. Did you understand anything from it? [Imam quotes the verse again. The translation is:]

“O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is the closest to being God-conscious. And remain conscious of God: verily, God is aware of all that you do” [5:8].

You know; the Muslims, especially, don’t

distinguish...we don’t distinguish between business and friendship. Business is one thing and friendship is a separate thing. My disagreement with you in our business is one thing; my friendship with you is something else. We do not follow that distinction. The commonly accepted wisdom among Muslims is that the shaykh gives a sermon, and if you don’t follow his opinion, he considers you his enemy. That’s our system as Muslims: my way is always the right way and all the other people are wrong. This Qur’anic verse is telling us: O you who believe, even if you are dealing with people you don’t like, still you have to *establish justice*. You have to be just. Doing that justice will make you closer to God; will make you closer to fearing your Creator. And your justice with others will be considered as justice with God because this is His rule. O you who believe **قَوَّامِينَ** . **كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ** means guardian. It means, be the guardian in carrying out the rules of God. The rule of God stated here is **شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ** : *witness and carry out justice*.

The lack of justice is at the root of all troubles all over the world. We are experiencing, nowadays, what they call “The Middle East Peace Process.”<sup>53</sup> When you analyze the “process” you know peace will never happen: peace is very hard to achieve. Why? Because there is no justice. The “peace” is based upon power: you *have* to do it this way. And, as a result, there is resistance; there are suicide attacks, and the resisters are branded as terrorists; and all that is interrupting the peace and disturbing it because peace will never be achieved without justice.

The ideal of justice leads us to Omar bin Khattab, *radiya-Allahu-‘an*,<sup>54</sup> and his government. It is well known that his government was characterized by true justice. One day, Kisra, the Emperor of Persia, wanted to visit the neighboring state – known, nowadays, as Saudi Arabia. So he came to visit Omar bin Khattab.<sup>55</sup> At that time, of course, there were no telephones; there was no fax to say, “Omar, I am coming to visit you.” One just came. When Kisra arrived, he asked, “Where is Omar?” Someone pointed him out “There, he is sleeping under that tree.” The Emperor found Omar fast asleep. He stood at his head and spoke the now very famous

<sup>53</sup> These remarks made by Imam in the year 1996

<sup>54</sup> May God be pleased with him

<sup>55</sup> He was the ruler (Caliph)

<sup>51</sup> Title of respect for Mary, mother of Jesus

<sup>52</sup> May God be pleased with her

saying, “You have governed with justice; you feel secure as a result, and you sleep, *ya Omar*.” That is what justice, which that verse is talking about, can do. If someone is not carrying out justice, how can he feel secure? *Fa*,<sup>56</sup> nowadays, the king sleeps at night with 100 bodyguards around him, and he is still dreaming that the “terrorists” are following him. Why? Because there is no justice.

The term “justice”, as commonly understood, is supposed to govern dealings between human beings. Omar was not like that. Not only did Omar establish justice among human beings, but Omar established justice in his dealings with the animals, also. One day he ordered his Ministry of Labor to level the roads in a very far and unfrequented area. Someone said to him, “We are able to walk and follow our way, *ya Omar*” implying that it was unnecessary to expend the labor and resources on this area. He replied with his famous saying:

“If a mule or a donkey should fall because the roads are not level, Omar will be questioned before God on the Day of Judgment about why he did not repair the roads for these animals.” That is the level of justice to strive for.

Egypt was a Coptic country, but the Roman Christians, who were the rulers, treated the Egyptian Christians badly. I don’t know if it is true or not, but when we studied Egyptian history, it was written in the books that the Romans would sit and eat while placing their food trays on the heads of Egyptian priests. When Omar sent his general Amr ibn al-Aws to Egypt, he entered the country without any fighting, and, although they were Christians, they welcomed him because they had heard about the justice of Omar. They welcomed Islam to Egypt. That is why these Qur’anic verses emphasize justice.

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<sup>56</sup> A connecting letter in Arabic language, that connects a previous idea with a following idea, and can be translated as “then” or “so” depending on the context