



## Is Interfaith Dialogue Deen-e- another type of ILAHI?

Bint Abu Umar | بنت أبو عمر

“The veil of belief that had so long enveloped the mind of Akbar was now ruthlessly torn asunder by the lovers of the Faith themselves and the sun of intellect began to radiate his luminous horizon. And the *Ibadat Khana* was no longer confined within the order of Islam.... Amongst the disputants sitting on the ground, some were Muhammadans and some were Hindus... An old man with white flowing beards and a young Brahmin with beard shaved and hair tied in the Southern Indian fashion [were] rather prominent.”<sup>1</sup>

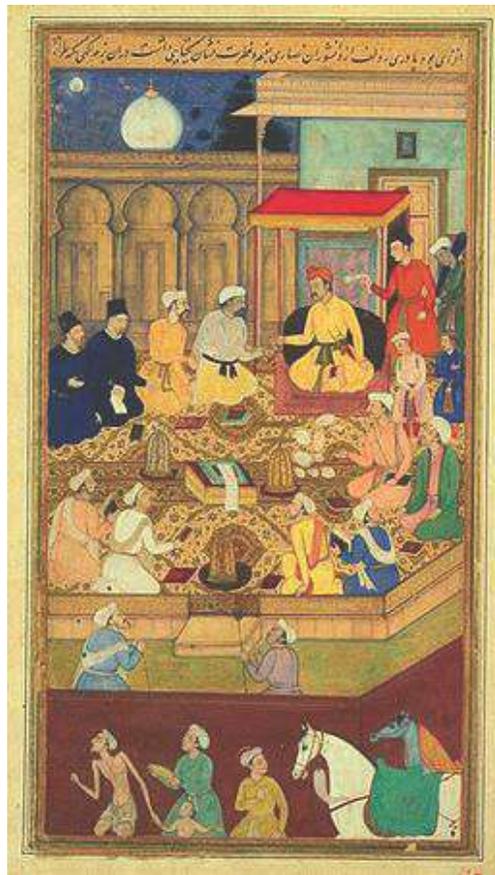
It was a “large building, rectangular in shape, which could accommodate at least 500 men. It had plenty of rooms and balconies. There were halls on all sides and the rooms were separated from one another by means of screens, tapestry and railings.”<sup>2</sup> This is a description of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Mughal Emperor Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar’s *Ibadat Khana* or ‘house of worship’ which he built in 1575 at his palace in Fatehpur Sikri. ‘Enlightened, moderate and respectful of all religions,’ Akbar initially opened this house of worship as a meeting place to discuss contemporaneous issues regarding Sunni Muslims.

Within three years (1578), “no longer...satisfied

1 Makhanlal Roychoudhury, *The Deen-I-Ilahi Or The Religion of Akbar*, (India: University of Calcutta, 1941), pp 82 & 118 respectively

2 Ibid., pp 71

by the Mulla interpretations of the laws of God”<sup>3</sup> he warmly opened the doors of the *Ibadat Khana* to Christians, Jews, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists. With the influx of ‘rich and diverse’ opinions flowing freely through Akbar’s court, and not able to accommodate one religious group except with the exclusion of the other, Akbar promulgated a set of regulations which culminated into what is known as *Deen-e-Ilahi* (Divine Religion) or Akbar’s own religion.



One does not have to go far to understand where this article is going. King ‘Abdullah has honored the footsteps of Akbar by initiating his own *Ibadat Khana* or interfaith conferences and put into motion his own *Deen-e-Ilahi* by not only his 2007 decree on reforms but also by issuing a set of other regulations whose effects can be seen most prominently after September 2001. The phenomenon of cowardly compromises or interfaith conferences has been a recent one and one that until recently has been resoundingly rejected by Saudi Arabia’s own religious elite.

Why is it so important to speak about the latter topic rather than for example the regime’s torture of *Mujahideen*? Because, both are intrinsically interlinked. The aftermath of 9/11 has

3 Ibid., XLIII (Introduction)



really exposed the true colors of the Saudi regime. The very fact that Saudi Arabia has initiated the calls for dialogue with other religions is not only an indication of their disrespect for the religion of Islam but also their audacity in changing the *deen* to suit their desires. The calls for dialogue would not have taken place unless there was a pertinent threat of 'terrorism' in the world. Thus in order to prove their enmity towards the *mujahideen* such calls have been initiated and propagated. We must also take heed from the examples in our history lest we repeat their mistakes and hence I will attempt to compare the similarities between the *Deen-e-Ilahi's* of Akbar and the calls of interfaith of 'Abdullah.

Before I delve into the points of similarity, let it be emphasized that before 9/11 the Saudi 'Ulema blatantly rejected any such calls to bring the religions together. In response to "inquiries, opinions and essays propagated in the mass media"<sup>4</sup> regarding making peace between the three major religions and building of non-Muslim places of worship on Muslim soil, a famous *fatwa* titled *Fatwa Against the Call for the Unification of the Religions*, was issued by The Presidency of Islamic Research and Ifta. This *fatwa* rejects all the points raised by 'Abdullah justifying his move to reconcile all the religions. Let's go through some of the points raised.

<sup>4</sup> *Fatwa Against the Call for the Unification of the Religions*, Issued by The Presidency of Islamic Research and Ifta Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Under The General Supervision of the Grand Council of Scholars, Fatwa No: 19402, 25 Muharram 1418H. This *fatwa* was issued by 'Abdul 'Aziz Ibn 'Baz, 'Abdul 'Aziz Ibn 'Abdullah Al-Shaykh 'Abdullah, Salih Ibn Fawzan Al-Fawzan, and Bakr Ibn 'Abdullah Abu Zaid. It was issued in 1997, before 'Abdullah was even in power. I am using this *fatwa* as a point of reference as the phenomenon being discussed is the same.

Firstly, there is the issue of not only participating in such humiliating conferences but rather calling for it in the first place. In response, the Saudi 'ulema vociferously forbade such deviations saying "had this (unification) call emanated from a Muslim, it would be considered explicit *riddah* (apostasy) from Islam, as it is in conflict with the principles of Islamic faith, and accepts disbelief in Allah."<sup>5</sup> Little did they know that eleven years later, the one who would initiate such a call would not only be a so-called Muslim but also one whom without the 'ulema's role as authorizers of his tyranny, would not be in power! Yet those very same individuals have refrained from denouncing his actions let alone calling him an apostate.

As if this response by the 'ulema was not enough to deter 'Abdullah, he went on to justify his leadership role in interfaith discussions. He claimed at the Madrid World Conference on Dialogue in July 2008 that "we must focus on the common denominators that unite us, namely, deep faith in God, noble principles, and lofty moral values, which constitute the essence of religion."<sup>6</sup> As if written in direct response to this comment, the Grand Council of Scholars in 1418 *Hijri* (1997) wrote, "The inevitable consequence of such evil calls are: The cancellation of differences between Islam and *Kufr*, Truth and Falsehood, and complete negation of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong."<sup>7</sup> Thus the 'ulema were stressing on the need to bring out our differences rather than succumb to what brings us together. Well, it seems that 'Abdullah just does not

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> King 'Abdullah, Opening Remarks at World Conference on Dialogue, Madrid, July 16<sup>th</sup> 2008.

<sup>7</sup> *Fatwa Against the Call for the Unification of the Religions*



get it. He equates all religions by saying “human beings are created equals and partners on this planet.”<sup>8</sup> ‘Abdullah, by stretching forth his arms in love towards the *kuffar* has denied that Islam is the purest of all religions. His statement also implies a “serious admission that religions are three and that people on earth may adopt whatever they wish of them, equally, and that Islam has not superseded the religions that preceded it.”<sup>9</sup>

Going a step further, ‘Abdullah claimed, “We’ll stretch our hands to all those who love peace, justice and tolerance.”<sup>10</sup> In effect this means, making peace with those who commit outright *shirk* (which is the greatest of injustices), those who plunder Muslim territory with no mercy, those who claim, in the words of a 14<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine emperor, “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached,”<sup>11</sup> and those who have reviled and mocked our prophet, not once but many times, may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him. The ‘ulema exclaimed “debates, meetings, and dialogue held with them in order to enable them in achieving their desires, fulfilling their aims, breaking the bonds of Islam, and bending the Fundamentals of Islamic Faith are all considered as invalid, which is rejected by Allah, His Messenger and all believers. Allah, The Most High,

8 Saudi-US Relations, A Call for Unity: King ‘Abdullah Addresses the UN, November 13, 2008..

9 *Fatwa Against the Call for the Unification of the Religions*

10 Saudi-US Relations, A Call for Unity: King ‘Abdullah Addresses the UN

11 BBC News, Pope’s Speech Stirs Muslim Anger, Thursday, 14 September 2006.

Says, ﴿**And follow not their vain desires, but beware of them lest they turn you far away from some of that which Allah has sent down to you**﴾ (5:49).

Why has ‘Abdullah gone to such lengths to appease the *kuffar*? In his own words, he wants to open a new page in which “concord will replace conflict.”<sup>12</sup> Oh I see, he believes in *jihad* of the *nafs* only. Perhaps the poor ‘ulema just forgot to teach him the numerous *ahadith* of *jihad* as *qitaal*. The point is that by engaging in such lowly discussions he has broken the “barriers of alienation between Muslims and *Kafiroon* so that no loyalty nor *Jihad* nor struggle for the sake of elevating Allah’s Word on Allah’s earth may take place.”<sup>13</sup> The main theme of ‘Abdullah’s speeches has been to unify the religions and focus on what brings them together, so in effect the ‘negative’ *ayat* of the Qur’an and other aspects of Islam can be rid of as they are a ‘shame’ to the ‘moderate’ Muslims. If they cannot get rid of them, they will misconstrue them until the point that is comfortable for the Saudi family. In this light, I would like to highlight some of the similarities between Akbar and ‘Abdullah. I will focus on four general topics namely, their views on appeasing other religions, expulsion of scholars, tampering with Islamic education and promotion of *riba* (interest).

**1) Firstly, Akbar never publicly expressed his desire to create a new religion.** He intended only to merge the different ‘positive’ aspects of all the

12 King ‘Abdullah, Opening Remarks at World Conference on Dialogue, Madrid

13 *Fatwa Against the Call for the Unification of the Religions*

religions in his court so that everyone would be accommodated to a certain degree. While it can be argued that by altering the different aspects of Islam, he in effect created a new religion, the point to be emphasized is that even Akbar, as deviant as he was, never explicitly claimed that he wanted to wipe out Islam from his court, even though by changing just one aspect of Islam he disbelieved in all of it as Allah says **﴿Then do you believe in a part of the Scripture and reject the rest? Then what is the recompense of those who do so among you, except disgrace in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they shall be consigned to the most grievous torment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do﴾** (2: 85). Similarly, 'Abdullah has never said that he hates Islam in clear terms. This would be too easy for his enemies. Rather, he has misinterpreted parts of the *deen* as he wants to, justifying them by his own interpretation of the *ayat* of Allah and by using his 'scholars for dollars' who **﴿have taken error in exchange for guidance; and neither has their bargain brought them gain, nor have they found guidance [elsewhere]﴾** (2: 16).

According to the author of *The Din-I-Ilahi or the Religion of Akbar*, the fact that there was no special mosque for the *Ilahians* and that they prayed at least three times a day is sufficient evidence that Akbar and his followers were within the fold of Islam and that in particular his *Deen* was merely a Sufi order.<sup>14</sup> However it was not just that he meddled with the allocated prayers in Islam but also adopted a variety of beliefs into his daily life:

"As an inquisitive inquirer endowed with the spirit of reason, he learnt the Hindu alchemy and medicine and cultivated their Yoga system; like his Central Asian ancestor, he believed in astronomy and astrology; and after his association with the Zoroastrian Mobed, he believed that life might be lengthened by lightning fire or by the repetition of a thousand names of the Sun. Following the Buddhist custom, he used to shave the crown of his head thinking that the soul passed through the brain. He turned into a vegetarian later in life."<sup>15</sup>

After reading about Akbar's personal beliefs in this manner, one cannot help but be shocked at how he could be a Muslim at all. He changed the *salah*, he

14 Makhanlal Roychoudhury, pp 293

15 Ibid., pp 303

imitated the disbelievers in their beliefs, not happy at all with the system that Allah has provided for us. Perhaps he was not convinced when Allah said, **﴿This day I have perfected your religion for you﴾** (5: 3). The point is that he was attempting to put together what was common between all the religions either to pacify the different communities or because he really believed he was doing the right thing by changing Allah's commandments. Although we may not know much about 'Abdullah's private life, we can judge him by his actions. He has proved to the world, that he has no qualms conversing with the pope who made the slanderous comments as mentioned above, nor does he have problems meeting the queen of England who knighted Salman Rushdie, neither does he have a problem with crusader presence on the holy lands of Makkah and Medina.<sup>16</sup> He has also proved that while the *Muslimen* were being slaughtered in Gaza, he did nothing to fight the Jews and as will be discussed with Allah's permission, he has imprisoned and tortured the *mujahideen fi sabilillah* in hordes as if to say 'don't you dare fight the poor Jews, they're my friends!'

Having discussed the fact that the two monarchs never saw their actions as advocating for a new religion; we must now ask, what did their beliefs really entail? Akbar went through three main stages of unification as can be seen through the different stages of the *ibadat khana*. At first, the house of worship was open strictly to *Sunni* Muslims. With time and the sticky issue of marriage and Akbar's displeasure with the views of the Mullah's, he decided to bring the *Shi'as* into his court to see what they had to say. By 1578, the Christians appeared on the scene and it was not long before Hindus, Zoroastrians and Buddhists were also involved. 'Abdullah's recent interfaith initiatives have also proved that he can sit down with Jews and Christians and water down Islam all in the name of uniting against 'terror.'

Akbar was not just a talker in terms of his commitment to 'peace' within his empire. Throughout his reign he put into motion a set of regulations which aimed to unify the various religions. To begin with in 1577, the slaughtering

16 Craig Unger, *House of Bush House of Saud*, (United Kingdom: Gibson Square Books Ltd, 2004), pp 144

of animals was forbidden. According to Roychoudhury, it had nothing to do with Jain or Buddhist influences; however, the fact is regardless of his intention he still banned it.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, in 1580, the Persian Nawruz festival was instituted as an official celebration perhaps to “allay the Persian *Shi’a* discontent.”<sup>18</sup> Thirdly, he allowed the flesh of wild boar and tiger for the Hindus. Thus as a Muslim, he did not have qualms against the impermissibility of the consumption of wild boar regardless of whether it was permissible for Hindus or any other group.<sup>19</sup> There are many other examples of his attempts to unify the religions but these should suffice for now.

‘Abdullah has also shown his sincere commitment to world peace and unity. He made a symbolic but nevertheless substantial gesture of travelling to the Pope and discussing with him the inevitable construction of churches in Saudi Arabia.<sup>20</sup> In 1997, the Grand Council of Scholars declared “It is prohibited for any Muslim to respond to that call for building (a mosque, a church, and a temple) in one complex, as this would imply a confession that there are religions by which Allah can be worshipped, besides Islam. This would also involve a denial that Islam is the purest of all the other religions.”<sup>21</sup> The Prophet, peace be upon him, also ordered the Muslims to “**Expel the mushrikeen from the Arabian peninsula.**”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Akbar in 1593 gave Christians the freedom to worship

17 Makhanlal Roychoudhury, pp 231

18 Ibid., pp 241

19 Ibid., pp 248

20 BBC News, Vatican-Saudi Talk on Churches, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2008..

21 *Fatwa Against the Call for the Unification of the Religions*

22 Narrated in al-Bukhari (2932) and Muslim (3089)

freely and build churches.<sup>23</sup> However ‘Abdullah has exceeded the limits of toleration by granting Non-Muslims the right of building houses of worship on the lands of Makkah and Madina!

The last example of similarity between Akbar and ‘Abdullah in terms of appeasing different religious groups is the abolition of *jizya*. By the time Akbar was twenty years old, he abolished the *jizya* as it was a huge source of discontent for the Non-Muslims.<sup>24</sup> ‘Abdullah, as the ‘custodian of the two holy *masajid*’ has also abolished the *jizya*. By not collecting it, his silence on this matter is akin to *jizya*’s abolishment. As a self-proclaimed religious authority, he should know that only ‘Eesa will destroy *jizya*<sup>25</sup> and ‘Abdullah has no authority in this matter.

**2) Secondly, in terms of expulsion of the scholars, this is something that both Akbar and ‘Abdullah would score high points on.** When the ‘ulema failed to satisfy Akbar’s desires, he expelled them and extended his hands to other religions to see what they had to say on different matters.<sup>26</sup> The Saudi regime is infamous for their silencing, imprisonment and torture of the righteous scholars among them **Shaykh Nasir ibn Hamad al-Fahd** and recently, **Shaykh Khalid al-Rashid**. If this example does not suffice then ever since the founding of a ‘Saudi’

23 Makhanlal Roychoudhury, pp 265

24 Ibid., pp 51

25 Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah’s Apostle said, “*The Hour will not be established until the son of Mary (i.e. Jesus) descends amongst you as a just ruler, he will break the cross, kill the pigs, and abolish the Jizya tax. Money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it (as charitable gifts).*” Recorded in Bukhari (Volume 3, Book 43, Number 656)

26 Makhanlal Roychoudhury, 131





Arabia, 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn Saud asked for the help of the British to rout the *Ikhwan*. In 1902 'Abdul 'Aziz began his quest to subdue the warring tribes and rise to prominence. He used the *Ikhwan* to accomplish this goal. By 1926, he and the *Ikhwan* had captured Mecca and Medina thereby making 'Abdul 'Aziz the *de facto* ruler of Islam's holy *masajid*. In order to stay in power, he had to destroy the *Ikhwan* and in order to justify fighting against his Muslim brethren, he went to the 'Ulema who issued a *fatwa* "which said that the *Ikhwan* were wrong" and so they were fought against.<sup>27</sup> More recently, seeing as 'Abdullah is desperate to promulgate reforms, he has fired those who were his most vocal supporters namely Ebrahim Al-Gaith who was the head of the *Mutawwa'* (religious police),<sup>28</sup> and Saleh Al-Luhaydan who was the chief justice of the Supreme Judicial Council. The fact that the head of the judiciary has been dismissed indicates the objective of 'Abdullah which is "to reduce the influence of the religious establishment over the legal and educational systems."<sup>29</sup> Even the most moderate of religious voices has no mercy from 'Abdullah who has proven his intolerance of Islam.

**3) Thirdly, it follows that in order to propagate their apostasy from Islam both must have tampered with the Islamic education systems.** In the case of Akbar, not only did he discourage the learning of Arabic but "being infused with a spirit of Renaissance, Akbar desired to substitute a curricula with introduction of philosophy, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, poetry, novels and other cultural subjects in the place of pure literary Arabic."<sup>30</sup> In

the case of Saudi Arabia, since 9/11 there has been immense pressure on the Saudi regime to remove those parts of the textbooks which the *kuffar* deem offensive. For many years prior to 9/11 the same textbooks were being used, and at that time no one raised any concerns about them. If there was anything un-Islamic with these books, the 'ulema would have been the first ones to be perturbed. However, the 'ulema themselves have switched their roles post 9/11 and they are now the ones who "have urged teachers not to disseminate extremist views among pupils and warned that any teacher found doing so will be fired."<sup>31</sup>

Not only has the *tagout* tampered with children's Islamic education but also in an attempt to "rehabilitate" those who have been exposed to extremist views, they have built *jihad* rehab camps where "jihadis are put through a 12-step program that includes psychological counseling, art therapy, sports and lessons in Islam."<sup>32</sup> Since they cannot remove the verses of the Qur'an which legislate *jihad* they try their utmost, by using psychological techniques to "to wean them from misconceptions about what the Koran does and doesn't permit."<sup>33</sup> Psychologists are brought in to get the men thinking in the "right direction." What would be the result if they actually used the Qur'an and Sunnah to guide these brothers and did not twist the verses? Pretty soon the instructors of the rehab camps would be joining the ranks of the *Mujahideen*! In addition, if the "beneficiaries" prove they have been successfully brainwashed, upon release they are "given a monthly stipend of \$700 to help make ends meet. Some are given cars, and single men are encouraged to get married."<sup>34</sup>

27 *Frontline: House of Saud*, Dir. & Prod. Jihan El-Tahri, PBS documentary, Feb 8<sup>th</sup> 2005

28 Joseph A. Kechichian, *Gulf News*, [Prelude to more reforms in Saudi Arabia](#), February 18 2009.

29 Statement made by Mustafa Alani at Dubai-based Gulf Research Centre..

30 Makhanlal Roychoudhury, 254

31 Mariam Al Hakeem, [Saudi Shura studies plan to revamp school curriculums](#), November 22, 2005.

32 *Jihad Rehab Camp*, TIME Photos..

33 Bobby Ghosh, [Can Jihadis be rehabilitated?](#), TIME World, January 27 2009.

34 *Ibid*.

Everything possible to keep these men away from *jihad* is done. The aim is to keep them busy with the affairs of the *dunya* and thus when they are released, they are made to feel indebted to the Saudi regime for taking them out of their 'darkness' and being given a 'better life'.

**4) Fourthly, both Akbar and 'Abdullah have waged war with Allah by not only tolerating riba (interest) but being the proponents of it.**<sup>35</sup> In 1583, Akbar allowed interest to be freely practiced. It is no secret that Saudi Arabia is infested with interest-banks all over. One example of this is the Saudi-British bank. In their 'credit card' user guide, the word 'interest' is not mentioned once but the inquisitive reader can read through the lines. In their section on 'payment and finance charges' it is said "if the Cardholder fails to pay the Minimum Amount Due in cleared funds by the Payment Due Date, a late payment fee will be charged at a rate to be determined by the Bank and notified to the Cardholder from time to time."<sup>36</sup> 'Late payment fee' here means upon not paying the minimum amount due, one has to pay an extra amount on top of what one actually spent and that is 'interest.' Little needs to be said about the religiosity of 'Abdullah when he has brazenly insulted Allah and His prophet, may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him.

Both Akbar and 'Abdullah have never claimed that they wanted to rid their lives of Islam. Rather, they have fooled the masses by misinterpreting verses of the Qur'an and that in fact they are the true adherents of the religion of Allah, and what they do is "inspired from the teachings of Islam."<sup>37</sup> It is not something new to find kings and emperors who have altered the religion of Allah to maintain their power in exchange for guidance. It is the enemy 'within' who is more dangerous to the *ummah* and who are using their scholars, desperate for bucks, in order to legitimize their apostasy. It is our hope that just as *Deen-e-Ilahi* died with the death of Akbar in 1605, so too will 'Abdullah's exploitation of Islam

<sup>35</sup>"O ye who believe! Fear Allah, and give up what remains of your demand for usury, if ye are indeed believers. If ye do it not, Take notice of war from Allah and His Messenger: But if ye turn back, ye shall have your capital sums: Deal not unjustly, and ye shall not be dealt with unjustly" (2: 278-9).

<sup>36</sup> Saudi-British Bank, SABB Cards User Guide.

<sup>37</sup> Saudi-US Relations, *A Call for Unity: King 'Abdullah Addresses the UN*

when he faces his **RABB**.

