

An Interview with Fethullah Gülen¹

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Question: What is the relationship between an individual and the state, according to the teaching of Islām? What is the place and function of an individual within a state?

The modern world and contemporary systems of thought claim that for the first time in history individuals have become the true, active subjects of their lives and their actions. According to these modern systems of thought, individuals have depended on the traditions that have come down from the past to the present day, imprisoning themselves within the limits of these traditions. Since the group attitude has become the norm, and as it is not possible to change the established standards of communal life, it has been the destiny of individuals to remain only passive, obedient members of the community. In the modern age, they have finally started to free themselves from this imprisonment, acquiring their individual personalities. Until the modern age, individuals were not free and were not independent. Although these thoughts on individualism are true for some cultures and some regions of the world, they are not true for every religion, for every thought, and for every community. From the perspective of *Tawhīd*, which is the main principle of the unity of God in Islām, it is impossible to have unrestricted individualism. This is because humans are either both free with no acceptance of any moral values and rebellious with no moral criteria, or they are servants who are dependent on God and seriously obedient to His commands. Through being obedient servants of God, the individuals will not bow before any power and will not sacrifice an ounce of their freedom.

A servant of God cannot be enslaved by anything but God — neither by worldly belongings nor by the corrupted traditions that cause individual misery and paralyze the spirit; nor by communal relations that lay siege to human reason; nor by considerations of selfish interests; nor by greed for more and more material earnings, a desire which dynamites morality; nor by oppressive tendencies that give priority to power over logic and reason; nor by

immorality, such as jealousy, hatred, and slavery to carnal impulses. A Muslim repeats at least 30 to 40 times a day, "O Lord, You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help" (Qur'ān, 1:4). By saying this, individuals break the chains that bind their freedom and individuality and so take refuge in the infinite Power of God, which is sufficient. An individual who has not achieved this reliance on God and taken refuge in Him cannot be considered having fulfilled the task of being an ideal human.

Thus, Islām, while asking individuals to be free and independent from anything except for God, also accepts as a principle individuals as members of a family, society, nation, and indeed, of all humanity, based on their needs. A human being is a social, civilized being that needs to live together with other humans. In this sense, a society is like an organism; the parts are interrelated to and in need of one another.

It is very important to see such togetherness as a "greenhouse" that protects individuals against oppressive forces and helps them to meet their needs and assists in personal and social development, which is not easily achieved individually. This is the point where we differ from those who claim absolute freedom for the individual. Those supporters of absolute freedom leave the individual alone by themselves in the "desert" of existence, without any support against the forces that wait in ambush to capture them, under the pretext of freeing the individual from certain traditional ties. Such an individual, being under the tyranny of dictators or even social oppression, has paid for this individualism in a very painful way, by losing both freedom and honor in the name of individuality.

Here I should also point out that, unlike some other religions or religion-like systems, Islām does not restrict itself to metaphysical considerations only, such as spiritual perfection of the individual, religious rituals, prayer, devotions, and contemplation. In addition to the emphasis on metaphysical considerations, Islām also sets out rules that order human individual, social, political, economical, moral, and legal life; and it promises safety from lawlessness and eternal rewards in return for the observation of these rules. Restricting the Divine religion to only belief and individual religious rituals means compartmentalizing it and shaping it contrary to God's will and approval. At the same time, this will force individuals to hesitate about what they need to practice and live by and how and when to practice it. It would not be difficult to claim that such compartmentalization can even cause some sort of mental confusion. If individuals cannot live by the principles of their religion freely because of certain obstacles put before them, this means that they have been denied the freedom of belief and conscience.

According to the religion of Islām, the Messenger has been sent to provide principles for life in this world and the afterlife, with the promise of eternal

bliss for its followers. In the message of the Prophet, this world and the world of eternity complement each other. Personal and social responsibilities are inter-related. Prayer, supplication and remembrance of God, the life of heart and spirit, and social and governmental issues are all facets of one unit. Besides all of this, every Muslim should be very sensitive and conscious about his or her own rights as well as respectful about the rights and freedoms of others. Moreover, as they defend their own rights at the same level, they are very willing to defend the rights of others.

Question: What is the Islamic understanding of “state”? What is the place of “state” in the Qur’ān? Many contemporary Muslims have spoken out about the establishment of an Islamic state based on the principles of *Shari‘ah* — could you kindly give me your thoughts on the subject?

Those who study and put forward opinions concerning the Islamic perspective of state and politics usually confuse Islām, established by the Qur’ān and the *Sunnab* of the Prophet, with the Islām as constructed through the historical experiences of Muslims and of course based on *Shari‘ah* (legal) principles, and also the superficially observed Islām of the modern times. They come up with various shapes and forms in the name of Islām; sometimes using Qur’ānic citations, a few selected sayings of the Prophet, or sometimes ideas and suggestions of one of our contemporary thinkers and they vow to make their interpretation reign if they have the opportunity.

By saying this in no way do I mean that Islamic rules and history have been petrified, with no room for thought and new suggestions. Those *ijtibād* (reasoned solutions) and *qiyās* (analogy) should be done except in the field of the fundamentals of the religion. All *ijtibāds* are to be done in the areas where there is room for interpretation. Also, it has to be in line with the main principles of Islām. In such issues every person who has the capacity to carry out independent reasoning (*ijtibād*) binds himself or herself only and does not bind others. The fact that such an independent reasoning is not authoritative on others is a principle of religion. Islām does not allow any person to put his or her own thoughts or ideas, or nowadays’ possibly fantasies or desires, at the level of guidance for people, and does not allow them to say “this is the religion,” but rather considers such attempts as misguided.

First of all, the thoughts that are proposed in the name of religion, if not originating from the Qur’ān and the *Sunnab* of the Prophet, will result in as many projects and proposals as there are opinions, and this will result in a crisis of legitimacy. Any proposal that does not take its reference from the

historical experience of Muslims upon which there is a consensus of the majority of Muslims absolutely cannot be enduring. The needs of today's people, if not responded to through a reference to the main sources of religion, which are accepted and revered by the majority, will not be realistic and will not satisfy people.

Therefore, whether it is derived from the main revealed sources or from the scholarly interpretations based on these sources, one can ask, "What is the Islamic understanding of state?" In Islām, rule and sovereignty belong to God. The Qur'ān emphasizes this point in several verses and declares that ruling and command belong to God: "Female and male believers, when God and His Messenger made a decision, they have no other choice anymore" (33:36). Through this, the Qur'ān declares that rule does not belong to holy and infallible spiritual leaders, as in theocracies, nor to any religious institutions under their supervision, nor to any other religious institution organized in any other way. Islām says, "the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is the most righteous." By this, it does not allow any privilege based on family, class, race, color, wealth, or power. Instead, Islām established righteousness and merit and honesty and the sentiment of justice as a principle. In Islām, which is based on the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet, there is neither absolute monarchy nor classical democracy as known in the West; neither dictatorship, nor totalitarianism. In Islām, ruling means a mutual contract between the ruler and the subject and it takes its legitimacy from the rule of law, and from the principle of the superiority of the law. Accordingly, the law is above the ruler and the subject. It belongs to God. It cannot be changed and cannot be usurped. The law is to be applied according to the Creator's command, and the way in which the Prophet expressed and applied it. For Islām, an administration based on tyranny is illegitimate. Islām does not approve any kind of dictatorship. In an Islāmic administration, those who are at the top have to obey the law like ordinary people: they cannot violate these principles and cannot act in their practice against these principles.

In Islām, the legislative and executive institutions have always been allowed to make laws. These are based on the needs and betterment of society and within the frame of general norms of law. On domestic issues in the Islamic community and its relationship with other nations, including economic, political and cultural relations, Muslims have always developed laws. The community members are required to obey the laws that one can identify as "higher principles" as well as laws made by humans. Islām has no objection to undertaking *ijtībād* (independent reasoning), *istīnbat* (deductive reasoning), and *istikbrāj* (derivation) in the interpretation of *Shari'ah* principles.

In fact, in a democratic society the source of law is colorblind and free from ethnic prejudice. It promotes the creation of an environment for the development of human rights, political participation, protection of minority rights, and the participation of individuals and society in decision-making institutions which are supposed to be the characteristics of our modern world. Everybody should be allowed to express themselves with the condition that no pressure should be made on others through variety of means. Also, members of minority communities should be allowed to live according to their beliefs. If these sorts of legislations are made within the norms of international law and international agreements, Islām will have no objection to any of these. No one can ignore the universal values that the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah* have presented with regard to the rights mentioned above. Therefore, it is impossible to prove in any way that Islām opposes democracy.

If a state, within the framework mentioned above, gives the opportunity to its citizens to practice their religion and supports them in their thinking, learning, and practice, this system is not considered to be against the teaching of the Qurʾān. In the presence of such a state there is no need to seek an alternative state. The system should be reviewed by the lawmakers and executive institutions if human rights and freedoms are not protected enough, as in the case of many developing democracies around the world. In order to make such ideal laws, lawmakers should reform, renew, and organize the system according to the universal norms of law. Even if such a renewal is not considered *tasbīrī* (based on *Shariʿah*), it is not conceived of as being against it.

Significantly, there are some who think that *Shariʿah* rule would necessitate a state system based on religious rules. Without looking at the meaning and implication of the word *Shariʿah*, they display an attitude opposing it. Whereas the word *Shariʿah* is, in a certain way, a synonym of religion (*dīn*), it indicates a religious life supported by God's commands, the Prophet's sayings and practices, and the consensus of the Muslim community. In such a religious life, the principles that are related to the state administration are only 5%. The remaining 95% is related to the articles of faith, the pillars of Islām, and the moral principles of religion.

Question: Is it possible to reconcile Islām with democracy? How do you see the lack of democracy in many Muslim countries, and do you see this lack of democracy as a deficit for Muslim nations?

On the issue of Islām and democracy, one should remember that the former is a divine and heavenly religion, while the latter is a form of government developed by humans. The main purposes of religion are faith

(*imān*), servanthood to God (*‘ubūdiyyah*), knowledge of God (*ma‘rifah*), and beautiful actions (*ihsān*). The Qur’ān, in its hundreds of verses, invites people to the faith and worship of the True (*al-Haqq*). It also asks people to deepen their servanthood to God in a way that they may gain the consciousness of *ihsān*. “To believe and do good deeds,” is among the subjects that Qur’ān emphatically stresses. It also frequently reminds people that they must develop a conscious relationship with God and act as if they see God, or as if they are seen by God.

Democracy itself is not a unified system of government; it is rarely presented without an affiliation. In many cases, another term, such as social, liberal, Christian, or radical, is added as a prefix. In some cases, even one of these forms of democracy may not consider the other as democracy.

However, in our days, democracy is frequently mentioned in its unaffiliated form, ignoring the plural nature of *democracies*. In contrast to this, many speak of religion as tantamount to politics, which is, in fact, only one of the many faculties of religion. Such a perception has resulted in a range of positions on the subject of the reconciliation of Islām and democracy. Even if these terms are not seen as being opposites, it is evident that they are different in important ways.

According to one of these conceptualizations, Islām is both a religion and a political system. It has expressed itself in all fields of life, including the individual, family, social, economical and political spheres. From this angle, to confine Islām to only faith and prayer is to narrow the field of its interaction and its interpenetration. Many ideas have been developed from this perspective and more recently these have often caused Islām to be perceived as an ideology. According to some critics, such an approach made Islām merely one of many political ideologies. This vision of Islām as a totalizing ideology is totally against the spirit of Islām, which promotes the rule of law and openly rejects oppression against any segment of society. This spirit also promotes actions for the betterment of society in accordance with the view of the majority.

Those who follow a more moderate pattern also believe that it would be much better to introduce Islām as a complement to democracy instead of presenting it as an ideology. Such an introduction of Islām may play an important role in the Muslim world through enriching local forms of democracy and extending it in such a way that helps humans develop an understanding of the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds. I believe that Islām also would enrich democracy in answering the deep needs of humans, such as spiritual satisfaction, which cannot be fulfilled except through the remembrance of the Eternal One.

Yes, in the Islamic world and particularly in my country, Turkey, it is painful to see how those who speak on Islām and democracy and claim to

pronounce in the name of religion have come to the understanding that Islām and democracy cannot be reconciled. This perception of mutual incompatibility extends to some pro-democracy people as well. The argument that is presented is based on the idea that the religion of Islām is based on the rule of God, while democracy is based on the view of humans, which opposes it. In my understanding, however, there is another idea that has become a victim of such a superficial comparison between Islām and democracy. The phrase, “Sovereignty belongs to the nation unconditionally,” does not mean that sovereignty has been taken from God and given to humans. On the contrary, it means that sovereignty is entrusted to humans by God, that is to say it has been taken from individual oppressors and dictators and given to the community members. To a certain extent, the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs of Islām illustrates the application of this norm of democracy. Cosmologically speaking, there is no doubt that God is the sovereign of everything in the universe. Our thoughts and plans are always under the control of the power of such an Omnipotent. However, this does not mean that we have no will, inclination or choice. Humans are free to make choices in their personal lives. They are also free to make choices with regard to their social and political actions. Some may hold different types of elections to choose lawmakers and executives. There is not only one way to hold an election; as we can see, this was true even for the Era of Bliss, the time of the Prophet of Islām, and during the time of the Four Caliphs, may God be pleased with them all. The election of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, was different than that of the second Caliph, Umar. Uthmān’s election was different from that of ‘Alī, the fourth Caliph. God only knows the right method of election.

Moreover, democracy is not an immutable form of governing. Looking at the history of its development, one can see mistakes which are followed by changes and corrections. Some have even spoken of thirty types of democracy. Due to these changes in the evolution of democracy, some have looked at this system with hesitancy. Maybe this is a reason why the Muslim world did not view democracy with great enthusiasm. Besides this lack of enthusiasm, the violence of despotic rulers in the Islamic world, who see democracy as a threat to their despotism, presents another obstacle for democracy in Muslim nations.

Question: In a time when political Islām has become very popular, what are your thoughts on the relationship between Islām and politics?

In my opinion, people have either gone too far or not far enough with regard to understanding the relationship between Islām and politics. Some have said that the religion of Islām has no relationship with politics; others

have perceived the religion as politics itself, ignoring the varied and rich aspects of religion. In the Holy Qurʾān, there are verses concerning administration and politics. The Prophet's practices also occupy an important place in this regard. For example, the Qurʾānic terms “*ūlu al-amr*” (those who rule), “*iṭāʿat*” (obedience to the rulers), “*shūra*” (consultation), “*ḥarb*” (war), and “*ṣulḥ*” (peace), are all examples of some Qurʾānic references with regard to political and legal decisions. In addition, there are Qurʾānic verses related to legal institutions and also some that point to politics and governing.

However, in Islām it is not possible to limit the concept of governance and politics into a single paradigm, unlike the principles of faith and the pillars of Islām. History shows us that in the Islamic world, since the time of the Prophet, there have been many types of states. This is so even if we exclude the elections in the early period of Islām and the qualities that were exhibited in those elections. Even if one cannot see some major methodological differences among these types of governance, there are many differences in the details. Those who are not aware of the principles of these different methods of governing have understood each of them as a separate system. I have to note that these differences were the result of the aspects of religion that are open to interpretation and related to the field of independent reasoning (*Ijtihād*).

In order to reach a healthy understanding and come to positive conclusions, one should refer to the main sources of Islām: the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah*. There is no doubt that historical experiences are also an important source.

In the Qurʾān, besides verses related to human relationships with God, there are many other verses regulating the relationships of human beings with one another. The source of both kinds of verses is one, Allah. The verses that remind us about our duties and responsibilities to the divine essence have been preserved in its originality based on the understanding of the Prophet and his companions. The Qurʾānic verses and prophetic sayings related to the second category focus on the principles of humans' social, economic, political, and cultural life. At the same time, they hint at some wisdom, betterment, and benefits through their brief ending statements at the end of many verses. For instance, the verses on justice, respect for rights, truthfulness, being compassionate and merciful, carrying out actions based on consultation, living a chaste life, and not deceiving anyone are considered examples of this category.

These kinds of verses that are directed to human relationships, if read thoroughly and correctly, will give some hints for Muslims about how to solve their future problems. Interpreters and the *Mujtahids* (those who are able to perform independent reasoning), to a certain extent, take this category as a reference point for their interpretations and analyses.

There are many topics in the Qurʾān and in the sayings of the Prophet whose relevance to human experiences continues to come to light as time passes. The details of such issues have been entrusted to the passing of time. The divine commands and prophetic suggestions about politics, the state, and ruling the community have been interpreted in diverse ways, resulting in different manifestations and various forms throughout history. You can relate this aspect of religion, if you wish, according to the concept that time is a great interpreter, or as an indication of the universalism of Islām, which is also known as the natural and tolerant religion (*al-ḥanifiyyah-al-sambāʾ*). Yes, among the addressees of the Qurʾān there were various groups of people: from Bedouins to civilized people, undeveloped communities to very developed nations, and simple masses to wonderfully organized and enlightened societies. The Qurʾān has addressed all these groups considering their own understandings, approaches, views, evaluations, and even lives.

In the case of human relationship to the divine Being, it has given brief explanations leaving the details for the coming generations. In the case of human-to-human interactions, it has detailed and explained the specifics of some well-established principles.

In this regard, there has been a consensus of understanding on this first case with the exception of some heretical groups' interpretations of the Islamic tradition. As for the second case, there have been many varying interpretations in accordance with the conditions, time, and the situations existing in the world. Naturally, these differences have been reflected in the judicial and administrative institutions.

It would not be a correct understanding of Islām to claim that politics is a vital principle of religion and among its well-established pillars. While some Qurʾānic verses are related to politics, the structure of the state, and the forms of ruling, people who have connected the import of the Qurʾānic message with such issues may have caused a misunderstanding. This misunderstanding is the result of their Islamic zeal, their limitations of their consideration solely of historical experiences, and their thinking that the problems of Islamic communities can be solved more easily through politics and ruling. All of these approaches within their own contexts are meaningful. However, the truth does not lie in these approaches alone.

Although one cannot ignore the effects of ruling and administration in regulating communal relationships between individuals, families and societies, yet these, within the framework of Qurʾānic values, are considered secondary issues. That is because the values that we call major principles (*ummuhāḍ*), such as faith (*imān*), submission (*islām*), doing what is beautiful (*iḥsān*), and the acceptance of divine morals by the community, are references that form the essence of administrative, economic, and political issues. The Qurʾān is a

translation of the book of the universe, which comes from the divine commands of creation, an interpretation of the world of the unseen, of the visible and invisible. It is an explanation of the reflections of the divine names on earth and in the heavens. It is a prescription for the various problems of the Islamic world. It is a unique guide for bliss in this life and in the life to come. It is a great guide for the travelers in this world moving towards the hereafter. It is an inexhaustible source of wisdom. Such a book should not be reduced to the level of political discourse, nor should it be considered a book about political theories or forms of state. To consider the Qurʾān as an instrument of political discourse is a great disrespect for the Holy Book and is an obstacle that prevents people from benefiting from this deep source of divine grace.

There is no doubt that the holy Qurʾān, through its enrichment of the human soul, is able to inspire wise politicians and through them to prevent politics from being like gambling or merely a game of chess.

Question : After the abolishment of the Caliphate (*Khilāfab*) in Turkey, many new movements to restore this institution arose, especially in India. Thinking of the fast development in our world, do you think that the Caliphate could be re-established? Or is the Caliphate an unattainable utopia? What are your thoughts?

When the institution of the Caliphate was abolished there were many views articulated either for this or against it. A contemporary Turkish sociologist, Ziya Gökalp, and those following his line of thought had the following approach: “The institution of the *Khilāfab* which draws its power from the Turkish Grand National assembly has an honorable place among Muslims. If there is no such institution, the world of Islām will be similar to a rosary which has no center (*imāmah*); all the beads would fall off.” Thinkers like Seyyid Bey believed that, “*Khilāfab* (the Caliphate) has a wise purpose and it is the issue of the nation itself and it follows the requirements of the time. When the Prophet died, he did not mention anything about *Khilāfab* (the succession) to his Companions. In fact, even in the Qurʾān there is no verse to this effect.” Seyyid emphasizes the importance of consultation and obedience to the rulers, as mentioned in the Qurʾān. These two aspects are related to administration and politics. He believes that with the Caliphate of ‘Alī, the fourth caliph in Islamic history, in the thirtieth year of the Islamic calendar, the Caliphate came to an end. In this regard, he mentions the opinions of scholars of Islamic law and Islamic thought. He speaks of the historicity of *Khilāfab*, in one sense, and suggests that one should benefit from this experience and

understand the goal and the aim of *Khilāfab*. According to Seyyid, the rulers who came after the first four Caliphs were not real Caliphs; in appearance they were Caliphs, but in quality they did not follow the previous Caliphs. With this opinion, he supported the abolishment of *Khilāfab* as found in the following statement of Turkish parliament: “The Caliph has been deposed. The institution of *Khilāfab* is abolished since the meaning and the context of this institution has been absorbed into the government and the republic.”

Long before these scholars, Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddimah* presented the following thought: “With regard to *Khilāfab*, there are three different views. The first is that *Khilāfab* is a divine institution and necessary. Secondly, *Khilāfab* is based on needs. Thirdly, as some Kharijites defended, there is no need for the Caliphate.”

Today, those who believe that there is no need for a Caliphate say this because of the establishment of nation states and the development of ideas of independence. For these reasons, some people believe that the *Khilāfab* has lost its effectiveness. There are some people who believe in the dynamics of *Khilāfab* since it is a means of unity among Muslims and facilitates cooperation between Muslim nations through exchanging their skills and opportunities. The possibility of rallying the masses can easily coalesce around the religious term, Caliphate/*Khilāfab*.

Having said this, I would say that the revival of the Caliphate would be very difficult and making Muslims accept such a revived *Khilāfab* would be impossible. The perception of the modern world regarding the revival of *Khilāfab* must be considered. I think it would be very beneficial for one to look at the concept of *Khilāfab* and the revivalist *Khilāfab* movements in the light of the thoughts mentioned above.

Question: Many writers in the United States and the West relate the development of the West to the Renaissance. Is it possible for there to be a renaissance in the Islamic world? Is a renaissance necessary? What are your thoughts?

The Renaissance is known as a *New Birth*, *Revival*, and *Awakening*. Some people say that it was a movement reviving the formal and spiritual values of ancient times or it represents a current of returning to the sources and rereading and evaluating them. Some also say that the focus of this movement was on the political, judicial, and moral values of ancient times through focusing on classical writings in the field of thought and focusing on legendary mystics. If the Renaissance is all of this, though parts may be praiseworthy, one could not accept all aspects of it.

If the Renaissance was a revolt against the dominance of religious authorities under the leadership of philosophers such as Jules Michelet, and if it is understood as pro-freedom, it is critically and totally anti-religion under the format of individualism. Although some trace the development of this movement to Italy and connect it to philosophers such as Dante and Giotto di Bondone, one hardly can see this as beneficial to humanity and thus can hardly accept the movement in this format. Another interpretation that one cannot accept is that some thinkers who were quite confused as a result of chaotic thought in the West have accepted Humanism in extreme form as a religion and caused another imbalance in thought.

Islām achieved a Renaissance in its third and fourth centuries and, to a certain extent, became a paradigm for the European Renaissance. With all sincerity, we support a renaissance that would consist of the rediscovery of lost human values and the rapprochement of humanity with universal human morals. Again, we support a renaissance that allows the questioning of dictatorship and the end of dictators, and working towards a democratic society. A renaissance that fosters great achievements in the fine arts and promotes a careful reading of the book of the universe, which has been lost for a long time, is greatly applauded. We support a renaissance that promotes a longing for research, a passion for knowledge, and the articulation of religion in accordance with the understanding of our century in a new style and new manner.

We are in search of an awakening of reason, as well as of heart, spirit, and mind. Yet, it is not possible to assume a harvest of fruits of efforts and works resulting from this. There is an appropriate time for everything. We will wait and see. "Before the sun rises, who knows what will come out from the darkest night?"

Question: For centuries, the Muslim world has not produced many great intellectuals. What might be the reason for this? Is it possible to have an intellectual rebirth?

It depends what is meant by intellectuals. The lack of intellectualism, which gives priority to reason against feelings and will and makes thought the source of creativity, is not a great loss for the Islamic world. There is no doubt that the Islamic world lacks intellectuals who are aware and knowledgeable about their own existence and able to interpret and understand the creation correctly. It is a great loss for the Islamic world to lack intellectuals who are aware of the time in which they live and ready to question it and able to voice with no hesitation what they know. It is unfortunate that the

Islamic world lacks such enlightened intellectuals. Here, I have to explain some issues.

First, this standstill of development is not something unique to the Islamic world. There have been many nations throughout history whose yesterday was very bright, and whose today is dull. This is like the destiny of all nations; history repeats itself. Various civilizations and nations have such a destiny; similar to a flaming fire that is extinguished, or resembling equipment that becomes dusty and obsolete, or a human who is born, grows old and then dies. One can try to renew them in order to extend their life, however this can be very costly.

Second, there are three fundamentals of the Islamic spirit. The abandonment of any one of these fundamentals to a certain extent will paralyze the other dynamics. These fundamentals can be summarized as follows: Firstly, interpreting the religious sciences that draw from the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah* in accordance with the understanding of the century, as was the case in the early period of Islām or the era of *Tadwīn* (recording tradition). Secondly, as we read the holy Qurʾān, as derived from God's attribute of *Kalām* (speech), we should also read the book of the Universe and the divine laws found in nature, which come from God's attributes of *Qudrah* (power) and *Irādah* (will). Thirdly, we ought to keep a balance between matter and the immaterial, body and spirit, this world and the hereafter, and the physical and metaphysical. One should be equally open to each of these. In a world where reason is abandoned, the heart has been ignored, and the love for truth and longing for knowledge has been extinguished, it is not possible to even speak of elite or intellectual humans.

Third, similar to the modern day West, the Muslim world experienced a great period of enlightenment. There were positives of the period, but when vital dynamics were neglected, there were no doubt negatives as well. In some cases, plentiful material possessions caused the laziness of people, industrial systems skewed people's sense of reality, victories and successes drove the people's passions for life, and extreme frivolity led to a decadent lifestyle. In a context where such an oppressive atmosphere is dominant, the intellectual cannot emerge.

Fourth, today's positive sciences essentially and methodologically are not based merely on the search, experience, and analysis of Muslim scholars. Methodologically speaking, in our modern days sciences are based on positivism, naturalism, and rationalism in the Western sense. In the world of sciences, all research and analysis are under the control of a certain understanding. This will continue until new geniuses emerge to reinterpret the world or the creation and to analyze and re-establish it within the filter of their own thoughts.

Question: The subject of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) has been debated in the Muslim world for a long time. Some thought that the door of *ijtihād* was closed, and of course this caused a stagnation of reasoning. What might be the criteria to use the methodology of *ijtihād*?

The word *Ijtihād*, independent reasoning, literally means “to use all your power and effort in order to bring some hard and difficult works into existence.” In Islamic terminology, the word means “to use all your power to deduct some hypothetical judicial decisions from the clear sources (*adilla-i tafsiliyyah*) of Islamic law.” The one who makes this effort is called a *Mujtabid*. The issue in which these efforts are made is called *Mujtabadun fib*.

In principle, there are two conditions for *Ijtihād*. First, one must know the sources of Islamic law related to legal judgments (*ahkām*). Second, the *Ijtihād* should be done by those who are able to penetrate into the spirit of the sources through their intelligence and the logic of religious law. Any *Ijtihād* that comes from an eligible person and is done within an appropriate case is valid.

Moreover, *Ijdihād* is not limited to analogy (*qiyās*). It can be done through analogy as well as through the indications, clues, and the hints of the legal texts. It is also possible to deduce legal judgments from the linguistic aspects of the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah*, including Arabic rhetoric dealing with metaphorical language and literary figures.

Islām, being the last and universal religion, is the epitome of solutions to the problems of humans for all time and for all locations. These solutions are based on the limited texts of the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah*, which address the unlimited problems of humans. This blessed activity started in the era of the Prophet and developed in the third and fourth centuries under the names of *ijtihād*, *raʿy* (subjective legal opinion), *istidlāl* (inference), *qiyās* (analogy), and *istinbāt* (deduction). It has remained alive within the practice of the dynamic systems of Islām and has been highly fruitful.

This rich and original legal culture, unique to the Islamic world, has been fading for reasons such as exclusion of the active Islamic system of life from the public sphere, the absence of active minds similar to those of the early period of Islām, the lack of inspired spirits, and deficiency of superior intellects, knowledgeable of the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah*. There are some who lack reasoning with insufficient intelligence, and are very behind in their knowledge of the Qurʾān and *Sunnah*, and closed to inspiration.

Since these types of people have risen to power in religious circles, the fertile institution of *ijtibād* has been replaced by unquestioning adoption (*taqlīd*), memorization, and copying.

One can see several reasons why the spirit of *ijtibād* was lost and the door was closed. The following are considered some of these reasons: political oppression, inner struggles, the misuse of the institution of *ijtibād*, an extreme trust in the present legal system, the denial of reform, the blindness caused by the dominant monotonous present system of the time. All of these are among the reasons for this loss. Furthermore, the believers who were eligible to perform *ijtibād* based on their intelligence and abilities were at times included mistakenly among the groups of heretics who misused *ijtibād*. The door, in fact, has never been closed by anyone. However, some *ulama* had the inclination to close the door of *ijtibād* against those who would like to promote their own desires and interpretations as guidance. The door was closed automatically in the face of those who were not eligible to make *ijtibād*. As long as society does not have quality scholars who can perform *ijtibād*, it is not possible to ignore the argument of those who are against *ijtibād*.

Today, people commonly think of the worldly life. The ideas and hearts of today's people are greatly disparate and the minds are estranged from immaterial things. Religion and religiosity are not the essential issues for people as was the case in the time of the early Muslims. On the contrary, people are neutral to religiosity or religion; that is to say, being religious or not being religious is the same thing. Many are highly disinterested in matters of faith and many essentials of religion are ignored. The pillars of Islām and the principles of faith are viewed with doubt. Religion for many Muslims has collapsed. Many make no effort to live their lives within the framework of Islām. Under such circumstances, one can hardly see that this dynamic aspect of Islām, *ijtibād*, will be used properly.

Despite all of this mentioned above, there has been a great revival of religion and religiosity in the Islamic world today. I hope — God willing — this development will result in the rise of those who are eligible to open the door of *ijtibād* in the near future.

It is my conviction that when the proper season comes, such gushing spirit and ingenious intellect will create groups comprised of specialists in their fields with an utmost sense of responsibility to undertake *ijtibād*. I hope that through such consultation, these groups will bridge the gap that has been created since the loss of the spirit of *ijtibād*. Let's continue mixing this dough for a little more time and see what the Almighty will do.

Question: The relationship between men and women in Islām is one of the controversial topics debated in the modern day. What are your thoughts of the place of women in society?

The Qurʾān invites people to form a family life and points out many wisdoms and benefits of marriage. “And Allah has given you wives of your own kind, and has given you, from your wives, sons and grandsons, and has made provision of good things for you. Is it then in vanity that they believe and in the grace of Allah that they disbelieve?” (16:72). The Qurʾān views marriage as a serious commitment on the part of the husband and wife; it is a covenant between the husband and wife. It speaks of the rights of the husband and the wife. “If you wish to divorce one wife and marry another, do not take from her the dowry you have given her, even if it be a talent of gold. Is it appropriate to take this by making up reasons for divorce and intentionally sinning? How can you take it back when you have lain with each other and put your heads on the same pillow and entered into a firm contract? That would be improper and grossly unjust” (4:20–21).

In addition to this, the Holy Book in principle emphasizes what is good and consistently declares that spouses should do what is good towards each other. “O you who believe! It is not lawful for you forcibly to inherit the women (of your deceased kinsmen), nor (that) you should put constraint upon them that you may take away a part of that which you have given them, unless they be guilty of flagrant lewdness. But consort with them in kindness, for if you hate them it may happen that you hate a thing wherein Allah has placed much good” (4:19).

In order to strengthen the ties of marriage, the Qurʾān places more responsibility upon the husband’s shoulders. It also imposes part of the responsibility upon the community, in the case of a disagreement between spouses. It views divorce, which God dislikes, as the last resort when reconciliation becomes impossible. “O Prophet! When you (men) divorce women, divorce them for their (legal) period and reckon carefully the period, and keep your duty to Allah, your Lord particularly about the rights of your wives. Expel them not from their houses nor let them go forth unless they commit an immorality such as adultery. Such are the limits (imposed by) Allah; and whoso transgresses Allah’s limits, he verily wrongs his soul. You know not: it may be that Allah will afterward bring some new thing to pass. Then, when they have reached their term (a three month period), take them back in kindness or part from them in kindness, and call to witness two just men among you, and keep your testimony upright for Allah. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day is exhorted to act thusly.

And whosoever keeps his duty to Allah, Allah will appoint a way out for him.” (65:1–2).

Another Qur’ānic verse says, “When you divorce your wives, lodge them where you dwell according to your wealth, and do not pressure them to leave through harassment. And if they are with child, give them their expenses until they give birth to their child. After you cut your relationship with them, if they continue to suckle your children, give them their due payment. Resolve the issue of payment due with kindness amongst yourselves according to your legal customs. If the mother of the child, by not suckling the child causes problems, the father should pay for another woman to suckle his child. Those who are wealthy should give according to their wealth. Those who have limited income, let them give according to their wealth from what God has given them. God makes people responsible only according to their capacity. God bestows ease after difficulty” (65:7).

Thus, the Qur’ān, as in many cases in this matter, in addition to reminding spouses about their duties towards one another, emphasizes the main principles of human morality, and invites individuals to be respectful to God and virtuous towards each other. Such an atmosphere of respect is necessary for the continuation of humane and legal relations. That is because institutions such as marriage with a unique aspect of privacy can hardly be controlled by outsiders. As a matter of fact, it is a considerable issue to refer to a judge or a referee in the case of disagreement between spouses. Yet, the fundamental issue is to prevent the problems from the very beginning, or to solve them at the very time of occurrence. This is in great part related to the personality, ethics, and characteristics of the two parties. It is highly difficult to keep the harmony of married life through various philosophical and legal orders without putting the faith of God in the heart without a sense of self-criticism and respect for people.

The Qur’ān, in various places, draws attention via emphasis on the warm atmosphere of the home “And one of the signs of His existence and power is this: He has created for you helpmates in order to make you feel comfortable with one another, and He ordained between you love and mercy. There are lessons in this sign for those who reflect” (30:21).

Islām addresses women and men equally and raises women, with its remarkable breath, to a blessed position. It has taken women from being objects for men to the level that paradise lay under their feet. After the emergence of Islām, no one could force such gentle creatures to adultery, whoredom, and impurity. She would not be treated as property; she could not be accused of impurity. Such an accusation would result in a severe punishment on the part of the accuser. “And those who accuse honorable women but bring not four witnesses, scourge them (with) eighty stripes and

never (afterward) accept their testimony — They indeed are evil-doers. Save those who afterward repent and make amends. (For such) lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. As for those who accuse their wives but have no witnesses except themselves; let the testimony of one of them be four testimonies, (swearing) by Allah that he is of those who speak the truth; And yet a fifth, invoking the curse of Allah on him if he is of those who lie” (24:4–7). Female children would not be looked down upon. Infanticide would be prohibited. “Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty, We shall provide for them and for you. Lo! The slaying of them is great sin,” The Qurʾān has declared. Even if she is physically different, this is not a reason to be looked down upon.

In the Qurʾānic view of creation, Adam is created first and Eve is created from the same leaven (2:187). This Qurʾānic picture reminds us that men and women are both equally humans. They are two entities that complete one another, as the Qurʾān presents. The difference between both is based on certain purposes and designs and is not ontological. The Qurʾānic verses that give the impression of the superiority of men over women are expressions with regard to certain capacities. “Do not desire something that God has given more of to someone else other than you. Men have the share of what they have earned, and women have the share of what they have earned. (Envy not one another) but ask Allah of His bounty. Lo! Allah is ever Knower of all things.” (4:32). The Qurʾān reminds us of these differences, and that being from a certain gender should not be seen as a reason for complaint. There is no difference at all as far as human relationships are concerned. Whoever gains, gains for him or her.

As stated above, with regard to humanity and human relationships with God, there is no difference between women and men. They are equals concerning their rights and responsibilities. Woman is equal to man in the rights of freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom to live a decent life, and freedom of finance. Equality before the law, just treatment, marriage and founding a family life, personal life, privacy and protection are all among the rights of women. Her possessions, life and dignity are assured like that of men. Violation of any of these rights results in severe punishment.

Yes, woman is free and independent before the law. Her femaleness does not limit or invalidate any of her eligibilities. When her rights are violated, she can seek justice just as men can. If someone takes her possessions wrongly, she has all rights of reclamation. Considering some qualities of women and men, Islām has developed certain legal prescriptions: for example, women are exempted from certain charges such as military services, going to war, taking care of the financial obligations of a family and herself, etc.

As for testimony, yes, the Qurʾān says that when you cannot find two men to testify, find one trustworthy man and two women, for if one forgets the

other, the other will remind her (2.282). It is not acceptable to deduce any meaning from this verse to indicate the superiority of men over women in humanity and in value. The fundamental issue here is the realization of justice.

This is not a matter unique to women. The testimony of some male Bedouins has been rejected when the matter is related to the rights and realization of justice. The issue of testimony is related to a strong commitment to communal life. The involvement of witnesses in all segments of social life — even today a reality — the lack of witnessing many aspects of the life of people are always possible for some men and women. This issue of testimony in the Qurʾān relates to oral testimony with regard to financial matters and loans. Otherwise, the testimony of women in writing, when needed, is accepted as equal by some scholars of Islamic law.

Question: In our modern day, the relationship between Islām and terrorism is greatly debated. Can terrorism be considered a way of struggle for freedom? What is the Islamic alternative to terrorism and struggle?

As I said in an interview with Nuriye Akman for Daily *Zaman*, today, at best we can say is that Islām is not known at all. Muslims should say, “In true Islām, terror does not exist.” No person should kill another human being. No one can touch an innocent person, even in time of war. No one can give a *fatwa* (a legal pronouncement) commending this matter. No one should be a suicide bomber. No one can rush into crowds with bombs tied to his or her body. Regardless of the religion of these crowds, this is not religiously permissible. Even in the event of war — during which it is difficult to maintain balances — this is not permitted in Islām. Islām states; “Do not touch children or people who worship in churches.” This has not only been said once, but has been repeated over and over throughout history. What Our Master Prophet Muḥammad said, what Abū Bakr said, and what ʿUmar said is the same as what, at later dates, Ṣalāḥaddīn Ayyūbī, Alparslan, and Kilicarslan also said. Later on, Sultan Mehmet II, the Conqueror, also said the same. Thus, the city of Constantinople, in which a disorderly hullabaloo reigned, became Istanbul. In this city the Greeks did not harm the Armenians, nor did the Armenians harm the Greeks. Nor did the Muslims harm any other people. A short time after the conquest of Constantinople, the people of the city voluntarily hung a huge portrait of the Conqueror on the wall in the place of that of the Patriarch. It is amazing that such behavior was displayed at that time. Then, history relates that the Sultan summoned the Patriarch and gave him the key to the city. Even today, Islām is not understood properly. Islām has always

respected different ideas and this must be understood for it to be appreciated properly.

I regret to say that in the countries Muslims live, some religious leaders and immature Muslims have no other weapon on hand than their fundamentalist interpretation of Islām; they use this to engage people in struggles that serve their own purposes. In fact, Islām is a true faith, and it should be lived truly. On the way to attaining faith one can never use untrue methods. In Islām, just as a goal must be legitimate, so must be all the means employed to reach that goal. From this perspective, one cannot achieve Heaven by murdering another person. A Muslim cannot say, "I will kill a person and then go to Heaven." God's approval cannot be won by killing people. One of the most important goals for a Muslim is to win the pleasure of God, another is making the name of Almighty God known to the universe.

Dissatisfied youth has lost its spirituality. Some people take advantage of such people, giving them a couple of dollars, or turning them into robots. They have drugged them. This has become a topic on the agenda these days that can be read about in the popular press. These young people were abused to an extent that they could be manipulated. They have been used as murderers on the pretext of some crazy ideals or goals and they have been made to kill people. Some evil-minded people have wanted to achieve certain goals by exploiting these young people. Yes, killing a human is a truly awful thing. The Qur'ān says that killing one person is the same as killing all people. Ibn 'Abbās said that a murderer will stay in Hell for eternity. This is the same punishment that is assigned to deniers of God. This means that a murderer is subjected to the same punishment as a disbeliever. If this is a fundamental principle of religion, then it should be taught in education.

An individual who accepts Islām from the heart will never knowingly take part in terrorism. The acts of terrorism associated with Islām may have been perpetrated by some Muslims who had not internalized the depth of Islām. Terrorism, as the name itself indicates, is a complicated issue. Analyzing terrorism is not something that is easy to do. Despite this, because it is so ugly in its nature and because many Muslims are charged with it, terrorism must be addressed with a great deal of consideration. Administrators and intelligence agents have to try to find the originators and the motivating factors of terrorist activities. This will help develop international strategies to stop it.

Otherwise, as a result of false analysis and some possible intelligentsia's services, the issue may be so complicated that some civilizations, nations and civic organizations will be always under threat. After September 11th, the issue has developed in this direction. The fear of terrorism has become paranoia in our society. At an increasing tempo, general feelings and fears of society were

exploited. Terrorist organizations were used by some as instruments of terror to reach their goals through terrorist activities against innocent society.

To my understanding, true Muslims will never involve themselves in such vulgar and cheap activities, even if they are behind in science and technology. The real factors behind terrorism are worldly advantages and self-interests. These factors have been the main reasons behind “the great games” on earth. While the main reasons are ignored, all fingers pointed to Islām.

On the other hand, there are many conflicting interests in the Islamic regions, as well as many competing and clashing groups. Problems such as anti-democratic practices and human rights violations have resulted in the foundation of various disaffected and disenfranchised groups. Being ignorant and inexperienced, many of these groups can easily be manipulated and used by some. Some, manipulating these groups, have worked to reach their goals step by step. Moreover, there are multi-national covert or open organizations who have based all of their efforts on destruction and the creation of fear in society. To extend the borders of their activities, they agitate the unhappy segments of society by stirring up trouble and fomenting violence.

Even though, through painstaking and intelligent effort, the superficial reasons for terrorism may be eliminated, without the above-mentioned considerations, it would be impossible to end terrorism once and for all. This cursed behavior will emerge under another name.

Endnote

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