

JOURNEY INTO ISLAM STUDY

A look at Islam through the work of Akbar Ahmed

A publication of



A MORE
PERFECT UNION

ABOUT THE BOOK

JOURNEY INTO ISLAM: THE CRISIS OF GLOBALIZATION

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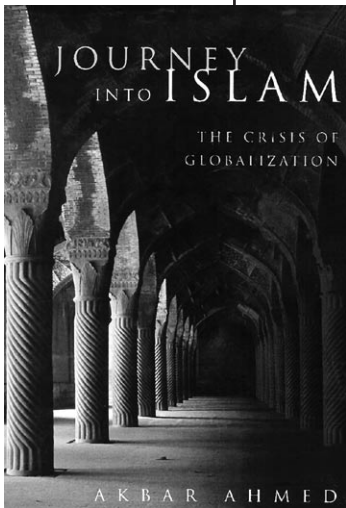
“Why?” Years after September 11 we are still looking for answers. Akbar Ahmed, the internationally renowned Islamic scholar, knew that the question could not be answered until Islam and the West move past the hatred and mistrust escalated by globalization and the war on terror. Seeking to establish dialogue and understanding between these cultures, Ahmed led a team of dedicated young Americans on a daring, unprecedented tour of the Muslim

world. Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization is the riveting story of their search for common ground.

From the mosques of Damascus to the madrassahs of Karachi and to the malls of Jakarta, Ahmed and his companions set out to listen to the fears, hopes, and beliefs of everyday Muslims. Here, they give voice to students, professors, sheikhs, presidents and prime ministers, even to cab drivers—and how they really view America, its policies and globalization. Ahmed and his team returned from their groundbreaking journey through nine Muslim countries with both cause for concern and occasion for hope.

As Western leaders wage a war on terrorism, Ahmed, rejecting stereotypes and conventional thinking about Islam and globalization, offers a new framework for understanding the Muslim world and makes suggestions on how the United States can improve relations with this vitally important region. Written with equal parts compassion and urgency, this book makes a powerful plea for forming bonds across religion, race and tradition to create lasting harmony between Islam and the West. Journey into Islam is essential reading for anyone concerned with the future survival of the United States as a world leader, for the individual who faces the painful changes of globalization and for the very future of our planet.

Ahmed, rejecting stereotypes and conventional thinking about Islam and globalization, offers a new framework for understanding the Muslim world...



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AKBAR AHMED

Ambassador Akbar Ahmed is the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at American University in Washington, D.C. The BBC calls Dr. Ahmed “the world’s leading authority on contemporary Islam.” He served as High Commissioner of Pakistan to Great Britain. He has advised Prince Charles and met with

President George W. Bush on Islam. His numerous books, films and documentaries have won multiple awards. His books have been translated into many languages including Chinese and Indonesian. Dr. Ahmed is regularly interviewed on CNN, CBC, the BBC, and ARY TV, and has appeared several times on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Nightline*. He presented and narrated “The Glories of Islamic Art,” the three-part television series for Channel 5, U.K., broadcast in 2006. He is working on a play called *Noor*, and his book

with Amineh Hoti, *Knowledge: Why Civilizations Rise and Fall*, is with Polity Press, Cambridge. BeliefNet considers Akbar Ahmed one of the “Most Inspiring Person[s] of the Year, 2005.” In 2006, Dr. Ahmed won the “Purpose Prize Award” with Dr. Judea Pearl for their work on interfaith dialogue.



ABOUT A MORE PERFECT UNION



A MORE PERFECT UNION

The mission of A More Perfect Union is to promote the vitality of diverse peoples through the elimination of religious, ethnic, and cultural bias through education. A program of the Virginia Interfaith Center, AMPU was created in 2003 in response to the increased bias, even violence, against Muslims, Arabs, and South Asian religious and ethnic groups – those people and groups who most looked and sounded like the terrorists of 9/11.

We work in three distinct ways:

Open Eyes.

We help Virginians to become aware of the Muslim, South Asian, and Arab communities and the injustices they often face because of their culture and race. We help people to open their eyes to the intolerance around them.

Open Hearts.

We understand that acceptance is a choice. We encourage Virginians to open their hearts to the human experience of those who face bias.

Open Minds.

Lastly, we educate ourselves and others as to the true nature of the Muslim, South Asian, and Arab communities. Education is our greatest tool. When we have convinced one another to listen and learn, we begin to change the very systems that cause bias.

For more information

www.rethinkbias.org

Dr. Gretchen F. Schoel, Director

P.O. Box 12516, Richmond, VA 23241

804-643-2474

gretchen@virginiainterfaithcenter.org

The topics for each study revolve around three ideas in Islamic theology presented in *Journey into Islam: adl (justice), ihsan (compassion/goodness), and ilm (knowledge)*.

ABOUT THE STUDY

This study is arranged so that it may be done in six meetings as group members read the six-chapter book from start to finish. Groups may choose to use the questions to meet more or less often.

The topics for each study revolve around three ideas in Islamic theology presented in *Journey into Islam: adl (justice), ihsan (compassion/goodness), and ilm (knowledge)*.

Creating a Study Group

1. Recruit members. The ideal size for a discussion group is six to 12. If you have more than that, consider splitting the gathering into smaller groups.
2. Choose a facilitator to lead discussion. The facilitator should not only guide the group in choosing which questions to address, but to also keep the group on topic. Further, the facilitator should ask the group to be respectful of each other's opinions, as the following questions may lead to some disagreement.
3. Decide on how often you will meet and what time and day of the week work best. Also, consider where you would like to meet. If you hope to include food and drink, make sure to plan who will provide the refreshments.
4. Decide whether you will give the questions out ahead of time or wait until the meeting.
5. Because some of these questions are likely to lead to lengthy discussions, facilitators might want to choose those most relevant/interesting to his/her particular group.

Internet Resources

The author's Web site: www.akbarahmed.org

A More Perfect Union: www.rethinkbias.org

Virginia Interfaith Center: www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org

HELPFUL TERMS

- Adl: justice
- Fana: annihilation
- Fatwa: an Islamic religious ruling
- Ihsan: compassion/goodness
- Ijtihad: independent reasoning based on the Quran or scholarly texts
- Ilm: knowledge
- Ishq: love
- Jihad: "striving" or determined effort, now often translated as "holy war"
- Hijab: head covering
- Madrassah: a religious educational center
- Nur: light
- Ummah: the global body of Muslims, "community of believers"
- Waliullah: "friend of God"

MEETING ONE



Chapter One

An Anthropological Excursion into the Muslim World

Knowledge

1. Compare the following schools of thought on Islam (labeled according to Ahmed's model):

Deoband

Ajmer

Aligarh.

2. What are the differences between the Shia and Sunni and what role do these differences play in modern Islam? Are those differences being diminished by globalization?

3. How did looking at role models in the Islamic world help Ahmed's team to decipher attitudes? Would you have approached this study in a different way and how might that have impacted the research?

Justice

4. The term "globalization" may have many meanings, depending on whom you ask. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary calls it "the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets." The World Bank says it is "the growing integration of economies and societies around the world."

The International Monetary Fund states that the term came to use in the 1980s and generally refers to "the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and financial flows. The term sometimes also refers to the movement of people (labor) and knowledge (technology) across international borders." How does Akbar Ahmed depict globalization? What are the positive effects and what are the inequities created by this global phenomenon? What impact has globalization had on your life?

Globalization: The

Merriam-Webster

Dictionary calls it

"the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets."

5. In this information age, the term “media” is broader than ever before, encompassing television, radio, print publications, Internet publications, blogs, and podcasts. How is media influencing culture – in the Western world and the Islamic world? How can this influence be moderated without affecting free speech?

Compassion

6. “Three poisons” — greed, anger and ignorance — are a threat to all societies, according to Ahmed. “In Islamic theology, the ‘cure’ for precisely these vices is *adl* (justice), *ihsan* (compassion / goodness), and *ilm* (knowledge).” Discuss any instances of the three poisons you have witnessed since September 11, 2001. Then, share any examples of justice, compassion or knowledge you have experienced in light of 9/11.

7. “The actions of Osama bin Laden, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Taliban, *even if* they kill women and children are perfectly justified in Islam.” These first words of the book, spoken by Aijaz Qasmi to Akbar Ahmed and his team, stir strong emotions. Why do you think Qasmi said this?

NOTES:

MEETING TWO



Chapter 2 The Struggle within Islam

Knowledge

1. Discuss how Dara and Aurangzeb embodied the Deoband and Ajmer models.
2. Both the Deoband and Aligarh visits included discussions about the impact of technology. How is each group using technology and what are some of the positive and negative consequences for these groups?

Justice

3. In reading about Ahmed's team visiting Ajmer, Deoband, and Aligarh, describe whether your initial impressions of each model were changed by the description of these places.
4. How does each model approach justice? Does "justice" have the same meaning to each group?

Compassion

5. "The people of the Deoband were reaching out to us, despite all the boundaries they had erected between them and the non-Islamic world...There was not a hint of anger anywhere — and they, and everyone else we met, seemed genuinely excited to have me, and treated me respectfully," wrote Frankie Martin, one of Ahmed's team, about the experience of being invited into the Mosque at Deoband. How did the team's experience differ at Aligarh University in India? Was this difference surprising?
6. In describing his team's experience at Ajmer, Ahmed writes, "Our Muslim, Christian, and Sikh identities, though still intact, had expanded and merged in the mystical air of Ajmer. We were simply pilgrims united as one and sharing a sense of common divinity." How might you go about accepting someone of a different faith, while keeping your faith "intact?"

NOTES:

MEETING THREE



Chapter Three

Tribes, Women and Honor in the Age of Globalization

Knowledge

1. What role does appearance play for Muslims? Discuss Ahmed's observations of women changing their dress on the airplane. How did the appearance of the students, Hailey and Hadia, affect their experiences during the trip? How does dress affect the West's view of Muslims?

2. The following passage was written by Benjamin R. Barber in 1992, in the *Atlantic Monthly* article "Jihad vs. McWorld:"

"Just beyond the horizon of current events lie two possible political futures—both bleak, neither democratic. The first is a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened Lebanonization of national states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe—a Jihad in the name of a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality. The second is being borne in on us by the onrush of economic and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize the world with fast music, fast computers, and fast food—with MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's, pressing nations into one commercially homogenous global network: one McWorld tied together by technology, ecology, communications, and commerce. The planet is falling precipitately apart *AND* coming reluctantly together at the very same moment."

The planet is falling precipitately apart AND coming reluctantly together at the very same moment.

—*Jihad vs. McWorld*

How do events in the 15 years since this statement support or defy Barber's analysis in light of Ahmed's discussion of tribalism? (Barber's full article can be read at <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/foreign/barberf.htm>.)

Justice

3. What part does tribalism play in "honor killings" and other injustices toward women? Talk about your reactions to the stories of Mukhtaran Mai ("whose rape became a symbol of the plight of women") and Shazia Khalid (whose rape destroyed her and her family).

4. "Globalization presupposes the dissolution of boundaries; tribalism defines itself on the basis of boundaries," Ahmed writes. Are globalization and tribalism mutually exclusive? How might these two forces complement one another?

Compassion

5. "In 2002 the world's attention focused on the ruling in the case of Amina Lawal, a thirty-one year old Muslim woman from the Hausa tribe, who was sentenced to death by stoning for having a child out of wedlock...Amina was freed in 2004 in part because of a massive international media campaign waged by American celebrities like Oprah Winfrey." Can the media be an agent of compassion? What are the dangers of such a role?

6. How did the "Black Hawk Down" incident in Somalia further confuse relations between Western and Islamic nations? How can aid be given in a way that is culturally acceptable and promotes understanding?

NOTES:

MEETING FOUR



Chapter 4

Who is Defining Islam after 9/11 and Why?

Knowledge

1. Bernard Lewis, the renowned Princeton history professor, has been a leading voice on American policy in the Muslim world. The “Lewis Doctrine” has become the “indisputable foundation of U.S. foreign policy,” according to Ahmed. Look at this quote from Bernard Lewis on C-SPAN shortly after the Sept. 11, attacks.

“The question people are asking is why they hate us. That’s the wrong question. In a sense, they’ve been hating us for centuries, and it’s very natural that they should. You have this millennial rivalry between two world religions, and now, from their point of view, the wrong one seems to be winning. More generally ... you can’t be rich, strong, successful and loved, particularly by those who are not rich, not strong and not successful. So the hatred is something almost axiomatic. The question which we should be asking is why do they neither fear nor respect us?”

What are your reactions to this quote, given what you’ve read? Does this sentiment illustrate current Western policy?

2. “In pressing their case for the primacy of democracy and the run-up to the Iraq invasion, the neocon[servative]s, backed by like-minded political figures, intellectuals, and journalists, developed the idea of equating Islamic extremists with the threat posed by the Nazis in the 1940s,” Ahmed writes. Discuss whether the “pressing” for the “primacy of democracy” has been the best political course for the United States in recent years.

3. “Lacking such leadership, many Muslims throughout the world do not know what to make of globalization’s winds of change and are reacting to them in anger,” Ahmed writes. What is the state of Muslim leadership?

4. Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said he did not believe that Muslims had to become “Westernized in order to become modernized.” He added, “The defenses of Islam are progress and compassion. In order for that to happen, the scholars of Islam have to be engaged so that the people in the streets begin to appreciate what Islam really is.” Is Musharraf the embodiment of these words or a contradiction? How can Muslim nations become modernized while retaining their traditions?

...many Muslims throughout the world do not know what to make of globalization’s winds of change and are reacting to them in anger...

Justice

5. Given modern media's penchant for quick sound bites and sensational visual images, how can misunderstandings about the Quran's teachings be corrected? How has globalization changed the media's role in the world?

6. Many comparisons — all along the political spectrum — have been made between the issues and policies surrounding World War II and the "War on Terrorism." Compare and contrast the following ideas in light of these two wars: the military-industrial complex, the Marshall Plan and appeasement.

Compassion

7. "War is to be waged only in defense of one's family and community, and never in aggression. The principles of war codified by Abu Bakr, the first caliph of Islam, forbade the killing of holy men of all faiths, women, and children and the destruction of trees, crops or other vegetation." How does this teaching from the Quran compare with modern events?

8. "American Muslims who are able to express themselves freely are in a unique position between Western and Muslim civilizations and feel they are the leaders of the future on behalf of the ummah," Ahmed writes. Discuss what American Muslims' roles are and perhaps should be. Look at the example of Malik Hasan's family. How have they reached out with compassion?

9. Just as Muslims are horrified by their depictions in Western media, so too are Westerners upset by statements like those found in Islamic textbooks that refer to Jews as "apes" and Christians as "swine." How can people of faith get beyond the words of those on radical fringes to find compassion and understanding as fellow human beings?

NOTES:

MEETING FIVE



Chapter Five The Clash of Civilizations?

Knowledge

1. “Many Americans live in a bubble consisting of the office, the supermarket, and their sections of town, where they are not necessarily forced to engage with people who are different from them...” Do you feel that you live in a bubble? What about those around you? What are the dangers of such a bubble? What can be done to encourage people to get outside of their bubbles?
2. As some elements of the Muslim world become increasingly reclusive and restrictive of free speech, such as in the Deoband model, how might Westerners reach out to Muslims?
3. What is the “Taj Syndrome” and what role is poverty playing in Muslim populations?
4. “While each Muslim country we visited could boast a few excellent centers of learning, the overall picture of education in the Muslim world is depressing.” What has been the impact of the gap in educational opportunities available for Muslims? How might this void be filled?

Justice

5. How have the events such as those at Abu Ghraib prison and the rape of a girl in Mahmudiyah sullied the image of the United States? What can Americans do to improve this image?
6. Benjamin Franklin said, “Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.” What role has anger played in the political landscape since Sept. 11?
7. Ahmed described how two of his American students received very different treatment in taxi cabs in Cairo. The blue-eyed blond was repeatedly faced with lewd sexual advances, while the dark haired, dark-eyed student received more respectful treatment. How has Western media inadvertently propagated such behavior? Likewise, what is the global impact of readily available pornography?
8. Discuss the history of the United States’ relations with Iran and Iraq. What are some of the impacts of this tense past? Does this history seem to be missing from current U.S. dialogue and policy decisions?

*Whatever is begun in
anger ends in shame.*

— Benjamin Franklin

9. How have U.S. and Muslim nations' actions moved away from their ideals of justice, compassion and knowledge / wisdom? Is there a discrepancy in the way the United States promotes democracy around the world?

Compassion

10. "While the 'me' culture fuels the engine of globalization and keeps it working, it also produces some serious 'pollutants.' By encouraging self-centeredness in the pursuit of economic goals and pleasure, it destroys the capacity to empathize with others." What are some of the causes of this "me" culture? What are some ways to promote compassion in the midst of such a culture?

11. For many Muslims, the Prophet is known and loved as a family member. How do these feelings translate into actions and reactions in the Muslim world?

NOTES:

MEETING SIX



Chapter 6 Lifting the Veil

Knowledge

1. Below is a list of the historic figures named by Muslims in “Journey into Islam.” Had you heard of these persons before? Who of these figures do you resonate with? Do you have role models in contemporary society?

Historic role models

- Prophet Muhammad: the founder of Islam
- Abu Bakr, Caliph from 632-634 C.E.
- Umar bin Al-Khattab: Caliph from 634-644 C.E.
- Uthman bin Affan: Caliph from 644-656 C.E.
- Ali ibn Talib: Caliph from 656-661 C.E.
- Khalid bin Al-Waleed: the commander-in-chief of the Muslim army during the time of the Prophet up to the second caliphate
- Saladin: the commander-in-chief of the Muslim army who defeated the Crusaders and conquered Jerusalem in 1187 C.E.
- Imam Ghazzali: 11th century university instructor in Baghdad and Sufi thinker
- Ibn Rushd: 12th century philosopher
- Maulana Rumi: 13th century Persian poet and mystic
- Ibn Tymiyya: an influential Deoband thinker in the 14th century
- Ibn Khaldun: 14th century philosopher who posited “that the rise and fall of dynasties has more to do with the loss of social vitality and social cohesion than with the moods of God.”
- Dara Shikoh: a beloved Mughal prince in the 17th century; a follower of the Ajmer model, he was executed by his brother, Aurangzeb
- Aurangzeb: Dara Shikoh’s younger brother and tormenter in the Mughal Empire; he was a follower of the Deoband model
- Allama Iqbal: a Pakistani poet and philosopher in the 20th century
- Sir Sayyed: a native of India, he was a 19th century administrator for Britain; he was a Muslim who promoted the Aligarh model
- Muhammad Ali Jinnah: an Indian Muslim politician and leader of the All India Muslim League who founded Pakistan in the Aligarh model in the 20th century

Justice

3. “Too many Arab rulers use the crutch of Israel directly or indirectly to avoid working toward a democracy until that ‘problem’ is resolved. For Pakistan’s politicians and army generals, the crutch is Kashmir and the ‘threat’ from India, which they use to delay introducing genuine democracy, human rights, and civil liberties.” What do these

“crutches” allow? Does America also have crutches?

4. Ahmed sums up all that he learned on his journey into Islam by advising the United States and Muslim leaders to “be true to your own ideals.” “Truth and justice are American ideals,” Ahmed said. Muslim ideals include knowledge, compassion and justice. What can each group do to reclaim these ideals?

Compassion

5. The book began with the chilling words of Aijaz Qasmi, the young Deoband man who toured with Ahmed’s team for a week. How did his week with Ahmed change his perspective? What hope does that provide for dialogue with more fundamentalist groups?

6. Discuss Ahmed’s personal journey through the three Islamic models of Deoband, Ajmer and Aligarh. What were his conclusions? In which model do you find the greatest hope?

NOTES:

*Be true
to your
ideals.*