"IF THE BOOK IS READ WITH THE SERIOUSNESS AND ATTENTION IT MERITS, IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO HAVE AS PROFOUND AND FAR-REACHING AN IMPACT ON RELIGION, SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT AND HUMAN RELATIONS AS CHARLES DARWIN’S ORIGIN OF SPECIES EVENTUALLY CAME TO HAVE ON SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIAL THOUGHT NEARLY A CENTURY AND A HALF EARLIER."

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A DARK DAY

The dark day of September 11, 2001 left a gaping hole in the heart of humanity. Whoever may have been the real perpetrator of this heinous crime, the finger of blame is left pointing in the direction of Muslims.

No one seems to care about the fact that at the moment there is no hard evidence linking Muslims to this crime. Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain says he is convinced. Secretary of State, Collin Powell, says the government has “good information.”

President Parvez Musharraf of Pakistan says he is finally convinced of the merit of the case. But Musharraf had to accept an offer made to him by the United States he could not refuse. From the beginning, he found himself between a rock and a hard place. And Blair is an accuser and a prosecutor and a committed activist in this case.

And when it comes to killing thousands of civilians in retaliatory bombings and destabilizing entire societies and states along the way or in the aftermath, “good information” may not be good enough.

This is not to say the U.S.A. and Britain do not have a case. They very well may, and it could even be a persuasive, if not entirely a convincing case. But the important thing is to make that case to the American public – and to the world at large.

Terrorists operate in the shadows. They have the luxury of being able to lie, dissemble and deceive. Civilized people must work in broad daylight. They must not only speak the truth and do justice, but must also appear to be doing so.

For, it is on such a clear-cut moral foundation that the edifice of national and international law ultimately rests. Force is most effective when it proceeds from a strong moral foundation and not when it acts as a substitute for it.

So, it is fair to say that evidence against Muslims as prime suspects in the dark deeds of September 11 is somewhat shaky. And there are those in America, Britain and elsewhere who seem to recognize
But right now, the main concern in many sections of American and British policy circles, media and public opinion does not appear to be about evidence, or even about the normal requirements of the evidentiary process.

Right now, the focus seems to be more on crime and punishment and on revenge and retribution – it does not seem to matter much on or against whom. Right now, there seems to be an overwhelming urge on the part of many to see things starkly in black and white: a terrible act has been committed; Muslims appear to be the actors; so let us go and get them.

What most people – including many Muslims – don’t seem to realize is the simple fact that Muslims are the ones who have emerged as the clearest and the most stark losers and victims in this terrible tragedy – without a single redeeming fact or feature in their favour.

AMERICAN LOSSES

No matter how one looks at it, American losses resulting from this tragedy are staggering. New York City lost hundreds of police officers and fire fighters.

In a single day of death and destruction, close to 7000 people died in New York, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania.

Among the dead were Americans, British, Bangladeshi, Indian, German and others. Among the dead also were hundreds of Muslims.

Over 60 percent of Americans cried when they saw fiery death rain down on innocent people. Among those who cried were Hindus, Jews, Christians, Muslims, White, Black, Brown and others – adults as well as children, men as well as women.

The tragedy brought life in America virtually to a standstill. Economy took a nosedive. People went into shock.

All civilian aircraft were grounded and jet fighters with orders to shoot took over the skies. By any measure, the damage to American economy, society, security and prestige was unprecedented.

Yet, the fact is that, in some ways, Muslims are the biggest losers and the sorriest victims of this catastrophe.

WHAT THE MUSLIMS SUFFERED

So far as the Muslims are concerned, September 11 is an unmitigated disaster.

For Muslims, it is not a simple or single tragedy; it is for them a double, triple, multiple tragedy. For, they are, simultaneously, the real victims of the tragedy as well as its alleged prime suspects.

Their position is not unlike that of a husband who, upon returning from a trip, discovers the body of his beloved wife and the mother of his beautiful children in his bedroom and is charged with her murder.

English language rarely could have seen more blatant examples of “adding insult to injury” and “victim blame” than the situation in which the Muslims find themselves in the aftermath of September 11.
First of all, their name is mud – no matter how you look at it. Almost overnight, Muslims went from being the nice and interesting new kids on the block in America to suspect # 1 in the worst terrorist act in the entire American history.

Not just as individuals with specific identities, but as an entire group tied together by common faith, culture – and appearance – no matter how much we may try to mitigate this.

Now, they run a serious risk – practically everyone of them, if they look and act Muslim or carry a Muslim-sounding name – of being hunted down and thrown behind bars at the flimsiest of excuses including minor traffic violations – and without the courtesy of due process.

Second, American might and armour are massing around Afghanistan. The sheer thought and talk of an all-out American onslaught has turned close to a million Muslim Afghan men, women and children into desperate refugees on the run.

Third, whatever freedoms, respect, rights and opportunities Muslims had come to enjoy in America – and the West in general – seem to have suddenly evaporated and turned into a mirage, bringing what appeared to be a religious and cultural Islamic juggernaut to a grinding halt.

Regardless of the powerful words of support coming from the president, the Attorney General and other leaders, law enforcement and airport security personnel seem to be having a field day at the expense of Muslims, ejecting some from scheduled flights and hauling some others off for targeted searches on the ground.

Anyone today can pick up the phone and call the local police or the FBI to report spotting “suspicious-looking” individuals “acting suspiciously” in any place. That will instantly uncoil the long arm of the law to grab and deal with any Muslim-looking individuals.

For, in the present environment of confusion, anger, uncertainty and fear, to look Muslim, no matter how remotely, and no matter by whose definition, is to look and act suspicious – guilty-by-Islam and guilty-by-Muslim-look.

In the minds of many people, the shock and horror of the tragedy have turned the famous bedrock of civil society “Innocent Until Proven Guilty” into a cliché sadly in search of meaning.

Despite all the protestations to the contrary, deionisation of Islam and Muslims fills the media channels and the airwaves. Strident voices over the airwaves have become judge, jury and executioner, so far as Muslims are concerned.

Among them are those who demand that Muslim cities be bombed to rubble, regardless of the loss of civilian life.

There is a certain “bloodlust,” as President Bush put it, in the air, and it is directed at one single target: Muslims. It does not matter whether these Muslims are in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria or Iran or somewhere else. At least the early refrain of the battle cry seems to be, let us go get the Muslims.

But the cruel and cold reality of the present situation is that no matter how you look at it, it is the Muslims that will end up losing their life, treasure and national sovereignty. It is their governments and societies that will be destabilized.

Fourth, according to an opinion poll, one-third of the population of the state of New York thinks Muslims must be thrown in internment camps, just like the Japanese were in 1941 in the aftermath of Pearl Harbour.
Could it happen in actual practice in the America of the 21st century? Probably not, but the possibility remains a distinct one. If not for all Muslims, at least for significant numbers of them.

According to newspaper reports, five hundred Muslims are already in custody. Their cases are being processed in secret courts. Not even their attorneys are privy to their whereabouts. In many cases, attorneys are not even allowed to meet their clients.

Responsible and credible civil libertarian voices such as Alan Dershowitz are talking openly about the legitimacy of “ethnic profiling” for security searches. That means one thing: singling out Muslim-looking individuals for special searches and possible harassment.

Supreme Court Justice, Sandra Day O’Connor, expressed the view that we may now be entering an era of truncated civil liberties, even though she did not appear to endorse ethnic profiling like Alan Dershowitz did.

Regardless of whether or not internment camps become a reality for American Muslims, the very thought of them is sobering and chilling. It negates much of what the Muslims had come to believe about American democracy, freedom and rights.

The seeming legitimacy and respectability of the thought of internment camps for Muslims in the minds of so many Americans is not something any individual or people can forget or overcome in a lifetime.

Many former World War II Japanese victims of internment camps have not gotten over their pain to this day, even though America apologized and paid compensation.

Fifth, already, there have been incidents of Muslims being shot dead – among them a Muslim look-alike Sikh and another Muslim look-alike Mexican. Others have been assaulted. Mosques have been defaced.

Muslim women, born and bred in America, some with roots going back several generations, sporting a scarf as a head cover, have been reduced to tears at the very thought of venturing out into familiar streets and malls which are no longer so familiar or safe.

Sixth, Pakistan has been reinvented and recommissioned to spearhead the destruction of the very Taliban it had fashioned earlier out of a polyglot mix of Islamic students and its own military recruits to fight America’s cold war battles against the Soviets.

This is likely to have disastrous consequences as much for Pakistan as for Afghanistan. The two Muslim societies are likely to fight themselves to a state of near-death. Much as happened with Iraq and Iran during the 1980s.

Even if they don’t, one fraternal people will be the cause of much death, destruction, suffering and ruination for another fraternal people – as has happened so often in the history of the Muslim people.

In the mid-nineties, the Taliban was a baby born out of a marriage of convenience between American intelligence, weapons and dollars on the one hand and Pakistani military and intelligence services on the other hand.

Now, it is the same parents that are looking to destroy the Frankenstein monster they created together. Millions of much-ravaged and poverty-stricken Muslim people of Afghanistan and Pakistan – men, women and children – are simply a footnote to this game of geopolitics.
No one seems particularly worried about the human toll or suffering in Muslim Pakistan, leave alone Muslim Afghanistan, as the grim tapestry of death and destruction unfolds all around Muslim central Asia.

There seems to be a general indifference about the prospects of imminent death, destruction and further destitution for humans - Muslim or not - numbering millions, that loom on the horizon.

Seventh, from Indonesia to India and from Iraq to Iran and Sudan, Muslim life and treasure seem, more than ever before, to hang precariously in the balance. Muslim societies and states have become routine airwave fodder in America as preferred targets for likely death, destruction and destabilization.

Eighth, the sheer enormity of the terror unleashed on an unsuspecting America on that dark day, has spawned a broad-based movement in America for a re-evaluation and rollback of civil liberties - something no one thought was ever likely to happen.

If it were to happen – as it is already beginning to happen in practice – it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out who the main targets of the projected curtailment of rights and liberties will be. It will overwhelmingly be Muslims.

The government is already asking college campuses to open up student files for snooping – this includes students with Muslim-sounding names who have never known a home other than America.

But, for Muslims, the tragedy is a much greater one, even on this front. For, so far as Muslims are concerned, liberty is not a personal luxury or political expedient. It is the very cornerstone of their creed. It is the very foundation on which the superstructure of Islam is built.

From this point of view, Patrick Henry, the famous Virginian, may have been echoing Islam when he cried out in the late 18th century: “Give me liberty or give me death!”

In the aftermath of the September 11 tragedy, the threat of loss of life as well as of liberty on a global scale hangs over the heads of Muslims like a Democlean sword. To be a Muslim is to be a suspect by definition – no one knows of what specific crime.

And the better Muslim you are, and the more passionately you are attached to your din (religion or way of life), and the more Muslim you look, the more likely you may be of being a suspect.

And finally, no one even seems to know or care that not one or ten or one hundred but several hundred Muslims died in the World Trade Centre on that black Tuesday - September 11. One estimate puts the number of Muslim dead in the World Trade Centre tragedy from 800 to 1000.

**VODKA AND STRIP BARS: PATH OF ISLAMIC TERRORISTS TO MARTYRDOM**

Everyone knows how uncommon common sense can be. We also know that analytical reasoning and critical thinking are no more a forte of the general American public than world affairs.

So, let us not expect too many people to ask if a plot of this magnitude, sophistication and “brilliant planning and execution” – as vouched for by high government officials – could have been the handiwork of a lone fugitive in the caves of the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan.

No matter how much money he may be said to have at his disposal and no matter how many dedicated and loyal followers he may have.
For, the September 11 operation gives every indication of being the handiwork of the most elite, resourceful, well-trained and sophisticated among state intelligence machines in the world – regardless of its identity or affiliation.

It bespeaks of a wealth of resources, personnel, training, experience, access to highly classified government codes, contacts, coordination and insight into the workings of the American society, system and institutions.

These can hardly be within the capability of a band of foreign individuals whose stay in America was of questionable duration, unless each one of them was Superman or James Bond.

Let us not expect anyone to lose any sleep over the reported conduct of these “fundamentalist” Muslim fanatics the night before the attack: getting drunk in bars, provoking bar brawls over unpaid bills and planting hundreds of dollars in the skimpy garments of lap dancers in strip bars.

What a trusted and true Islamic way they chose of preparing themselves for “martyrdom” and for meeting their lord the next morning! The picture does not square with the fundamentalist Muslim fanatic profile.

**MUSLIMS IN SHOCK**

No, let us not expect anyone to ask: For what or whom are the Muslims mourning? For, the Muslims are clearly in shock and in mourning, like the rest of the Americans – and like much of the rest of the world.

Are the Muslims mourning for the 7000 human lives that were lost so brutally and mercilessly right in front of their eyes, on television? Are they mourning for humanity?

Are the Muslims mourning for the death of their fellow-Americans and for the destruction of tens of billions of dollars of their national treasure?

Are they mourning the loss of jobs for hundreds of thousands of their fellow-citizens and for the destruction of some of their most magnificent national monuments like the twin towers of the World Trade Centre?

Or, are the Muslims mourning the threat to their own jobs, life, property, security, dignity, honour and civil liberties right here in America and the West – and all over the world?

Let us, therefore, not expect anyone to ask any of these questions. Not now anyway.

Yet, there is one set of questions, someone, somewhere is bound to ask someday about the alleged perpetrators and about the horrible deed they perpetrated on that dark day in New York City, in Washington, D.C. and in the state of Pennsylvania.

**WHAT KIND OF MUSLIM WERE THEY?**

What kind of Muslims were these, someone is bound to ask someday, who in one masterful stroke were able to deal so many death-blow to such a wide range of Muslim interests, causes, hopes, dreams, accomplishments and triumphs?

Not only here in America and the West but throughout the world? For, in one brilliant flash, they gave the green light to India, Russia and China, among others, to crack down ruthlessly on their own respective Muslim minorities.
What kind of Islam did these masters of diabolical planning and demonic performance believe in or practice that they, in a single fateful day, let loose such a deluge of unmitigated disasters on Muslim America and Muslim Europe and the Muslim world in general on so many different fronts?

What were these “devoted” Muslims – the ones who are held to be the perpetrators, whoever they may be – really thinking? In one single blow, to destroy the good name of Islam in America and the world? And, at the same time, close every avenue of opportunity and advantage for Muslims all over the world? And put Muslims everywhere on the defensive – and on the run?

What perfect dreamers and visionaries of Islamic glory and resurgence were these “devoted” fanatical Islamic terrorists that in one clear swoop they threw the ultimate doomsday book upon Islam and Muslims for the foreseeable future?

Perfect and meticulous and “brilliant” planners of terror they were, we are told by those in charge of our security at the highest levels. And yet, it appears, they were not without chinks in the armour of their cleverness and cunning. For, they left behind detailed manuals, maps and manuscripts of their terrorist designs and undertakings – some of them in Arabic.

WHAT KIND OF ISLAM WAS THEIRS?

What kind of Islam did they practice, someone is bound to ask someday, that it teaches them to commit suicide, when the Prophet of Islam himself so clearly and emphatically forbade his followers from ever committing suicide?

What kind of Islam was theirs that it made them kill thousands of innocent civilians on a peaceful day, without apparent cause, warning or notice?

For, Islamic teachings and traditions specifically forbid – even in times of war – the killing of women, children, religious leaders, non-combatants and those who lay down their arms, or take refuge in a place of worship or in their own houses behind closed doors?

These are all questions worth asking. But whether they will be raised and given their due share in the ongoing national and international debate in the media and in government policy circles at the highest levels, is another matter.

And even if they are, will that become public knowledge is yet another matter.

Someday, university professors will get grants, tenures and promotions writing books on this subject, asking these very same questions. They will go on to make “discoveries” regarding these issues that will be heralded in newspapers as pioneering and pre-eminent.

Someday also, news media will get awards doing analysis and investigative pieces and documentaries pursuing these very same angles and uncovering answers to these very same questions.

But evidently not today!

Today is not the day to expect answers to any or all of these questions. For, today is not the day for a relentless pursuit of truth. Today, the focus is not on law and justice and truth and respect for civilian life, but on the patching up of America’s wounds and on the staunching of the haemorrhage in America’s soul.

And up to a point, it is only right and fair and proper that it should be so. For, right now, America is
wounded and bleeding – in her body and in her heart and in her spirit. As a result, America’s state of mind right now is not very different from that of a wounded tiger in a jungle.

It is not unreasonable, therefore, that there should be voices at large in America today that are clamouring for a “measure of vengeance” against those seen as the perpetrators – whoever they may be, even though no one knows for certain who they are.

What really matters is the fact that right now, the perpetrators have been pronounced to be Muslims.

A consensus quickly seems to have been reached on this question within hours of the disaster.

For, according to government sources and media reports, they are all people with impeccable Muslim names, though, it turns out, many of them with questionable personal identities – and at least one of them, newspapers say, is still alive.

But sooner or later, America will have to rise above her grief, anger, shock and pain – and above her lust for vengeance and global domination – and speak and act in a more human and responsible manner – befitting its role as the world’s only superpower and moral leader.

America – and the world – will have to rise to a higher and more moral and sophisticated level of analysis and understanding and deal seriously with some of these same questions.

**DENOUNCING TERROR IN ALL FORMS**

At the same time, let us make no mistake about it. To a Muslim mind, the bombings were a despicable crime, no matter whose was the hand and the mind behind them. From an Islamic point of view, they ought to fill every human heart with disgust, shame, sorrow, anger and revulsion.

Muslims absolutely and categorically denounce terror in all its forms, wherever and by whomsoever it may be perpetrated – regardless of whether it is perpetrated on or by Muslims.

In this sense, the September 11 terror acts are no different from some of the worst atrocities and terror acts perpetrated by the Israeli army and settlers on Palestinian Muslims or by the Serbs on the Muslims in Bosnia.

As such, they deserve the fullest and most unreserved denunciation and condemnation from Muslims everywhere, as does the reign of terror let loose by the Israelis and the Serbs on Muslim Palestinians and Bosnians.

Muslims must not mince words in speaking the truth on this issue, for God made them the last refuge of truth and integrity in this world.

In doing this, the Muslims must separate the act from the actor, something the rest of the world has not been able to do very well. The act is known and it must be unequivocally rejected and condemned.

As for the actors, even though Muslims may have some doubts about their identity, the Muslim position about the actors is quite clear and emphatic: hunt down the culprits; bring them to justice; try them in public; execute them.

From a Muslim point of view, the guilty person, group, agency, institution or state must be held accountable and punished with all the authority and force of national and international law,
regardless of who that may be – Muslim, Christian, Jew, atheist or someone else.

If it turns out that the perpetrators were indeed Muslims, even then the Muslim position does not change. For, a Muslim's devotion to truth transcends tribal, ethnic, national and religious loyalties and allegiances.

To understand this fully, let Muslims recall the words of the Prophet, Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam, when he declared from the pulpit that if his own daughter, Fatimah, had been guilty of theft, he would have no hesitation in punishing her.

The Prophet, Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam, was responding to the entreaties of people to spare a woman of noble birth who had been found guilty of theft.

Therefore, from an Islamic point of view, it is not the actor that defines the act, but it is the act that defines the actor. That means, regardless of whether it is the terrorists, or the government of Israel, or any other government or agency, that cause civilian deaths and destruction of homes and property, they all stand condemned by their own acts.

This is what Islam teaches in a nutshell: speak the truth and uphold the principle of justice, even if it be against yourself, for, you are the champions of truth and witnesses of God on earth.

From an Islamic point of view, it is a fallacy and a travesty to argue that, when it comes to criminal matters and questions of justice, something is right because the actors are our friends, but the same thing is wrong if the actors happen to be our adversaries.

**THE WHY QUESTION**

At the same time, America – and the world – need to go beyond the question of the “act” and the “actor” and include in their deliberations and analysis a third component to the gory equation of September 11. America and the world must seriously focus on the “Why?” question.

Whoever did this horrendous thing, we must ask, what was the motivation behind it? What rationalization, no matter how twisted and wrong, could have led anyone to the perpetration of a horror of this kind?

If Muslims did it, what pushed those Muslims – especially, the more “religious” and the more pious among them – to do something so hateful, vile and dastardly – something so alien to Islam and so contrary to their own nature, upbringing and character as Muslims?

It is not enough for America to assert that these Muslim fundamentalist fanatics hate us because of our freedoms and our democracy. For Muslim fundamentalists to hate America with such passion and to the point of wreaking such wholesale carnage on innocent civilians, there must be stronger, deeper and more complex reasons.

Common sense roundly rejects such glib clichés, generalizations and oversimplifications. What America needs to do, therefore, is to look deeper, and search harder for truth, and have the courage not to cover up the truth in the interests of short-term political expediency. For, cover-up and untruth are not the way to serve the best interests of the American people.

As a result, what America needs to do is to re-examine its policy toward the Muslim world with regard to a number of issues.

One such issue America needs to carefully reconsider is American domination and exploitation of the
Muslim world and its vast resources from Algeria to Indonesia and from Saudi Arabia to Oman and Brunei.

Another issue that merits immediate American review is America’s support of its client Muslim regimes around the world that deny Muslims the basic rights of political self-expression.

In Algeria, the Muslims played by the rules of Western democracy and won the elections fair and square. And yet their electoral victory was snatched out of their hands by the military, which, in their mind was at least tacitly supported by France and given a silent nod by America. Thereafter, the world stood by as the military massacred the Algerian Muslims by the thousands.

In other words, oddly enough, what the fundamentalist fanatic Muslims hate about America is not the American freedoms, but the forcible and often brutal denial of these very rights and freedoms for their people in their own societies.

And, rightly or wrongly, many of them blame America for it. For, they consider many of their own Muslim governments to be little more than American and European puppets.

A third issue the fundamentalists may feel strongly about is the positioning of non-Muslim American forces on the Arabian peninsula. To them, it is a direct violation of one of the basic tenets of Islam. For them, to quietly swallow the American presence on the land of Islam is to abrogate a basic religious principle.

A fourth issue of American foreign policy the fundamentalist fanatic Muslims may dislike is the American underwriting, with arms, money and political and technical support, of the brutality and inhumanity of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land in direct violation of numerous U. N. resolutions.

When the fanatic fundamentalist Muslims look around their own neighbourhoods, this is what they see: indiscriminate killing and maiming, on almost a daily basis, by the government of Israel, of Palestinian civilians – men, women and children. This to them is terrorism of the worst kind.

Then they see the targeted assassination of dozens of Palestinian leaders, activists and intellectuals by Israeli security and intelligence agencies with impunity, which to them is nothing short of state terrorism.

Then they witness the daily demolition of Palestinian homes by Israeli bulldozers and the ongoing confiscation of ancestral Palestinian land for Jewish settlements in the occupied territories contrary to international law.

This to many of these fundamentalist fanatic Muslims is just another example of the brute terrorism perpetrated against them and their people in broad daylight and on a daily basis.

To many of them, what America – and the West and the world – suffered on that dark day was what they and their people throughout the Muslim world and in particular in places such as Palestine and Kashmir lived and experienced almost on a daily basis.

And this is not so just in the eyes of the fundamentalist fanatics, but also in the eyes of many of the more moderate and enlightened elements among the 1.2 billion Muslims around the world.

And then they all see, behind all these atrocities and acts of barbarism, terrorism, injustice and cruelty that are visited upon them and their families daily, the not-so-invisible hand of America – and in many instances the West.
And then they come to see clearly, helplessly and in a state of utter frustration, despair and desperation the American and Western double standards and hypocrisy when it comes to the Muslims.

It is, therefore, now time for America, in the wake of the tragedy of September 11, to review honestly and seriously its policy positions with regard to some of these issues. The American administration then needs to take the American people fully into its confidence on these issues.

For, the American people have a right to know the truth on these issues. And so does the rest of the world, even though the people in much of the rest of the world know these things better than most Americans do.

If the September 11 bloodbath leads to such an outcome on the part of America and the American people, the innocent civilians who died so tragically that day will not have died in vain.

The whole world – Muslim as well as non-Muslim – will be a safer and happier place if the tragedy of September 11 leads to the government of Israel completely pulling out of occupied Palestinian territories; halting and dismantling Jewish settlements on them; and negotiating viable borders and living in some kind of workable peace with its neighbours including the Palestinians.

As a result, these are not questions that can be brushed aside lightly. No one who has the best interests of the American people at heart, can possibly shout down, ignore or downplay these questions or simple muscle them out of the agenda for serious national and international debate and discussion.

For, the long-term security and best interests of the American people – Muslim as well as non-Muslim – and of the rest of the world are inextricably intertwined with the answers to some of these questions and to other questions like them.

Maybe, as time goes by, and as the anger and grief subside, some of these questions will inevitably find their way to the surface. There were indications that such a review of American policy toward some of the most sensitive Muslim issues such as Palestine was already being undertaken by the Bush administration.

It is reported in the press – actually under-reported considering its enormous importance – that the American administration had made a decision, a few days prior to September 11 massacre, to declare its support for a Palestinian state.

According to media reports, Secretary of State, Gen. Collin Powell, was set to make the announcement to the United Nations General Assembly, when – as they say – all hell broke lose and took the wind right out of the sail of such an announcement, if not actually render it almost irrelevant.

But there is no reason why the Bush administration should not regroup on this issue and make it a key focus of their foreign policy. It certainly has the potential to address one of the oldest, deepest and most obstinate root causes of unrest and terrorism in the world.

So, someday, some of these questions will be raised and discussed and some of the answers will be forthcoming. But will it be too late by then? Will a great many more innocent lives have been lost as a result of our indiscriminate bombing of people and places before we pause and ask if we are really doing the right thing?
COPING STRATEGIES

In a sense, it is already too late for the Muslims – those living in America, Europe and elsewhere. The damage already done to the reputation and security of Muslims is real, staggering and irreversible in the short run.

As a result, today is a day for Muslims to explore ways and strategies for coping with the reality of the damage that has already been done to their good name and to their sense of security and well-being in the world.

Now is the time for them to find out how best to deal with the fresh wave of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim prejudice that is sweeping North America and the West.

It is time for Muslims to come up with ways to effectively deal with their own very special private pain and predicament, within the overall framework of the national and international calamity of which they have become an inseparable part.

So, what can the Muslims of America and Europe do to cope with their triple, quadruple, multiple grief, loss and tragedy?

How can they deal with the prejudice that is engulfing them from so many different sides?

The ideas offered here, however, go beyond the question of merely coping and survival and remind the Muslims of their true roots and mission in life. They call for enlightened social activism and high-minded moral courage of the highest calibre on the part of the Muslims.

Strange as it may sound, the advice offered here calls for nothing less than profound and courageous leadership on the part of the grief-stricken, harassed, hunted and fearful Muslim community in reaching out to the equally grief-stricken, confused, anxious and fearful non-Muslim communities in America and Europe.

It reminds the Muslims that Allah created them for a moral and spiritual leadership role in the world. The Muslims must, therefore, turn their present shock, pain and grief into an opportunity to reach out to the non-Muslim community in North America and Europe.

The Muslims must reach out to their non-Muslim neighbours throughout North America and Europe with the message of Islam. They must reach out with the Qur’an, the hadith (saying of Prophet Muhammad) and the story of the life of Muhammad, Sallallahu Alaihi wa Sallam. And with genuine love, concern and caring for their non-Muslim compatriots, fellow-citizens and neighbours.

Muslims must know that there is a lot of good in America, and in Canada, and in every European society – and an awful lot of people with goodwill, compassion, courage and fairness.

Now is the time for Muslims to reach out to the side of America and Canada and Europe that is good, decent, kind, generous, caring, fair, enlightened and open-minded.

President Bush has shown extraordinary leadership and political courage in reaching out to the Muslims and denouncing and discouraging anti-Muslim prejudice – and in coming up with the idea of throwing his support behind the notion of a Palestinian state.

Many other national and local leaders have joined him in asking Americans to treat their Muslim neighbours with respect.
Droves of decent, fair-minded and kind Christians and Jews in many communities have taken the extra step of reaching out to the Muslims to assure them of their support.

**A MILESTONE IN AMERICAN JOURNALISM**

Religion Newswriters Association (RNA), in its convention of September 21-23, 2001, adopted a resolution to stop using the expression “Islamic terrorists” in news coverage of events related to the recent bombings.

This is a milestone in American journalism. And it is a significant triumph for truth. America - and the world - will be a better place for it.

If this becomes standard journalistic practice, as I expect it would, Muslim and non-Muslim children in America will no longer have to grow up associating Islam in their minds and psyches with terrorism.

That means, hopefully, we will no longer be filling our streets, offices and institutions with as many damaged individuals and confused souls with mangled psyches - both non-Muslim and Muslim - as we used to do up to now.

Damaged non-Muslims that harbour hate, loathing and fear of Muslims in their bosoms, because they have come to blindly associate Islam with terrorism.

Damaged Muslims that are burdened by guilt, self-hate, sense of inferiority, fractured self-concepts and punctured personalities, because they grew up on a steady media diet associating Islam with terrorism, and because they were painted, at every opportunity, by the broad brush of guilt by association.

America and Europe - and the world - will be healthier, happier, safer places as a result of this. And America and Europe - and the world - will be freer. For, America and Europe, then, will have the benefit of truth, and truth shall set America and Europe - and the world - free.

This will be a new wave and level of freedom for America and Europe - based on truth and justice and true human equality under God - whose time has come, should that be the will of Allah. And then this new umbrella of freedom, truth and justice, this time around, will also include the Muslims.

The RNA struck a blow for truth and freedom - and for American journalism - when it pointedly noted that terrorism was not a function of simple religious fanaticism, lunacy or hate, but that it had its roots in a complex web of causes that ranged from personal to political and from economic and sociological to religious.

These are all unmistakable silver linings that twinkle at the edges of this dark and terrible cloud that has descended upon America and Europe including American and European Muslims - and the rest of the world.

END OF PART ONE

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