

Society is the Prison

Could Sayyid Qutb, "the father of Islamic fundamentalism," express any compassion for infidels and idolaters? In *Milestones*, his most famous work, he writes, "We invite people to Islam because we love and we wish them well, although they may torture us." [74] Not only does he feel compassion, he feels love for other humans. He pities the people who live without the light of Islam and feels a duty to save them, to welcome them into his utopian society. "This din [75] aims at bringing back the entire human race to its Sustainer and to free it from servitude to anyone other than Allah." [76] His community welcomes all races and nationalities to live together in a "relationship of love." [77] He believes that he has found the solution to human suffering and he wants to share it with every human being.

In a 1946 article for the Egyptian newspaper *al-Risala*, however, Qutb condemns Westerners: "How I hate and despise those Westerners! all without exception: the British, the French, the Dutch, and now the Americans...I hate and despise just as much those Egyptians and Arabs who continue to trust Western conscience." [78] And, later, in his Qur'anic commentary, he instructs Muslims to wage war against secular governments. If he hates Westerners, why does he invite all people to utopia? Does he hate some people or love everyone?

MAN VERSUS SOCIETY

Qutb's appeal to love and hatred appear to contradict one another only when extracted from the context of his entire philosophy. Though it may not be clear in one isolated quote, I argue that, within the broader context of his work, Qutb differentiates between man and society, never treating society as the aggregate sum of individual people. Instead, the two are at odds: modern society is the enemy of man, the prison of individual men. Recognizing this distinction reveals that, while Qutb hates societies and their leaders, he loves the human individual. Similarly, when he enjoins Muslims to battle the forces that oppose Islam, he orders them to fight only against the leaders who represent the society and control mankind. While he rarely uses words as strong as 'hate' to describe his attitude towards societies - this quote represents the extreme of his language - he explains that these jahili societies are unhealthy, and devoid of morality. These societies strip humans of their dignity and lead people to

rebel against God.[79] He calls on Muslims to destroy the institutions of this established order. Qutb, however, never calls for an attack on people. He writes in Milestones,

[Islam] has the right to destroy all obstacles in the form of institutions and traditions that restrict man's freedom of choice. It does not attack individuals nor does it force them to accept its beliefs. It attacks institutions and traditions in order to release human beings from their pernicious influence, which distorts human nature and curtails human freedom.[80]

According to Qutb, Muslims must not attack individuals. Instead they must battle the forces that restrict the transmission of the message of Islam, the societies that imprison their citizens and the tyrants who force other humans to obey them.

Before turning to the religious context of Qutb's philosophy in order to identify the distinction between man and society, we should examine the historical and cultural background of Qutb's thought in order to place Qutb's hatred in a social context. Examining the specific historical context reveals why Qutb first hated society and shows how this hatred paved the way for the development of the ideology of Milestones and In the Shade of the Qur'an. To explain these origins and the process of development, I examine when and why Qutb wrote this article condemning Westerners for al-Risala.

SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR HATRED

Qutb wrote of his hatred for Westerners in this article in 1946. World War II had just ended. Only months before the publication of the article in al-Risala, President Truman asked the British to allow 100,000 Jews from Europe to move to the Palestinian Mandate. Truman's support of Israel shocked and enraged Arab intellectuals. The United States claimed to support international social justice - like many Egyptians, Qutb had expected the U.S. to support the Palestinians. But this action, this willingness to gamble "with the fate and rights of humans in order to win a few votes in an election," showed the true "conscience" of America, Qutb wrote.[81] In 1946, Qutb came to see the U.S. as just another imperialist power bent on destroying the political and cultural sovereignty of Middle Eastern people in order to expand its influence.

Qutb, like all intellectuals of the Arab-Muslim world, saw the foundation of Israel as another page in the long book of Western imperialism, another instance of Western crusader mentality aimed at occupying and stealing Arab lands. Egyptians, too, had suffered under occupation, and, like most people who have lived under an imperialist power, Qutb deeply resented imperialism.

Qutb learned to hate imperialism at a young age. Britain had militarily occupied Egypt since 1882, exploiting Egypt's resources for its own benefit. In the beginning, Lord Cromer and an elite class of inexperienced British bureaucrats controlled Egyptian politics and barred Egyptians from any say in their own government. Later, with the outbreak of World War I, the British declared martial law and put political power in the hands of the British High Commissioner. The demands of war, ever-increasing needs for food and labor, fell upon Egyptian peasants and wartime measures caused great anger and resentment among the populace. The difficult economic conditions and the refusal of the British to give the Egyptian people any control in their government led to the rise of the nationalist movement, increased calls for independence, and finally the popular revolution of 1919 to 1922.[82] Qutb, a teenager during this period, had listened in on his father's political meetings and shared in these nationalist sentiments. He would continue to condemn imperialism for the rest of his life.

The 1919 revolution in Egypt brought the establishment of parliamentary monarchy, but the British were not willing to abandon their interests in Egypt. The British maintained control by manipulating the palace and the parliament, pitting the parties against the king.[83] The most powerful political party, the Wafd -- a party founded with a goal of national independence -- negotiated with the British and accepted political favors from them while the king struggled and failed to exert his power against the British and the parliament. In addition, The Egyptian monarchy encouraged Westernization and supported reforms in the educational system based on the Western model. Qutb believed that the government betrayed the Egyptian people by negotiating with the British and allowing continued British military presence and economic control. Qutb, like many Egyptians, saw with increasing frustration that the Egyptian government did not represent the Egyptian people.

Qutb echoed the views of earlier Islamic reformers, describing a "corruption of faith" in Egyptian society and blaming the growing influence of foreign values in Egypt. Qutb saw decay in Egyptian society. He saw the humiliation of Egyptians who were not allowed to govern their own country nor attend to their own needs. Like other Egyptians, he suffered the shortages, economic hardships, and the presence of British soldiers.

Qutb, however, feared more than political imperialism - he feared moral imperialism. Not only did the British control the government and economic policies of Egypt, but their Western way of life invaded Egypt as well. Western values crept into Egyptians' minds and corrupted their consciences. In his writings during that period, Qutb expanded on the ideas of Easternism, an intellectual movement in the 1920s and 30s that contrasted the spiritual and oppressed East against the materialistic and imperialist West.[84]

Qutb wrote that the Western conscience was "rotten," a product of the materialistic civilization that has no soul or spirituality. The West planned to invade the minds of Muslims with these devices - it planned a "slow annihilation and profound and complete corruption" of Muslim morality.[85] This mentality spreads, says Qutb, for Western society tricks humanity with "its luster, noise, and sensual enjoyment in which the soul suffocates and the conscience dies down, while instincts and senses become intoxicated, quarrelsome and excited." [86] In prison a decade later, Qutb would call this civilization jahiliyya and explain that it is the nature of jahiliyya to spread, to "crush all elements that seem dangerous to its personality." [87] Like an imperialist empire, the decaying conscience spreads and threatened the morality and humanity of Muslims. First it overtook the West and now it threatens Egypt and "the spirit of Islam." [88]

Qutb felt pride in Egypt's own cultural history, spiritual identity, and integrity. Egyptian culture was more spiritual and pure, he said, and did not need to borrow systems from the West or adopt the materialistic Western way of life. Qutb asked Egyptians to stay true to their cultural heritage and their religion and not to mimic their Western oppressors. "The question for me," wrote Qutb in 1946, "is my honor, my language, and my culture." [89]

This background illuminates the reasons behind Qutb's hatred of the West and the context explains the contradiction between his love and hatred. In 1946 when he wrote this article, Qutb watched in fear as Western culture invaded Egypt and threatened Eastern values. Western leaders, the leaders of the United States for example, lacked moral conscience and would use any means necessary to gain power, to conquer the rest of the world. Qutb hated the hollow civilization, the rotten conscience, and the heartless, power-hungry leaders. Instead of resisting the West and fighting the imperialists, Egypt's leaders, the palace and the parliament, accepted help from the West, made compromises, and submitted to capitulations. Instead of shunning Western influence, the Egyptian powers encouraged Westernization. Instead of driving the rotten Western conscience out of Egypt, the leaders welcomed it in and pushed it onto Egyptians. Qutb, therefore, hated the political powers of Egypt, "the Egyptians who continue to trust the Western conscience." Western societies and Western leaders with the cooperation of the rulers of Egypt imperialized, corrupted, and exploited Egypt. When Qutb says he hates Westerners or Egyptians, therefore, he refers not to individuals, but to the societies and their leaders. Leaders and societies, not individuals, corrupt Eastern morality and spirituality.

AMERICA AS ONE EXAMPLE

In articles in Western media, writers describe Qutb's trip to the United States as the pivotal experience in his life and thought. In the New Yorker, Lawrence Wright adheres to the common view: "Qutb returned to Egypt a radically changed man. In what he saw as the spiritual wasteland of America, he re-created himself as a militant Muslim, and he came back to Egypt with the vision of an Islam that would throw off the vulgar influences of the West." Scholars, too, cite Qutb's trip to the U.S. as the origin of his radical thought. Emmanuel Sivan wrote in his book *Radical Islam* that Qutb's experience in America "was indeed the formative experience that converted him [...] to fundamentalism." [90]

The facts, however, undermine this depiction. Qutb had published seething attacks on Europe and the United States years before he even left for the U.S. - his criticisms of Westernization were part of the reason for his exile. His experiences in America "confirmed and honed the distinctions which he had long supposed separated the West, including America, from the East..." [91] but those experiences did not inspire a radical or sudden shift. Qutb's years in the U.S. reinforced his existing views of the West, to Western imperialism and Western values. Qutb did not develop his philosophy suddenly or impulsively. Nor did he develop his philosophy in reaction to America specifically; within Qutb's worldview, America is an example of a Western civilization, a society with a "rotten conscience." America is not the only example, but one of many. Though American journalists and scholars attempt to depict Qutb as hating Americans with anecdotes of his experiences in the U.S., in reality, Qutb hates American society because he hates Western civilization.

SHIFT TO RELIGIOUS TERMS

Though the shift was not sudden, Qutb's thought did evolve during the time he spent in America and continued to develop after he returned to Egypt. After his return in 1950, Qutb began to describe the influence of Western society as more than moral and cultural imperialism. In later writings, he began to express his hatred for Western societies in religious terms. He labeled these societies jahiliyya, ignorant and ungodly, antithetical to Islam.

In *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, Qutb describes in Qur'anic terms the struggle that righteous Muslims must undertake against fallen society. As before, man and society remain distinct - hatred for society does not extend to individuals. Now, however, hatred becomes action: Qutb describes the role of the righteous man in the battle against jahiliyya. In his interpretation of Sura al-Anfal in volume seven of *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, Qutb explains the duty of the believer, the jihad against jahiliyya, and the utopia to come using the sura to frame these themes. These ideas reappear in

Milestones and are, therefore, well known, appearing frequently in popular discourse. We return to the Qur'anic commentary beyond Milestones to examine the foundation of Qutb's thought.

SURAT AL-ANFAL

According to Islamic history, the Prophet received most of the revelations of Surat al-Anfal immediately after the battle of Badr. When the battle ended, God revealed to Muhammad that he had assisted the Muslims and ordained the victory. The sura describes the battle between the Muslims of Medina and the Quraysh of Mecca, a powerful tribe in pre-Islamic Arabia. The verses reveal details about the battle itself, as well as the proper way to divide the spoils of war and the proper treatment of prisoners. In addition to the references to the battle in the Qur'an, the hadith[92], collections of sayings and deeds of the Prophet, and eighth and ninth century histories detail the battle.

The battle occurred in 624 C.E., the second year after the Prophet emigrated to Yathrib (now Medina) from Mecca. The Muslims were still a minority in Yathrib, and their position was fragile. The Battle of Badr was the first major battle for the Muslim community: this victory against great odds established the Muslims as "challengers and potential inheritors to the prestige and the political role of the [Quraysh]"[93] and established the authority of the Prophet. Soon after the battle, the Muslims won many converts and gained control of Yathrib.

Originally, Muhammad had planned to raid a Qurayshi caravan carrying goods from Syria back to Mecca. As the Prophet and his small army of just over three hundred companions rode through the desert towards the caravan, they received news that the Quraysh had sent an army of a thousand men to protect the caravan. The Prophet asked his companions if they wished to continue. Despite the size of the Meccan army, the companions chose to stand by the Prophet's command and follow him into battle. The Muslims proved victorious. They killed approximately fifty of the Quraysh on the battlefield, took between fifty and seventy more as captives, and forced the Qurayshi army into retreat.[94]

Though custom dictated that the captives be held until their families paid their ransom, the Muslims killed three captives immediately. The first was Amr ibn Hashim, a leader of Mecca whom Muhammad later named Abu Jahl, the Father of Ignorance. Amr ibn Hashim fought the spread of Islam and brutalized converts: he beat 'Abd Allah, the first man to recite the Qur'an before the Ka'ba, ridiculed and blackened the names of new Muslims, whipped slaves who converted to Islam, and forbid Meccans from buying

goods from Muslim merchants in order to drive them into poverty. 'Abd Allah decapitated Amr ibn Hashim as he lay wounded on the battlefield. The Muslim troops killed two other captives, clan leaders who had tortured Muslim converts. Then the Prophet received revelation to spare the other captives: "O Prophet, say unto those captives who are in your hands: 'If God knoweth any good in your hearts, He will give you better than that which hath been taken from you, and He will forgive you. Verily God is Forgiving, Merciful.[95]" Muhammad ordered the Muslims to treat the rest of the captives well until their families paid the ransom.[96] [97]

INTERPRETATIONS OF SURAT AL-ANFAL

This sura invites many possible readings. The interpretation is pivotal because the sura outlines the role of the believer in holy war. Deplorably, some have used Surat al-Anfal to justify indiscriminate violence. Saddam Hussein's secular regime in Iraq, for example, used the sura to justify genocide against the Kurds. His campaign of genocide was called "al-Anfal" in an attempt to lend religious justification to the murder of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children, most of them Muslims. Muslim extremists, too, use Surat al-Anfal to motivate recruits to attack non-Muslims and to justify this violence.[98] They quote, for example, verses 12 and 13: "Your Lord inspired the angels saying: 'I am with you. So give courage to the believers. I shall cast terror into the hearts of the unbelievers. Strike, then, their necks and strike off their ever fingertip.' (12) This is because they have defied God and His Messenger. Whoever defies God and His Messenger [will find out that] God is severe in retribution. (13)"[99] Other readers, however, argue that these injunctions only apply to specific situations in history. Historian Karen Armstrong explains that, because these verses were revealed during a war, they only apply to wartime when the lives of the believers are at risk. God ordered Muhammad to kill the unbelievers because "if the Muslims were defeated, they would all be slaughtered to the last man or woman." [100] Armstrong notes that extremist groups like al-Qaeda quote these verses out of context and ignore the verses that prescribe peace. Read in context, she argues, the Qur'an only justifies a war of self-defense and only as a last resort.[101] How did Qutb, the so-called father of Islamic militancy, read this sura?

In volume seven of his commentary, Qutb uses Surat al-Anfal to expound his major theme: the destruction of jahiliyya in order to establish an Islamic utopian state. He reads each verse as a part of a greater picture -- each verse is an arrow that points in the same direction. Unlike most commentators who focus on one individual verse at a time, Qutb draws on verses from various suras to show how a major theme runs through the entire Qur'an.

In this way, Qutb's reading of Surat al-Anfal supports a facet of his theme, his belief that leaders, not individuals, are the enemies. He is clear: the enemies at the Battle of Badr were the Jahili leaders. The Muslims did not fight the pagan civilians of Mecca - they fought an army led by the most vicious opponents of Islam. They fought the leaders of Mecca who prevented Muhammad from spreading his message. His reading of 8:12-13 provides a clear example. In verse 12, God orders the angels to strike off the heads and fingers of the unbelievers. Verse 13 continues, "Whoever defies God and His Messenger [will find that] God is severe in retribution." [102] What does it mean to defy God and the Prophet? Does this mean that God will punish the person who has not chosen Islam?

In his commentary, Qutb responds,

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Whenever a Muslim community takes active steps to establish the principle of God's oneness and to implement His message, it will be granted victory against any enemy that opposes it in defiance of God and His Messenger.[103] [italics added]

Does God grant victory against an enemy that opposes the concept of His oneness? Does Qutb say that the Muslim community, with the help of God, will force a person to accept Islam? Salahi translates the feminine pronoun " ??" to "it": "It"(italicized above) will triumph against any enemy that opposes "it." In the Arabic, "it" can refer to the Muslim community or the community's message. "It" cannot refer to "God's oneness" because "God's oneness" is a masculine noun. An individual could refuse to accept "God's oneness," but only a leader could prevent the Muslim community from spreading its message. In light of this distinction, it is clear that the Muslim community does not battle the individual who does not believe in the Islamic God, "God's oneness" - this person is not the enemy. Qutb repeats 2:256 throughout his work: "There is no compulsion in religion." Muslims must not force their beliefs onto any individual, but they must be free to spread Islam without impediments, to present it to everyone so they may choose to become Muslim. The community will battle who or whatever attempts to block the spread of the message. "And [Islam] uses physical power and jihad to abolish the organizations and authorities of the jahili system which prevent people from reforming their ideas and beliefs, forces them to follow

deviant ways, and make them serve humans instead of their Almighty Lord." [104] Islam opposes those with the power to keep the masses ignorant of Islam. God will grant Muslims victory against the leaders and remove the barriers to the spread of Islam.

Qutb interprets Surat al-Anfal within the historical context by describing verses in relation to the Battle of Badr. He then extends the interpretation to apply to modern times. The Quraysh controlled the shrine at Mecca, and therefore held great power in Arabia. Historical accounts show that the Quraysh did not merely disagree with Muhammad's message - they tortured Muslims and intimidated converts. [105] The Quraysh represent the powerful and corrupt political leaders who attempt to prevent their followers from converting to Islam. In the Battle of Badr, however, the Muslims killed only fifty combatants and released most of the hostages. The Prophet's companions executed only five of the most hostile leaders, those who had tortured Muslims. The Muslims executed three leaders immediately after the battle, but then God revealed verse 70 [106]: "Prophet, say to the captives who are in your hands: If God finds goodness in your hearts, He will give you something better than all that has been taken from you, and He will forgive you your sins. God is much-Forgiving, Merciful." [107] According to the historical account, most of the captives did not convert and were instead released when their families paid the ransoms. For Qutb, however, encouraging a hostage to convert to Islam is the most important reason to take captives in battle. Qutb comments on verse 70:

From the Islamic point of view, keeping prisoners of war in the hands of believers is only a means of opening up the essence of goodness that may be deep in their hearts. Thus their nature becomes recipient to the call to accept the divine faith and follow guidance. No vengeance is to be exacted on those prisoners of war. [108]

The purpose of this battle, and every battle, was and is to facilitate the spread of Islam. Gentle preaching to hostages is the best way to teach them the faith. Before the companions received verse 70, they slew five of the most hostile leaders of the Quraysh. Qutb is clear, however, that the revelation of verse 70 forbid killing for revenge. The ultimate goal of military jihad is to open the pathways for verbal jihad, and then free all people, even cruel leaders, from jahiliyya.

Qutb calls for the destruction of institutions that "restrict man's freedom of choice," [109] the Qurayshi ruling council for example. In order to destroy these institutions, Muslims must remove their leaders. Qutb, however, never instructs his followers to kill the leaders. The goal is not violence or vengeance but to open their hearts to Islam so they no longer restrict the spread of the message. In Qutb's vision, the leaders will convert to Islam and

renounce their positions as leaders of jahiliyya. In this way, it is possible to destroy the jahili leaders without resorting to violence. In Qutb's reading, Muslims fought at Badr not only to free the people of Medina from the Quraysh, but also to free the Quraysh themselves from jahiliyya and to allow them all to freely embrace Islam.[110]

Surat al-Anfal has great significance for Qutb - this sura sets the historical precedent for a modern-day battle against the modern jahiliyya. The Battle of Badr was the first major battle between the Muslims and the forces of jahiliyya. In Qutb's mind, this was not just a lesson in history, for today jahiliyya threatens Muslims again. Qutb thus calls for a new battle; he asks Muslims to follow the example of the Prophet and vanquish jahiliyya again. In order to fulfill their duty to free mankind and to protect and spread Islam, Muslims must fight the jahili leadership. Qutb calls for an attack, a 'holy war' against 'the apparatus which directs the operation of deception.'[111] He calls for an attack against the machine, the leaders and the culture itself.

ANOTHER JAHILI GOVERNMENT

When the Free Officers seized control of Egypt in 1952, Qutb and the Muslims Brothers had high hopes. After the revolution, Qutb met with Nasser to counsel him on Islamic issues and chaired the conference on "intellectual and emotional emancipation of Islam" that Nasser attended.[112] Qutb even had an office in the leadership building of the RCC (Revolutionary Command Council).[113] He had great faith in Nasser and his promises of social justice. In the first days after the revolution, Qutb wrote on the front page of al-Risala,

We the people recognize that today a new dawn appeared and that a new reign casts its shade on this valley. We recognize that this blessed move is not for the sake of an individual or a body or a party. Rather it is for the sake of us, the people. This new uprising alone tore up the political police, curtailed capitalism, [and] gave freedom to workers' unions...[114]

Qutb believed the Free Officers would bring true change to Egypt. He saw within them elements of his ideal leaders, the leaders he described in Social Justice in Islam: he believed the Free Officers expressed the will of the people of Egypt and would strive always towards the common good. Qutb hoped Egypt would cast out capitalism and corruption - products of Western influences -- and take a step on the path to a truly Islamic society. In August of 1952, Qutb published a letter in the paper al-Akhbar asking for the establishment of a "just dictatorship for six months for a comprehensive purgation which deprives corrupted ones of every

constitutional activity, and which does not permit political freedom except to honest persons." [115] Democracy, he said, was unnecessary, because the most important goals - freedom from the British, feudalism, and capitalism -- were "entrenched in the conscience of the nation and its collective mind." [116]

It wasn't long, however, before relations between Nasser and Qutb turned sour. Sources differ on the reason for their disagreement, but, whatever the reason, Qutb resigned from the RCC and became more deeply involved with the Muslim Brotherhood. In the year that followed, tensions between the Free Officers and the Brotherhood escalated. The regime had already abolished all political parties claiming that this action was necessary to achieve the revolution's goals of destroying "corruption and imperialism." [117] The Free Officers, however, had allowed the Brotherhood -- classified as a religious organization -- to persist. Despite the initial cooperation between the two groups, the Free Officers saw the Brotherhood as an increasing threat to their power and in January of 1954 the regime found an excuse -- a student rally that escalated into violence -- to outlaw the Brotherhood and arrest its leaders. Then, three months later, the regime legalized the Brotherhood again and released the leaders from prison since, as President Neguib put it, they "promised to behave themselves." [118]

The Brotherhood, however, continued to criticize the regime. When the regime negotiated the Heads of Agreement, a treaty granting the British a right to reoccupy the Canal Zone for seven more years, the Brotherhood was outraged. The regime had censored the press, but the Brotherhood circulated secret pamphlets condemning the agreement. Qutb criticized the government in these pamphlets, taking aim at its secular policies, its willingness to compromise its goals by negotiating with the British, and its attempts to destroy the Muslim Brotherhood. [119]

A few months later, after a Brother attempted to assassinate Nasser, the regime lashed out against the Brotherhood and arrested over one thousand members and leaders with the intention of completely destroying the organization and, with that, "the regime cleared the path for long-term dictatorial rule." [120] This was not the short term, just dictatorship that Qutb had asked for two years earlier.

Convicted of taking part in a conspiracy against the government, Qutb spent the next ten years in prison. It was during those years that he began to describe Nasser's government as the example of tyranny and jahiliyya. [121] He saw that the regime was jahili and idolatrous to its core: the brutality of the prison guards convinced him that these men had abandoned God and worshiped Nasser instead. [122] The rulers of Egypt served neither the will of the people nor the law of God, but enforced laws of their own

making. The regime forced Egyptians to obey and worship it. In addition, Qutb believed that Nasser fought against Islam by attempting to "modernize the institutions of official Islam, particularly al-Azhar, in an effort to turn them into the most effective possible transmission belt for state ideology." [123] This tyrant, this "iniquitous prince," attempted to destroy Islam and overwhelm it with jahili systems. Nasser had turned himself into a false God and was steering the Muslims in the country to jahiliyya.

In the beginning, Qutb had hoped the Free Officers would usher change and steps towards a moral and Muslim society, but now he saw that Nasser was fighting Muslims in Egypt and forcing them into idolatry. Not only the West had fallen, he wrote while in prison, but so had Egypt and every country in the world. Nowhere in the world were people truly free - jahiliyya had overtaken the entire world. "The whole world is steeped in jahiliyya," [124] wrote Qutb. Now was the time for action, for Muslims everywhere to join together in jihad to save the entire world from jahiliyya.

LOVE FOR ALL MANKIND

Though these people who have strayed from God are infidels, Qutb's appeal to hate is not directed toward them. Non-Muslims are not evil, only misguided and ignorant of Islam. The Qur'an [125] says that at the time of creation, God instilled every human with an ability to understand religious Truth. Therefore, Qutb says, all people have the ability to discern and follow the will of God. All people possess an inborn capacity for goodness. Morality and love of God are natural to humans. The problem arises, however, when man, "swayed by his desires, deviates from the truth imbedded in the depth of his innate nature, and when he tries to follow laws of his own making, or follows his own opinion instead of Allah's commandments..." [126] If a person falls into this trap, only religion can bring him back, and his fitra, his natural inborn character, will guide him back to his natural state. [127] People stray, not because they are evil, but because they lose touch with their fitra. Muslims, therefore, must teach Islam and help people reawaken their fitra. They must tear down the obstacles that prevent man from acting in accordance with his nature.

Qutb shows compassion for the individual - he believes that the mission of Islam is to free all people from their prisons, to show them happiness, to fulfill them, and to save them. "Islam will take the initiative and move to save humanity and free people throughout the world from servitude to anyone other than God. It is not possible that Islam will confine itself to geographical boundaries, or racial limits, abandoning the rest of mankind and leaving them to suffer from evil, corruption, and servitude to lords

other than God Almighty."[128] The purpose of Islam is to save every human being.

Even the most vicious opponents of Islam can reform. As Qutb explains in his description of the significance of the Battle of Badr, the jahili leaders may open their hearts to Islam and denounce their past. The purpose of taking hostages is the hope that they may open their hearts to Islam. "God will then find goodness in them... Thus their nature becomes recipient to the call to accept the divine faith and follow guidance."[129] In other words, Muslims may fulfill their duty to destroy jahili leaders not by killing them, but by teaching them Islam, by appealing to their human goodness and helping them to reestablish their human qualities. Some people have buried their fitra deep within themselves, but, if they are willing, God will find it. Conversion, not murder, is the goal.

Qutb believes he can spread Islam through words, example, and by establishing freedom for all people. He shows total faith that each person, granted freedom and shown the purity and beauty of Islam, will choose Islam on their own. God instilled morality in all human hearts, so Qutb says he loves them. "We invite people to Islam because we love them, not because we have something to gain from their conversion."[130] His intentions are positive - he believes conversion will bring a person back to their natural, harmonious state.

PERFECT SOCIETY

Islam is not only a religion, says Qutb, it is an all-encompassing way of life. "By the Shari'ah of Allah is meant everything legislated by Allah for ordering man's life. It includes the principles of belief, principles of administration and justice, principles of morality and human relationships and principles of knowledge."[131] In Qutb's vision, there can be no division between church and state. God is the only true ruler, and Islam is the only possible system of rules. If a person must submit to the man-made laws of a secular state, he or she must obey powers other than God. "According to the shari'ah, 'to obey' is 'to worship.'"[132] "Anyone that serves anyone other than God in this sense takes himself out of Islam, no matter how strongly he declares himself to be a Muslim."[133] To obey a power other than God is shirk, polytheism, a grave sin. In a secular society - or any society that is not perfectly Muslim -- the rulers, the state, politics, nationalism, and parties become false idols and usurp the sovereignty of God. These societies enslave their citizens and force them into polytheism.

A man can only serve one master, says Qutb, and that master should be God. Only God's law perfectly suits man's

nature. The Shari'a is natural because like the laws of the universe and, like man himself, the Shari'a comes from God. Only the Shari'a can create "harmony between [man's] life and nature." [134] When man worships many idols, when he obeys many laws and rulers that conflict with his nature, he becomes confused and miserable. Modern society creates within man a "hideous schizophrenia," and this is "the origin of modern misery - the anxiety of contemporary society, the sense of drift, the purposelessness, the craving for false pleasures." [135]

Only by forming a Muslim community and accepting the Shari'a into every aspect of their lives can people escape this confusion and misery. True Muslims base life on tawhid, the unity of God. Tawhid mandates the unity of church and state because state and religion must be the same in order for men to worship and obey only one power. There are cannot be human laws or constitutions, only the Shari'a, God's law.

The Muslims in this community will unite and love and support each other. "In the world there is only one party of Allah;" Qutb writes, "All other parties are of Satan and rebellion." [136] Because all people worship and obey one God, Qutb assumes they will naturally form a single harmonious community. Like the first Muslim community in the time of the Prophet, people will join together "on an equal footing in the relationship of love." [137] The community welcomes any and all human beings. In one sense, Qutb is radically pluralist:

Those who opt for another system, whether based on nationalism, colour and race, or on class struggle, or similar corrupt theories, are truly enemies of mankind. They are the ones who do not want man to develop those noble characteristics which have been given to him by his Creator. Nor do they wish to see a human society benefit from the harmonious blending of all those capabilities, experiences and characteristics which have been developed among the various races of mankind. [138]

In this community, there is no conflicting patriotism or false allegiances -- Islam is the only nationality. Race does not divide people; love and worship unite them. Non-Muslims, too, are welcome in the community, for, according the Qur'an "there shall be no compulsion in [matters of] religion" and it would be tyranny to force someone into Islam. Non-Muslims, though they worship a different God, will benefit by living under the Shari'a - in his vision, the Shari'a will foster the human dignity of every person, even if they do not worship the same God. Qutb's utopia, based on love and submission, brings out the noblest characteristics in humans by welcoming peoples of all abilities, different strengths, and varied racial heritage. In this perfect community, humanity flourishes.

Despite rejecting man-made law, Qutb recognizes the need for some form of government. Only a few lines of Milestones and In the Shade of the Qur'an explore the practical matters of government. Qutb prefers to discuss the ideology and leave the logistics for the scholars of the future community. His description of the governing structure is therefore vague and general. He is clear that he does not mean to destroy a tyrannical system just to replace it with another: "Establishing the rule of God on earth does not mean that sovereignty is assigned to a particular group of people... God's rule is established when His law is enforced and all matters are judged according to His revealed law." [139] A just and faithful ruler will merely serve as the voice of the community to implement and enforce the Shari'a. A ruler who has proven unwavering faith to God alone will not strive for power or pride and will never use his political authority for the benefit of himself, his family, or his tribe. [140].

In his earlier work Social Justice in Islam, Qutb explains his vision of government in the Muslim community in a little more depth. He explains the importance of shura, consultation. Shura, he says, is "one of the principles of government in Islam" because the Prophet frequently consulted his companions and accepted their advice. [141] In addition, the first Caliphs consulted with the Muslims of the community before making decisions. [142] Based on the Prophet's example, shura is an element of the Shari'a and is therefore a religious duty. Muslims should only obey a leader who "recognizes that government belongs only to God" and implements the Shari'a [143]; therefore, any ruler who does not consult with the people has no authority. Government must be completely consensual, ruled by the majority through one representative, never a self-serving elite. Qutb's divine utopia will be a form of democracy because the Qur'an commands it.

PATH TO THE SOLUTION

Muslims have a duty, explains Qutb, to engage in jihad to abolish jahiliyya and free mankind from tyranny. Muslims, however, should not be hasty - in the beginning they should not fight outside forces. The battle begins within the Muslim's own heart. Qutb bases this belief on the first years of Islam when the Muslim community was still small and weak. This period, the Mecca period, was a time of training, preparation, and education - not fighting. Qutb explains the reason why the earliest Muslims refrained from battle during this time. It was important to begin by,

[Disciplining] the Arab mind to persevere and endure personal and collective hardship as a means to transcend personal egos. One's own self and immediate community should no longer be the focus and prime movers in one's life. People needed to be

taught restraint and self-control and how not to react with immediate rage and anger, as was their nature.[144]

Before beginning an external jihad, every believer needed to strengthen his or her own faith and establish his or her place in the community. The believers would not enter the eventual battles against the Quraysh with haste or anger. Instead, they would study and train. Later, when fighting the Quraysh, they would see the battle as a carefully planned step in a larger mission.

Qutb asks his followers today to base their jihad on the example of the Prophet's community. The believers must be realistic and levelheaded, move slowly, and evaluate the situation at every step.[145] From there, Qutb recommends a process of activism to his readers. First, the believers must disentangle themselves from modern jahiliyya. They should symbolically reject and withdraw from their society and process of government and combat the influences of jahiliyya within their own minds.[146] From there, they initiate the offense, jihad, the struggle to disarm the enemy.

Jihad has two forms, a military form and an advocacy form, but, Qutb writes,

The Islamic approach does not resort to the use of verbal argument when confronting material power. Nor does it ever resort to compulsion and coercion in order to force its beliefs on people. Both are equally alien to the Islamic approach as it seeks to liberate people from subjugation so that they may serve God alone.[147]

Preaching alone is not enough to tear down this real prison. Mere words will not topple tyrants. Believers, says Qutb, must accompany their words with action and fight the oppressors. But, believers must never direct this action against individuals. Blurring the distinction between individual and tyrant leads to a common misreading of Qutb, a misreading that leads terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda to commit murder. True, Qutb instructs Muslims to fight and to preach. Preaching and fighting, however, are not simultaneous or interchangeable. Muslims must fight against tyrants and preach the message of Islam to individuals. Qutb repeats over and over, "There is no compulsion in matters of religion" and he explains that Islam does not gain converts through physical force. Qutb is emphatic: the goal of jihad is not to force conversion, but to wrest political power from the tyrants, to seize their weapons of law and communication.[148]

When channels of communication are open and the Muslims have toppled the tyrants who sought to deceive people, the call to Islam must be a gentle, loving invitation. "The correct procedure is to mix with discretion, give and take with dignity, speak the truth with love, and show the superiority of the Faith with humility." [149]

The ultimate goal of jihad is not oppression, dominance, or personal gain, but to set humans free and violence against them will not free them.

Some "defeatists," writes Qutb, define jihad as a purely defensive war. They "succumb to the pressure of the present circumstances and to the Orientalists' wily attacks" and try to find evidence that the early Muslims only went on jihad to expel invaders and defend the community against outside attack. This kind of thinking, says Qutb, "betrays stark defeatism" and "a lack of understanding of the nature of Islam." [150] Jihad is an active, offensive movement that seeks to free mankind all over the world. "If we must describe Islamic jihad as defensive, then we need to amend the meaning of the term 'defence' [sic] so that it means the defending of mankind against all factors that hinder their liberation and restrict their freedom." [151] The battle is offensive, but the goal is defensive. The military form of jihad is necessary to eliminate the barriers to free choice and communication and to replace unnatural laws. An active approach is the only possible way to save mankind, to impose God's law and true freedom. After removing the obstacles, jihad takes another form, preaching and advocacy. Muslims must teach the message of Islam and welcome all human beings into the Muslim community. In this state of free choice and open communication, says Qutb, each person may choose to accept or reject Islam.