



# REVIVING IJTIHAD

Unlocking the Door to  
Islamic Renewal

Maulana  
Wahiduddin Khan



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## Contents

TAQLID AND IJTIHAD	5
Contemporary Muslim Society	6
Respect for Humanity	7
Consideration of Circumstances	9
Gradual Implementation of Shariah	10
Change in the Field of Action	13
Stages of Hadith Study	15
The Importance of Ijtihad	16
What is Ijtihad?	16
Intellectual Crisis	18
The Ability to Reassess	18
Compilation of Fiqh During the Era of Muslim Power	21
No Example Available	22
The Issue of Blasphemy Against the Prophet	23
The Power of Peace	27
The Traditional Fiqh is Insufficient	29
Utilization of Modern Opportunities	31
Military Mindset and Peaceful Means	34
Anachronistic Attitude	35

Criticism and Ijtihad	37
Choosing the Battlefield of Badr	39
The Consequences of Ignoring Criticism	41
Principles Over Personalities	43
The Benefits of Criticism	45
True Standards and False Standards	47
The Need for a Revolutionary Mindset	49
Two Types of Ijtihad: General and Special	49
The Need for an Additional Qualification	50

## TAQLID AND IJTIHAD

The human mind can be categorized into two types: an imitative (taqlidi) mind and an independent reasoning (ijtihadi) mind. The distinction between these two can be described as follows: an imitative mind is a closed mind, while an independent reasoning mind is an open mind. The mental journey of an imitative person comes to a halt at a certain point, whereas the mental journey of an independent reasoning person continues to progress, ceasing only with death. This distinction can be better understood through an example.

Shakespeare was a great writer of the English language, who passed away in 1616. On the other hand, George Bernard Shaw, an English writer of a later period, was born in 1856—there was a gap of about three hundred years between their periods of activity. In the history of English literature, Bernard Shaw holds a lesser position as compared to Shakespeare. Referring to this, Bernard Shaw famously remarked:

“I am smaller in stature than Shakespeare, but I stand upon his shoulders.”

This statement reflects an independent reasoning approach. Such a way of thinking fosters broad-mindedness and courage. In a society where this attitude prevails, the journey of intellectual evolution continues unhindered. Each generation adds to the intellectual heritage of its predecessors and further develops it to pass on to future generations.

## **Contemporary Muslim Society**

Now, consider Muslim society. In the present era, the process of intellectual evolution among Muslims has almost come to a standstill. The primary reason for this stagnation is the dominance of imitative thinking (taqlidi), while the practice of independent reasoning (ijtihadi) has been abandoned, and treated almost as a vice to be avoided. Generally, there is a widespread belief that all knowledge and research have already been accomplished by the scholars of the past (salaf). The prevailing notion is that our only task is to read their books and follow their conclusions. However, this mindset creates a permanent obstacle to intellectual progress.

Muslims today face two possible approaches in their way of thinking:

1. “My stature is lesser than that of my predecessors, but I stand upon their shoulders.”
2. “My stature is smaller than that of my predecessors, and therefore, I lie at their feet.”

The first approach represents the ijthadi way of thinking, which leads to continuous intellectual progress. In a community where this intellectual tradition exists, each generation fully respects its predecessors but uses their achievements as a foundation to advance further. This ensures continuous growth and progress.

In contrast, the other school of thought is based on blind imitation, restricting the intellectual progress of Muslims at a certain point. This approach has two disadvantages simultaneously. First, it deprives such individuals of reaching the higher intellectual levels of religious truth. Second,

it causes such individuals to fall behind other nations in intellectual and academic fields. In the ever-moving caravan of humanity, they remain behind as mere dust on the road.

This imitative mindset is precisely what the famous pre-Islamic poet Antarah bin Shaddad al-Absi (d. 615 AD) expressed in the opening lines of his Mu'allaqa:

*Hal ghaadara ash-shu'araau min mutaraddami*

*“Have the poets left any patch unsewn?”*

In other words, he believed that everything worth saying had already been said, leaving nothing new for others to contribute. This kind of thinking puts a complete stop to intellectual progress, resulting in intellectual stagnation—a state more harmful and dangerous for an individual or community than anything else.

To further understand this issue, here are a few examples from the collection of Hadith.

## **Respect for Humanity**

An incident involving the Prophet Muhammad is narrated by various narrators in different collections of Hadith. In Sahih al-Bukhari, the incident is recorded as follows:

“In Medina, a funeral procession passed by the Prophet Muhammad while he was sitting. Upon seeing the procession, he stood up out of respect for it, and his Companions stood up with him. It was mentioned to him that it was a Jewish funeral (not a Muslim one). He responded, ‘Was he not a human being?’ (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1312).



Imam al-Bukhari's contribution is monumental, as he collected hundreds of thousands of Hadith and, through extraordinary effort, selected 7,563 Hadith (including repetitions) to compile the invaluable collection known as *Sahih al-Bukhari*. This work, regarded as the most authentic book after the Quran, stands as a singular achievement, unparalleled in its significance.

However, future generations must not confine themselves to Imam al-Bukhari's arrangement and categorization. For instance, Imam al-Bukhari included the aforementioned Hadith in the chapter on funerals (*Kitab al-Jana'iz*), under the subheading "The one who stands for a Jewish funeral." If later generations interpret the Hadith solely through the lens of this chapter title, they will perceive it merely as a guideline for funeral practices, deriving only funeral-related lessons. Consequently, their intellectual engagement with this Hadith will remain limited to the topic of funerals.

Now, consider this matter in the context of the present time. One of the objections frequently raised against Islam is that its moral teachings emphasize respect for Muslims but lack respect for humanity as a whole. This objection is unquestionably incorrect and can be refuted with numerous references from the Quran and Hadith. In this regard, the incident involving the Prophet Muhammad given in the above Hadith serves as a compelling example. It demonstrates that Islam embodies perfect respect for humanity. Islamic teachings hold that every human being created by God deserves respect in all circumstances—whether they share the same religion or belong to another, whether they are from one nation or another, or even if they appear to be from an enemy nation. As human beings, they are entitled to respect.

However, when this Hadith is narrowly interpreted within the confines of funeral practices, an important principle of Islamic teaching—its universal respect for humanity—risks being overshadowed.

### **Consideration of Circumstances**

In *Sahih al-Bukhari*, it is narrated that the Prophet Muhammad told Aisha that when the Quraysh later rebuilt the Kaaba, they did not construct it on the foundation laid by Abraham. Instead, they altered it (Abraham had built the Kaaba lengthwise, but the Quraysh made it square, leaving a portion of the original Kaaba outside, now known as Hateem). Aisha asked, “O Messenger of God, why don’t you rebuild the Kaaba on the foundation of Abraham?” The Prophet replied, “Your people (the Quraysh) have recently abandoned disbelief and entered Islam. I fear this may provoke them. If it were not for this fear, I would have done so” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1583).

Imam al-Bukhari included this Hadith in the Book of Hajj (Chapter on the Virtues of Makkah and its Construction). Suppose later generations restrict their understanding to the chapter title given by Imam al-Bukhari. In that case, they may only derive lessons regarding the virtues of Makkah from this Hadith and fail to uncover its broader relevance. However, this Hadith conveys a very significant lesson of Islam, which can be encapsulated as the “wisdom of life.”

Rebuilding the Kaaba on the original foundation laid by Prophet Abraham would have been the correct course of action. However, leaving it on the foundation laid by the Quraysh during the pre-Islamic period of ignorance was

apparently an improper act. Yet, the Prophet refrained from making this correction because, under the circumstances of the time, such a change could have led to more serious issues.

From this example of the Prophet, a vital principle can be derived: in life, there are situations where the consideration is not about what is right or wrong but about what is possible and what is impossible.

This principle is of immense importance. Achieving success in the present world often requires adherence to this pragmatic approach. Many of the failures of Muslims in the modern era stem from neglecting this principle. Instead of considering what is realistically achievable, they focus solely on what they perceive as right. They often rush to act on this perceived rightness, even when circumstances make its attainment impossible. The resulting fruitless sacrifices of Muslims in the present era are a direct consequence of ignoring this principle.

The root cause of this detrimental outcome is blind imitation (taqlid). By viewing the Hadith only through the lens of the chapter title provided by Imam al-Bukhari, they limited their understanding to the virtues of Makkah. They failed to extract the broader principle of the wisdom of life from it. This confinement to imitation prevented them from advancing to the subsequent stages of independent reasoning (ijtihad), which is essential for progress.

## **Gradual Implementation of Shariah**

In a narration from Sahih al-Bukhari, Aisha, in response to a question, mentioned that the first revelations of the Quran were the detailed chapters, which contained descriptions of Paradise and Hell. It was only after people's hearts had settled

in Islam that verses concerning halal and haram (lawful and unlawful) were revealed. Aisha said, “Had the first thing to be revealed been: ‘Do not drink wine,’ they would have said, ‘We will never give up wine.’ And had it been revealed, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ they would have said, ‘We will never give up adultery’” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4993).

Imam al-Bukhari included this narration in his *Sahih* under the ‘Book of the Virtues of the Quran’ (Chapter on the Compilation of the Quran). If later generations study this narration solely under the chapter title given by Imam al-Bukhari, they will derive only issues related to the virtues or compilation of the Quran and nothing more. However, if one goes beyond the chapter title and reflects further, it becomes evident that this narration highlights a crucial aspect of Islam.

Pondering over this narration reveals that the implementation of Shariah, or the application of Islamic law, requires adherence to a significant principle: the wisdom of a gradual process. During the early period of Islam, the implementation of Shariah law was carried out with this gradual wisdom. The process involved first creating a willingness in people’s hearts to obey the laws, and only after achieving this internal readiness were external laws enforced.

Considering the current Muslim leaders in this context, it becomes apparent that they have been reading the Hadith in *Sahih al-Bukhari* only within the confines of its chapter title, without delving deeper. This imitative mindset has prevented them from grasping the important wisdom of gradual implementation highlighted in this Hadith.

For many years, loud calls for the application of Shariah

law have echoed across various Muslim countries—such as Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, Algeria, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Bangladesh. However, despite countless sacrifices, Shariah law has not been successfully implemented in any Muslim country.

The reason for this failure lies in the weakened faith of contemporary Muslims, a condition resulting from prolonged complacency (referred to in chapter Al-Hadid: 16). This weakened faith has led to a lack of mental alignment and heartfelt readiness, both of which are essential for practically accepting Shariah laws. According to the aforementioned narration, their condition resembles that of the early Muslims who, if addressed with laws prohibiting wine and adultery prematurely, would have responded, “We will never give up wine” and “We will never give up adultery.”

In many Muslim countries, enthusiastic leaders have attempted to Islamize the media by taking over television systems and broadcasting “Islamic programs.” However, these efforts have largely proven ineffective. When these Islamic programs were aired in Muslim households, family members often changed the channel, opting instead for other entertainment programs.

Despite the turbulent efforts to enforce Shariah, its complete failure primarily stems from the absence of ijtihadi (independent reasoning) mindset among contemporary Muslim leaders. They entered the political arena equipped only with a taqlidi (imitative) mindset. The inevitable consequence of such an imitative approach was exactly what unfolded in practice.

## Change in the Field of Action

In Sahih al-Bukhari, there is a narration from Abu Huraira in which the Prophet Muhammad said: “I have been commanded to migrate to a town which will swallow other towns. They call it Yathrib, but it is Madinah” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1871).

Imam al-Bukhari included this Hadith in his Sahih under the chapter, ‘The Virtue of Al-Madina.’ If later generations interpret this Hadith with an imitative mindset, they will derive only issues related to the virtues of Madinah. Consequently, most commentators on this Hadith have confined their discussions to this context. For example, many Hadith commentators argue that it is disliked (makruh) to call Madinah by its old name, Yathrib and that it should only be referred to as Madinah or Madinah Munawwarah.

However, the Quran uses the term Yathrib for Madinah (33:13), which contradicts this interpretation. To reconcile this, some scholars have explained, based on personal conjecture, that the Quran is merely quoting the words of non-Muslims (Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari*, Vol. 4, p. 105).

If we move beyond imitative thinking and approach this Hadith with independent reasoning, it becomes evident that the Prophet Muhammad was outlining an important principle of the Islamic method. This principle can be summarized as the “change of the field of action.” It highlights that when the situation in Makkah became difficult for Muslims, God commanded them to migrate to another city, Yathrib, where conditions were more favourable. Yathrib then became the centre of Islam and

was called Madinat al-Rasul (the City of the Prophet) or Madinat al-Islam (the City of Islam).

In contemporary times, this principle is invaluable for achieving practical success. It can be referred to as migration (hijrah). It emphasizes that if favourable conditions are not found in one place, one should move to another. If an objective cannot be achieved through confrontation, it should be sought through reconciliation. If success is not attainable through violence, it should be pursued through peace.

Historical events reveal that many Muslim leaders in the present era, due to their imitative mindset, have failed to grasp this profound wisdom. As a result, they have incurred enormous losses. For instance, violent movements in the name of Islam have caused tremendous loss of life and property. However, had these leaders embraced independent reasoning, they would have found guidance in the aforementioned Hadith. Consequently, they would have abandoned violent methods and adopted peaceful approaches, achieving success in accordance with the laws of nature.

This comparison underscores the difference between imitative thinking and independent reasoning. In essence, imitative thinking is akin to stopping at the first step, while independent reasoning involves climbing successive steps to reach the top. The first step, though initially important, serves as a foundation, for without it, subsequent steps cannot exist.

## **Stages of Hadith Study**

The First Stage: The foundational achievement of the early scholars of Hadith (muhaddithin) was their monumental effort in collecting and compiling Hadiths. This work represents the initial stage of Hadith study.

The Second Stage: The succeeding generation undertook the task of organizing these Hadiths into comprehensive indexes, facilitating easier access and the derivation of knowledge.

The Third Stage: This phase involved compiling the interpretations of Hadiths provided by the Companions, the Followers (Tabi'in), and the Followers of the Followers (Taba' al-Tabi'in). The objective was to understand the original context and background of these Hadiths.

The Fourth Stage: Scholars began analyzing Hadiths within the context of the historical circumstances of their times. This approach allowed for a broader and more nuanced understanding, as illustrated by the examples discussed earlier.

The Fifth Stage: A more recent and ambitious endeavour could involve the creation of a comprehensive encyclopaedia of all authentic Hadiths. Such a resource would enable modern readers to engage with Hadiths in a style more aligned with contemporary methods of study.

These stages of Hadith study are not definitive but serve to highlight the progression from imitative (taqlidi) to independent reasoning (ijtihadi) approaches in Hadith scholarship. The emphasis lies on the benefits of adopting an analytical and contextual methodology for deriving deeper insights.



## **The Importance of Ijtihad**

Ijtihad is not merely an intellectual exercise; it is one of the most vital needs of the Muslim community. Through ijtihad, Muslims reaffirm their religious identity in every era. By reapplying Islam to changing circumstances, they demonstrate that Islam is an eternal religion, as relevant in contemporary times as it was in ancient ones. In essence, ijtihad serves as a means to continually update Islamic thought, ensuring its relevance to the present day.

## **What is Ijtihad?**

Ijtihad does not mean forming opinions arbitrarily. Rather, it involves reflecting and pondering on the Quran and the Sunnah (the authentic sources of Islam) and deriving new Shariah rules through qiyas (analogy) or istimbat (deductive inference). In essence, ijtihad is also a type of taqlid. While an ordinary muqallid (one who engages in taqlid) follows the opinions of the fuqaha (Muslim jurists), the mujtahid (one who engages in ijtihad) follows the guidance of God and the Prophet by directly reflecting on the Quran and Hadith, deriving rules by inference.

The term ijtihad refers to the same intellectual process described as istimbat (inference) in the Quran (4:83). In the terminology of the fuqaha, this process is also known as qiyas.

The Quranic commentator Al-Qurtubi wrote: "Istimbat in the Arabic language means istikhraj, and it indicates ijtihad when texts and consensus are absent" (*Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Quran*, Vol. 5, p. 292). This means that istimbat

refers to deriving Shariah rulings through *ijtihad* in the absence of clear texts (*nass*) and consensus (*ijma*).

In the second century of the Hijra, Muslim jurists undertook this work of *ijtihad*. During the Abbasid Caliphate, many new issues arose that did not have direct or *mansus* (text-based) answers in the Quran and Sunnah. At that time, jurists solved these issues through *ijtihad*, deriving Shariah rulings for new circumstances through *qiyas* (analogy) or *istimbat* from the texts of the Quran and Sunnah. This effort ensured that the Muslim community continued to receive Shariah guidance for evolving circumstances, allowing their historical journey to proceed without interruption.

However, after the second and third centuries of the Hijra, a misconception arose among Muslims for various reasons. This misconception was that the *ijtihad* or *istimbat* required to be done directly from the Quran and Sunnah had been fully accomplished by the early jurists. It was believed that there was no longer a need to derive rulings directly from the primary sources of Islam. Instead, the task for later Muslims was to study the works of these early jurists, contemplate them, and derive Shariah rulings for later times.

As a result, in the intellectual history of Islam, the jurists of the Abbasid period were given the status of absolute *mujtahids*, while the jurists of the later period were considered restricted *mujtahids*. The *ijtihad* of the early jurists was based on the Quran and Sunnah, whereas for later scholars, *ijtihad* meant staying within the confines of the early jurists' interpretations to derive rulings.

## **Intellectual Crisis**

This marks the onset of the intellectual crisis among Muslims. This stagnation in thought has rendered the Muslim community a stationary caravan. Amir Shakib Arslan (d. 1946), in his book “Why Have Muslims Lagged Behind and Others Progressed?,” addresses this issue at its core: the primary reason for the backwardness of Muslims in the modern era is the cessation of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning).

*Ijtihad* is not an optional endeavour; it is an essential and inevitable process. The question is not whether *ijtihad* should be undertaken—it is a natural necessity. Halting this process is akin to disrupting the flow of nature itself, and such disruption inevitably leads to stagnation and the cessation of progress.

The vitality of a river lies in its flow. If the flowing waters of a river are obstructed, it ceases to be a river and becomes a stagnant, foul-smelling pond. In the same way, if a community suspends the process of *ijtihad*, stagnation will ensue, making all forms of progress—material, religious, and spiritual—impossible.

## **The Ability to Reassess**

A person with an imitative mindset, as the popular saying goes, simply follows the beaten path. Such individuals lack the ability to reassess situations. They persist in following the same familiar track, even when it yields no results. In contrast, a person with an *ijtihadi* mindset continuously reevaluates circumstances. They study the past and present to develop new plans of action. While the imitative person

remains stuck in the past, the one with ijtihadi insight focuses on the future.

An example of this distinction can be found in the history of the Indian subcontinent. During the 18th and 19th centuries, when the British dominated India, Muslim leaders of that era largely responded with armed confrontation. Influenced by the traditional theories of Dar al-Harb (land of war) and jihad, their mindset led them to pursue only one course of action: to fight the British and eliminate these foreign rulers.

Under this approach, Sultan Tipu waged war against the British in 1799, which resulted in his death and the collapse of his vast kingdom. Similarly, in 1857, Muslim leaders launched an armed rebellion against the British, which continued in various forms for over half a century. This rebellion also ended in their complete destruction, bringing no benefit to Islam or Muslims.

This exemplifies an imitative response to the challenges posed by British rule. However, history also provides an example of an ijtihadi approach to the same issue. This approach was embodied by Syed Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935). In 1912 (1330 AH), he visited Lucknow at the invitation of Maulana Shibli Nomani to attend a session of the Darul Uloom Nadwatul Ulama. He then visited Darul Uloom Deoband, which was at that time a centre of resistance against the British. During his visit, a special session was convened at Darul Uloom Deoband. Maulana Anwar Shah Kashmiri (1875–1933) delivered a speech on behalf of the institution. Following this, Syed Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) addressed the gathering. His

speech, delivered in Arabic, was later published in the proceedings of Darul Uloom Deoband (1330 AH). An excerpt from his speech reads:

“There is an important point that every farsighted Muslim should consider: the number of Muslims in India is so small compared to non-Muslims that their existence in this country will always be in danger. The British government, which is a government of reason and justice, has maintained a balance between non-Muslims and Muslims. If this balance is disrupted at any time, you can imagine what the result would be. Probably, Muslims will face the same fate as they did in Andalusia. Therefore, we must have a group among us to dispel the doubts cast on Islam. These doubts have arisen due to the modern sciences and arts, and it is essential to remove them. However, dispelling these doubts is impossible without understanding modern philosophy. Therefore, it is necessary that the members of this group be familiar with the key issues of modern philosophy” (*Al-Jami’at Weekly*, Delhi, February 2, 1970, p. 10).

This speech by Syed Muhammad Rashid Rida exemplifies ijthadi insight. By thoroughly analyzing the situation, he foresaw that the balance between the Muslim minority and the non-Muslim majority in undivided India, maintained by the presence of the British as a third power, would collapse once the British withdrew. The resulting political independence would bring new challenges for Muslims rather than solve their problems.

Based on this forward-looking assessment, Syed Rashid Rida advised Muslim leaders in India to focus on dawah (conveying the teaching of Islam) rather than armed

confrontation. He urged them to prepare intellectually rather than militarily, ensuring they could effectively convey Islam's peaceful message in line with the demands of the time. However, the Muslim leaders of that era were so consumed by their animosity toward the British that they could not imagine any constructive work being undertaken under British rule. A significant historical opportunity was lost, and the lack of ijtihadi insight was the primary reason.

Muslims suffered setbacks because they adopted an imitative mindset and stopped practicing ijihad. This stagnation has left Muslims akin to a backward caravan in the modern era, struggling to keep pace with contemporary challenges.

### **Compilation of Fiqh During the Era of Muslim Power**

The root of this tragedy lies in the fact that the foundational corpus of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) was compiled many centuries ago during the Abbasid Caliphate. This era marked the zenith of Muslim global dominance, with the Muslim world recognized as the most formidable political power of its time. A poet aptly captured this reality with the following verse:

“From East to West, we were dominant across the world,  
No nation's scale was weightier than ours in the world.”

The fiqh that exists today was compiled during this era of dominance. As a natural consequence, the spirit of that time became embedded in it. This compiled fiqh thus became a form of authoritative jurisprudence.

## **No Example Available**

I once heard a lecture by a well-known Islamic scholar and thinker, delivered in a city in India. The topic of his speech was “Islam in the Modern Era.” At the end of the lecture, someone from the audience asked the speaker what guidance the Shariah provides for us in a country like India. Upon hearing this question, the Muslim scholar remained silent for a while and then said that answering this question is very difficult. This is because the model of a position of strength exists in Islamic Shariah, but the model of a position of modesty does not.

For a long time, I wondered why this scholar leader could not find a model for a position of modesty in Islamic Shariah. Finally, I understood that this scholar (like other contemporary Muslim leaders) knew only the codified jurisprudence (fiqh) as Islamic Shariah, i.e., the fiqh that was developed when Muslims were in a position of power and authority in all respects. Consequently, the Islamic jurisprudence that was developed during that time, consciously or unconsciously, became the jurisprudence of the powerful. It represented the state of power and authority. This is why, in the present era, when Muslim leaders saw that they had been deprived of absolute authority, they felt that their Shariah did not provide them with any positive guidance for their position of modesty. As a result, in the current era, they saw no other option but to start a fight with others to regain power.

Undoubtedly, the jurisprudence developed during the era of power did not contain this guidance, but the Quran,

which was revealed during the early period, undoubtedly contained eternal teachings. It provided guidance for every situation, even for the state that the said Muslim leader described as a position of modesty. This is because God knew in advance that Muslims would not always remain in the same condition. They would face different situations at different times. As the Quran states: "If you have suffered a wound, they too have suffered a similar wound. We bring these days to men by turns, so that God may know those who believe, and choose witnesses from among you; and God does not love the unjust." (3:140)

The Prophet Muhammad experienced both states. His Makkan period was, as it were, a period of modesty for him, and his Madinan period was a period of power. Both these states are equally desirable, and there are equal models for both states in the life of the Prophet. Neither model is inferior, nor is any model superior. In the eyes of God, all decisions are based on the person's inner intentions, not on external political or non-political conditions.

### **The Issue of Blasphemy Against the Prophet**

To understand this matter, consider the following: all jurists agree that anyone who insults the Prophet Muhammad, even indirectly, is subject to a mandatory death penalty. Blasphemy is considered a prescribed punishment (hadd). This ruling has little exception among notable jurists. For detailed discussions, refer to the following works:

1. Al-Sarim al-Maslul 'ala Shatim al-Rasul by Ibn Taymiyyah



2. Al-Sayf al-Maslul 'ala Man Sabb al-Rasul by Taqi al-Din Ali al-Subki
3. Tanbih al-Wulat wa al-Hukkam 'ala Ahkam Shatim Khayr al-Anam aw Ahad Ashabihi al-Kiram by Ibn Abidin al-Shami

Writers often cite these jurists to argue that the punishment for blasphemy in Islam is death, claiming a near-unanimous consensus with minimal juristic disagreement.

However, a critical question arises: If this ruling is mandated by Shariah, why was it not enforced during the early days of Islam? Historical records show that many individuals committed blasphemy against the Prophet but were not executed.

One clear example is Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul of Medina. He openly blasphemed against the Prophet repeatedly. Despite irrefutable evidence and public pressure, the Prophet did not order his execution, and Abdullah ibn Ubayy eventually died a natural death. Explaining this incident, Allama Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) writes:

“The Prophet refrained from killing him only because it was feared that his execution would cause people to turn away from Islam since Islam was weak at that time.” (*Al-Sarim al-Maslul 'ala Shatim al-Rasul*, p. 179)

This prompts another question: Why does the jurisprudence of the early Islamic period differ from the fiqh developed later under the Abbasid Caliphate?

In February 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa

declaring that Salman Rushdie had insulted the Prophet Muhammad in his book *The Satanic Verses* and that it was obligatory for Muslims to kill him. This fatwa received widespread support from Muslims worldwide, with the exception of this writer. Massive demonstrations followed, but despite global Muslim support, the fatwa could not be carried out. Instead, the issuance of the fatwa and subsequent reactions led to Islam being defamed globally, with its image, God forbid, associated with barbarity.

In today's world, freedom of expression is considered a fundamental human right, akin to a modern "religion." Consequently, the global community perceived this fatwa as a direct attack on their values. Modern media amplified the issue, ensuring it reached every corner of the world. Thus, the same concern that led the Prophet Muhammad to refrain from executing Abdullah ibn Ubayy manifested on a much larger scale in the case of Salman Rushdie.

Now, consider these two opposing precedents. The precedent set by the Prophet of Islam demonstrates that in the case of *shatm-e-Rasool* (blasphemy against the Messenger), no matter how widespread it may be, the practical consequences of executing the blasphemer must be taken into account. In contrast, the precedent set by the jurists (*fuqaha*) dictates that whenever someone commits *shatm* (blasphemy), they must be immediately put to death.

Why did they do so? The answer lies in imitation (*taqlid*). Contemporary Muslims adopted the view that the door to independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) from the Quran and Sunnah was closed. Instead, they relied solely on juristic

fatwas, adhering to them with imitative zeal. This mindset led to the rigid application of rulings derived during the Abbasid period, a time when Muslims held political dominance and could easily enforce such laws. An Arabic poet aptly captured this era of authority:

“When the commanders dispatch an army against the enemies, we simply send a letter.”

However, circumstances have changed. Muslims today lack the same political and social dominance. Additionally, modern values, such as the sanctity of freedom of expression and the global influence of modern media, have created entirely new challenges.

The result was clear: despite widespread Muslim support, it was impossible to kill Salman Rushdie. Worse still, Islam’s reputation suffered irreparable damage. To modern observers, Islam came to be viewed as a religion of terrorism, fostering fanaticism. This was the outcome of attempting to enforce outdated jurisprudence in a radically changed era.

Had contemporary Muslims adopted *ijtihad-e-mutlaq* (absolute independent reasoning), they would have sought direct guidance from the Quran and Sunnah in Rushdie’s case. They would have realized that the solution lay not in issuing a fatwa for his execution but in refraining from reactive measures and engaging in peaceful dawah efforts. Instead, their imitative mindset trapped them within the confines of a jurisprudence developed during an era of Muslim dominance. As a result, they adhered to the juristic ruling that “The blasphemer is to be executed as a prescribed punishment” (*al-shatim yuqtal haddan*).

Ijtihad Mutlaq can be translated as “absolute independent reasoning” in Islamic jurisprudence. It refers to the capacity of a scholar to exercise independent reasoning directly from the primary sources (Quran and Hadith) without relying on the interpretations of other scholars.

### **The Power of Peace**

Following the modern industrial revolution and the subsequent colonial era, Western nations rose to political and cultural dominance on a global scale. This presented a significant challenge for Muslims. Across the Muslim world, numerous leaders emerged, united in their belief that “jihad is the only solution” (al-jihad huwa al-hall al-wahid). However, despite nearly two centuries of extraordinary efforts and sacrifices, this approach of armed jihad failed to yield positive results for Muslims.

When this issue is analyzed in light of the Quran and Hadith, it becomes clear that the true solution lies in peaceful dawah (invitation to Islam). The Quran instructs the Prophet in such circumstances to convey the teachings revealed to him, with the assurance of divine protection: “And God will protect you from the people” (5:67). Furthermore, the Quran emphasizes calling people to God with wisdom and good counsel, highlighting that even adversaries can transform into allies through this approach: “Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend” (41:34).

It would not be incorrect to say that the Quran, in its silent language, was calling out: “The only solution lies

in conveying God's message to people." Yet, why did it happen that present-day Muslims failed to find guidance in this clear message of the Quran? Instead of engaging in the peaceful communication of the divine message to people, they became involved in jihad—specifically in the sense of qital (armed combat). Given the prevailing circumstances, it was not difficult to foresee that such extremist actions would result in nothing but further devastation.

Why, then, did contemporary Muslim leaders make the grave error of adopting the un-Quranic notion that "jihad is the only solution"? The answer lies in their abandonment of *ijtihad-e-mutlaq* (that is, independent reasoning to derive rulings directly from the Quran and Sunnah. Instead, they adopted an imitative mindset, relying solely on the codified jurisprudence (*fiqh*) compiled centuries earlier.

At the time, the jurisprudential texts were saturated with rulings on jihad and combat. Every major *fiqh* book contained extensive chapters on jihad but was entirely devoid of rulings or discussions on inviting people to God (*dawah*). While the Quran explicitly commands *dawah*, these leaders had neglected the Quran as a source for deriving rulings, relying exclusively on *fiqh*. Unfortunately, the pages of *fiqh* offered no guidance on the concept of *dawah*.

This highlights the immense value of *ijtihad* and the detrimental consequences of relying solely on codified *fiqh* for deriving rulings.

A similar error was made by Muslim leaders of the Indian subcontinent after the rise of British dominance. They declared India as *Dar al-Harb* (the abode of war).

In 1823, Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlvi (1746-1824) issued a fatwa declaring India Dar al-Harb (*Fatawa Azizi* [Persian], Delhi, 1322 AH, p. 17). Subsequently, 500 ulama signed a collective fatwa obligating jihad against the British. Indian Muslims, considering it their religious duty, waged armed jihad against British rule. Despite a century-long struggle, this jihad proved entirely fruitless.

Had these leaders moved beyond their reliance on fiqh, they would have recognized that contemporary India should have been seen as Dar al-Dawah (the abode of invitation), much like certain regions during the early period of Islam. However, their prohibition of ijtiḥad and exclusive reliance on codified fiqh left them confined to its limitations. Notably, the existing fiqh texts contain rulings on Dar al-Harb but lack any concept of Dar al-Dawah.

### **The Traditional Fiqh is Insufficient**

The jurisprudence (fiqh) developed during the second and third centuries of the Islamic era came to be widely accepted among Muslims as a complete and comprehensive legal system. It was believed that all the teachings of the Quran and Hadith relevant to human life were fully detailed and perfectly encapsulated within it. This belief led to the notion that, after the compilation of this fiqh, the door to unrestricted ijtiḥad was effectively closed, leaving only limited forms of ijtiḥad available to Muslims.

This assumption appeared valid in earlier times, but as circumstances evolved—particularly with the end of the traditional era and the advent of the modern scientific age—it proved to be significantly detrimental. Muslims,

adhering to the belief that the existing corpus of fiqh constituted a complete legal system, saw no reason to seek solutions beyond it. Consequently, they were deprived of many valuable insights present in the Quran and Sunnah that had not been incorporated into the compiled fiqh. This issue can be illustrated with a few examples.

In the modern era, the rise of democracy introduced a new political system. The existing fiqh, developed during an age of monarchy, contained no concept of modern democracy. As a result, those confined to the framework of traditional fiqh failed to grasp its significance. Some outrightly dismissed democracy as un-Islamic and declared it haraam (forbidden), while others trivialized it as mere “head counting,” mocking it with statements like:

“Democracy is a form of government where people are counted, not measured by their qualities.”

In reality, democracy represents a political blessing for Muslims. Unlike the monarchy of old, democracy is founded on the principle of power-sharing. It offers Muslims the opportunity to gain political influence in various countries through strategic participation. However, due to their lack of ijthadi thinking, Muslims failed to capitalize on this opportunity. Instead, an imitative mindset led to impractical ideas, such as establishing a caliphate in countries like the United States and even imagining converting California into “Khaleefornia.” This mindset blinded them to the more practical and achievable objective of securing political representation through the modern principle of power sharing.

The root cause of this intellectual stagnation lies in Muslims' rejection of direct guidance from the Quran and Hadith, a consequence of their imitative approach to *ijtihad*. Had this intellectual error not occurred, and had they approached the Quran with an open mind, they would have discovered clear guidance on such matters.

This guidance is evident in Chapter 12 of the Quran, which recounts the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph). During his time, Egypt was ruled by a polytheistic king who, recognizing Joseph's exceptional capabilities, invited him to join his administration as a powerful partner. Joseph accepted this offer and assumed a governmental position, which, in theory, was that of the minister of food and agriculture but, in practice, amounted to being the kingdom's vice-regent. In the agrarian society of that time, all economic and administrative activities revolved around agriculture, making Joseph's position the most pivotal in the nation.

If modern Muslims had gone beyond the *taqlid* (imitation) of the traditional *fiqh* and engaged with the Quran in an *ijtihadi* manner, they would have recognized this incident as a profound prophetic example. It demonstrates how the principle of power-sharing can be effectively utilized, even within non-Islamic systems, and assures Muslims that such participation aligns fully with the prophetic tradition.

### **Utilization of Modern Opportunities**

Muslims in the present age suffer from a unique deprivation, one that perhaps no other nation or group shares to the same extent. This deprivation lies in their failure to capitalize on the vast opportunities afforded by the modern era.



One of the most significant opportunities available in contemporary times is what we now call “freedom.” The revolutionary French thinker Rousseau famously began his book *The Social Contract* with the sentence: “Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.” This phrase became the creed of the modern age, evolving into a universally accepted belief that freedom is a birthright of every human being. It is an inalienable right for individuals to act according to their convictions, with the sole condition being that this freedom must not involve aggression and must be exercised peacefully. Two illustrative stories shed light on this principle.

Three hundred years ago, when America gained political independence from Britain, an American citizen took to the streets to celebrate. While walking enthusiastically, he swung his arms vigorously, accidentally hitting a passerby on the nose. Angered, the passerby demanded, “What is this nonsense?” The American citizen replied, “Now that America is free, I can do whatever I want.” The passerby calmly responded, “Indeed, you are free, but your freedom ends where my nose begins.”

This anecdote eloquently encapsulates the modern concept of freedom: individuals are granted complete liberty, provided they do not resort to violence or infringe on the rights of others.

Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi, who learned this principle during his education in the West, applied it effectively in India’s struggle for independence. In 1857, Muslim leaders in India had launched a freedom movement against British colonial rule, basing their efforts on violent

struggle. Despite waging a bloody war for over sixty years, their movement failed. However, when Mahatma Gandhi assumed leadership of the independence movement in 1919, he adopted a fundamentally different approach, rooted in peaceful struggle. Consequently, India achieved independence in 1947.

What explains this stark difference? The failure of earlier efforts stemmed from the taqlidi (imitative) mindset of the Muslim leadership, which recognized only armed jihad as a strategy. The classical texts of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) were written in an era when the sword was the predominant symbol of power. These works reflect the worldview of their time, emphasizing violent struggle as the sole method of achieving goals. This is reflected in an old Arabic saying:

“War eliminates war” (al-harb anfa lil-harb).

A Persian poet similarly captured this ancient mindset:

“Whoever wields the sword,  
The coin bears his name.”

Strikingly, modern Muslims have failed to harness the remarkable opportunities presented by the modern age. Among these, the concept of freedom stands out as a particularly valuable one. Modernity has established that freedom is a universal human right, with the sole condition that it be exercised without aggression and through peaceful means. If today’s Muslims had adopted an ijtihadi (independent reasoning) mindset, rather than remaining confined to the taqlid (imitation) of medieval

jurisprudence, they would have recognized that the modern concept of freedom provides a unique opportunity to pursue their objectives through nonviolent methods, aligning with the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah.

### **Military Mindset and Peaceful Means**

The military mindset is so deeply ingrained in contemporary Muslims that almost no Muslim remains unaffected by it. This mindset is perpetuated in various forms across different contexts. For example, a line from a Palestinian song states: “Halumma noqatil, halumma noqatil, fa inna al-qitala sabeel al-rashad” (Come, let us fight, come, let us fight, because fighting is the way to success).

This mental framework, rooted in ancient jurisprudence, became so prevalent that even modern thinkers could not escape its influence. Figures like Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), Dr. Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), and Sayyid Abu al-A‘la Maududi (1903–1979) were also caught in this mindset. This has been a key reason why the sacrifices of contemporary leaders have failed to yield significant results.

The example of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) demonstrates how a peaceful approach can be more effective than armed struggle in the modern era. Gandhi joined the Indian freedom movement in 1919. Until then, the movement was based on the principle of violence, which the British government countered with their own violent measures. Gandhi abruptly announced that

the movement would henceforth adopt the principle of non-violence instead of violence. This shift rendered the British government powerless, as they could no longer justify suppressing a non-violent movement.

It is said that when Gandhi made this announcement as the leader of the freedom movement, an English collector sent a telegram to his secretariat, stating:

“Kindly wire instructions on how to kill a tiger non-violently.”

This vividly illustrates how non-violence rendered the British government’s violent suppression strategies ineffective.

Muslims, by adopting peaceful means, can achieve far more than they could through violent struggle. The failure to understand this reality lies in their continued adherence to an outdated mindset rooted in medieval jurisprudence, which recognizes only violent struggle as a valid means to achieve goals.

### **Anachronistic Attitude**

Contemporary Muslim leaders and intellectuals, constrained by an imitative mindset, have succumbed to an outdated mode of thinking. The figures they emulate from the past lacked the concept of peaceful methods or non-violent struggle. While these concepts are clearly outlined in the Quran and Sunnah, deriving rulings directly from these sources requires *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). Unfortunately, the door to *ijtihad* was long ago shut, to the extent that, as one scholar remarked, even the key to that door seems to have been lost.

The Quran articulates a timeless law of nature in these words: “Reconciliation is best” (4:128). This verse underscores the superiority of a conciliatory approach over a confrontational one, advocating non-violence in place of violence. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad emphasized this principle in a hadith: “God is gentle and loves gentleness, and He grants to gentleness what He does not grant to harshness” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith 2593). This highlights that a peaceful approach yields results far more effectively than a violent one.

Despite such clear guidance on peaceful methods in the Quran and Sunnah, modern Muslim leaders and intellectuals, due to their imitative mindset, have failed to recognize these teachings. Instead, they have persistently pursued violent approaches, mistakenly perceiving them as acts of sacrifice and martyrdom.

This adherence to an outdated mindset has caused immense setbacks for Muslims in the modern era while providing no tangible benefits. For example, had the Arabs of Palestine embraced this principle after 1948, they might have avoided a destructive armed struggle. By adopting peaceful methods and utilizing the opportunities available in the modern age, they could have achieved a position of influence in Palestine akin to the Jewish community’s status in America—acquired through similar peaceful approaches.

Similarly, if the Muslims of Kashmir had understood this principle, they would not have resorted to the culture of guns and bombs that have come to define their struggle. Instead, they could have cultivated a culture of peace,

harnessing modern opportunities within a framework of non-violence. This approach could have earned them a position of respect and influence not only in Kashmir but throughout India—a far more beneficial outcome than the so-called Azad Kashmir.

Additionally, present-day Muslim leaders, who continue to engage in “power struggles” across various Muslim nations, are inadvertently contributing to the destruction of their own societies. If they had embraced peaceful methods, they could have transformed their nations into flourishing societies. This is evident in the achievements of secularists in countries like Singapore, where peace-based principles have led to remarkable progress.

### **Criticism and Ijtihad**

Critique and taqlid (blind imitation) are opposites. Where taqlid prevails, critique cannot thrive, and where genuine critique flourishes, taqlid disappears. In contrast, ijtihad (independent reasoning) inherently requires critique. Without an environment of critique, the process of ijtihad cannot continue.

However, critique must be genuine and constructive, not mere fault-finding. True critique involves scientific and logical analysis, whereas fault-finding is driven by the desire to highlight flaws and level accusations. When critique devolves into fault-finding, it ceases to be meaningful and becomes mere slander, devoid of intellectual value.

After the Crusades, certain Christian clergymen authored books criticizing Islam and Muslims, depicting Arabs as a barbaric nation. One of their claims was that Umar ibn al-

Khattab, the second caliph of Islam, ordered the burning of the great library of Alexandria after the conquest of Egypt, leading to the destruction of its priceless collection of books.

A common response to this accusation has been to dismiss these individuals as enemies of Islam seeking revenge for their defeat in the Crusades. Such responses often allege that the story of the library's burning was fabricated as part of a conspiracy. However, this approach does not constitute constructive criticism. By its nature, it amounts to slander rather than a scholarly rebuttal of the clergymen's claims.

Later, some scholars approached the issue differently. Through rigorous historical investigation, they demonstrated that the claim was entirely baseless. They established that the library of Alexandria was not burned on the orders of Umar ibn al-Khattab. In fact, at the time of the Islamic conquest in 642 CE, the library no longer existed. Historical records show that the Roman ruler Julius Caesar had destroyed the library in 48 BCE, centuries before the Arab conquest. (For details, see *Philip K. Hitti's History of the Arab's*, page 166.)

This second method represents an example of scientific criticism. Criticism is not a vice; it is a vital tool for intellectual progress. Without a critical environment, the process of intellectual growth halts. The real choice before us is not between criticism and non-criticism but between criticism and intellectual stagnation. Without critique, intellectual development ceases altogether.

The process of *ijtihad* occurs through open discussion. *Ijtihad* is essentially the pursuit of the unknown through the known. It begins with existing knowledge and seeks answers to emerging questions. In an open environment where ideas are freely expressed, a clash of perspectives occurs, revealing new dimensions of the matter. This free exchange of ideas leads to scrutiny and, ultimately, to the research-based conclusions that are the true goal of intellectual inquiry. This intellectual journey is what defines *ijtihad*.

Both in theory and practice, *ijtihad* is an essential aspect of life and guarantees the development of any social group. When the process of *ijtihad* ceases, progress within that group comes to a halt. However, for *ijtihad* to proceed effectively, criticism is indispensable. Only those who are willing to tolerate and embrace critique can fully benefit from *ijtihad*. Those who lack the temperament to listen to and accept criticism with an open heart will never achieve the intellectual success that comes with forming an *ijtihadi* opinion.

To further illustrate this, two contrasting examples are presented below.

### **Choosing the Battlefield of Badr**

In the second year after Hijra (2 AH), the Battle of Badr took place during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. At that time, he was in Medina and received news that a Quraysh army was advancing toward the city. The Prophet prepared an army and set out to confront them in the direction from which the Quraysh army was approaching.



Before reaching Badr, the Prophet and his Companions camped at a certain location, indicating that if the enemy advanced, they would engage them there.

At this point, a Companion named Khabbab ibn al-Mundhir approached the Prophet and asked, “O Messenger of God, is this place where you have camped based on a revelation from God, or is it an opinion and a war strategy?” The Prophet replied that it was an opinion and a war strategy. Upon hearing this, the Companion said, “Then this is not the place to camp” (*Al-Sirah Ibn Hisham*, Vol. 2, p. 259).

This was a clear case of objection. However, the Prophet did not take offence. Instead, he calmly asked the Companion why he held a differing view. The Companion explained his reasoning: there were several wells of water between their current position and the enemy. If they camped where they were and allowed the enemy to advance, the enemy would gain control of all the wells. Therefore, they should move forward and take control of the wells, ensuring access to water for themselves while denying it to the enemy. Upon hearing this explanation, the Prophet said, “You have suggested a good strategy.”

This conversation occurred in a completely open and normal environment. Ultimately, the Prophet approved the Companion’s suggestion and acted upon it. This decision contributed to the decisive victory of the Muslims in the battle.

This example highlights the vital importance of a free environment for the expression of opinions in reaching the best decision. Differing perspectives can reveal new dimensions of a matter, proving invaluable in achieving

the right outcome. The significance of this principle is so great that even when a differing opinion is expressed in a direct or forceful manner, it should be met with tolerance and a positive attitude.

### **The Consequences of Ignoring Criticism**

In 1831, Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi (1786-1831) led a jihad against Maharaja Ranjit Singh with a Muslim army. This campaign took place in Balakot (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). In the ensuing battle, Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi and most of his Companions were killed by Ranjit Singh's forces. Ultimately, this fervent jihad ended in complete failure from a practical standpoint.

Most of the individuals in Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi's army were his devoted followers. Among them was Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali Dehlvi (d. 1280 AH), a distinguished scholar of his time. He joined Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi's army and travelled with them. The group camped at a location called Charsadda (now in Pakistan). Upon reaching there, Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali had a disagreement with Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi.

Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali documented this disagreement in his Arabic book, *Tareekh-ul-Aimma fi Khulafa-ul-Ummah*, which is preserved in the library of Jamia Hamdard (Tughlaqabad), Delhi. According to this account, Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali had a private meeting with Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi at Charsadda. During their discussion, he asked Syed Ahmed on what basis he had decided to launch a jihad against the Sikhs. Syed Ahmed replied that his decision was based on divine inspiration

and dreams. Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali responded that such decisions could not be made solely on the basis of dreams and visions. He cited the Quranic verse: “And their affairs are conducted by mutual consultation among themselves” (42:38). He emphasized that the Prophet Muhammad always made decisions regarding jihad through consultation. Therefore, Syed Ahmed should consult others and carefully investigate the situation before taking any action.

However, Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi rejected Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali’s advice. He argued that such criticism was undermining his mission and insisted that Maulana’s obedience should be as unwavering as the mountain in front of them. As a result, Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali chose to return to Delhi. Syed Ahmed reacted strongly to this decision, declaring: “Whoever leaves me and returns to his homeland has abandoned his faith.” (*Maulana Ismail Dehlvi aur Taqwiyat-ul-Imaan* by Maulana Shah Abu-Hasan Zaid Farooqi, pp. 86-87).

In some texts, this incident has been portrayed as evidence of Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali’s deviation. Maulana Syed Abdul Hai Hasani (1869-1923), the former principal of Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow, wrote that Maulana Mir Mahboob Ali was among the eminent scholars of his time. He pledged allegiance to jihad under Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi and travelled to Yaghistan to support him. However, the devil planted doubt in his heart, leading him to abandon Syed Ahmed and return to India (*Nuzhat-ul-Khawatir* by Syed Abdul Hai, Vol. 7, pp. 406-407).

Syed Ahmed Shaheed Barelvi did not consult anyone

regarding his decision. He failed to verify reports of the desecration of Islamic symbols in Punjab. Additionally, he did not assess the military strength of Maharaja Ranjit Singh or the capacity of his own untrained followers to face such a formidable force. Driven by blind faith, he entered Ranjit Singh's territory without a complete understanding of the geography. Unsurprisingly, the result was that Syed Ahmed and most of his Companions were killed by Ranjit Singh's army. This campaign ended in a unilateral disaster for the Muslims.

This example underscores the critical importance of allowing the articulation of differing opinions in order to arrive at sound decisions in collective matters. Criticism should be welcomed with an open heart, and efforts should be made to reach the best decisions through scholarly discussions and debates.

In conclusion, listening to criticism and fostering open dialogue are essential for making informed and effective decisions. These processes ensure that actions are taken based on thorough investigation and mutual consultation. Ignoring criticism and suppressing dissent leads to disastrous outcomes, as demonstrated in the case of Syed Ahmed Shaheed Bareilvi. Therefore, creating an environment that encourages open dialogue and constructive criticism is vital for the progress and success of any community.

## **Principles Over Personalities**

An Islamic scholar once criticized his spiritual guide (Sheikh) on a scholarly matter. When someone pointed

out that he was criticizing his Sheikh, the scholar replied, “We love our Sheikh, but the truth is dearer to us than the Sheikh.”

This response underscores an essential reality: when a critique is made, even if it appears to reference a particular individual, it is fundamentally a critique of a principle. Personal references in such cases are necessary, as without them, the critique would lose specificity, becoming an ambiguous opinion that fails to achieve its purpose.

The process of criticism and differing opinions has been a consistent feature throughout Islamic history. The Companions of the Prophet often differed on various matters, expressing their disagreements openly. Similarly, the Tabi’un (Successors), Tabi’ al-Tabi’in (Successors of the Successors), hadith scholars, jurists, and other Islamic scholars frequently engaged in debates and openly expressed their dissent. These differences were never condemned, nor was it suggested that the practice of criticism and disagreement be abandoned. During the early period of Islamic history, such critiques and disagreements were accepted because they were understood as being rooted in principles, not in personal animosities. (For further details, refer to the author’s book *Deen-e-Insaniyat*, chapter “Hurriyat-e-Fikr” [Freedom of Thought].)

Listening to criticism with composure and reflecting upon it demonstrates that a person is not consumed by the grandeur of personalities. For such individuals, principles take precedence over personal affiliations. They may tolerate the undermining of an individual’s stature but will not accept the violation of principles. This mindset reflects the presence of a true religious spirit.

However, when a nation enters a period of decline, the focus shifts from principles to personalities. People become indifferent to principles and excessively sensitive about their revered figures. As a result, critique becomes anathema. When they hear criticism that appears to target their admired personalities, they react with agitation and hostility. This reaction, though seemingly directed at the critic, reveals a deeper issue: they have not yet experienced the profound joy of recognizing and prioritizing truth. For them, truth is inseparably tied to specific individuals rather than being valued for its own sake.

### **The Benefits of Criticism**

Criticism is not a vice; it is a blessing. It opens new dimensions of knowledge and brings to light previously unexplored aspects of an issue. Criticism is not merely fault-finding; it is, at its core, an intellectual exchange between the critic and the one being criticized, benefiting both parties equally. It broadens the intellectual horizons of everyone involved. True criticism is an intellectual gift from one person to another.

This is why the second Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, said, “May God bless the man who sends me the gift of my shortcomings.” (*Musnad Al-Darmi*, Athar No. 675)

The immense value of criticism is not just a theoretical concept to me; it is a matter of personal experience. If I were to say that I have an inherent appreciation for criticism, it would not be an exaggeration. Because of this disposition, I encourage my close associates to engage with me intellectually through criticism.

An incident from my life illustrates this attitude. One of my colleagues, Maulana Anis Luqman Nadwi, worked closely with me for about eight years. When he later visited an Arab country, a Sheikh asked him about his role in India. He replied, “I am the critic of the biggest critic in India.” This reflects my affinity for criticism and intellectual discourse.

For a true scholar, the most fulfilling experience is intellectual exchange. While criticism may appear to be directed at a person, its true focus is the subject matter under discussion. Genuine criticism transcends personal ego; it is not a matter of prestige or personal confrontation but an exploration of ideas and truth.

When criticism is valid, it provides an opportunity to correct errors and move from the darkness of flawed thinking to the light of accurate understanding. It helps a person grow intellectually and become more developed in their thoughts. Even when criticism is invalid, it serves the purpose of highlighting additional aspects of the subject. If the person being criticized responds calmly and with an open mind, criticism can strengthen their intellectual capabilities. It can stimulate creative thinking, enabling them to present their views more clearly and logically. In truth, criticism is beneficial in every way, whether it is valid or not.

A personal experience further illustrates this point. In 1965, I was in Lucknow, where I met a non-Muslim scholar who did not believe in religion or religious figures. During our conversation, he criticized the Prophet Muhammad, saying, “If Muhammad were removed from history, what difference would it make?”

His words were certainly provocative. Had I reacted with anger, I might have simply rebuked him and walked away. But, by the grace of God, I maintained my composure. This allowed me to think constructively and respond calmly. I said, “The same difference that existed in history before Muhammad.” (In other words, history would lack exactly what it did before his advent.)

This criticism compelled me to reflect on an aspect of the Prophet’s life I had not previously considered. The observation led me to realize that all modern scientific and cultural advancements emerged after the Prophet’s advent. This insight inspired a formal study, culminating in my book, “Islam: The Creator of the Modern Age.”

This experience demonstrates that when one approaches criticism with composure and an open mind, it can be a profound source of growth and discovery.

### **True Standards and False Standards**

One significant drawback of an imitative mindset is its inability to recognize truth on its own merits. Instead, individuals with such a mindset identify truth through their revered figures, making these figures their primary point of reference. Whatever their assumed elders declare as truth is accepted without question. Conversely, when someone outside their circle of reverence presents a matter—regardless of the strength of evidence—they remain unwilling to accept it. This stems from their lack of their ability to discern and embrace truth based solely on evidence.

This has been the single most significant reason for the rejection of prophets in every era. A prophet would



appear to his contemporaries as an unfamiliar figure—someone outside the lineage of their presumed revered ancestors. As a result, they could not grant him the status of an important or noteworthy person during his lifetime. Furthermore, when the prophet criticized their beloved figures, they became even more infuriated and refused to consider his message seriously.

The fundamental difference between an imitative mind and an independent mind lies in their approach to truth. People with an imitative mindset recognize truth only through personalities, while those with an independent mindset can discern and accept truth based on pure reasoning.

This difference results in those with imitative mindsets being deprived of what holds the utmost importance in religion: faith that arises from realization. The wellspring of such faith lies in self-discovery. Those with imitative mindsets fail to think independently, and as a result, they remain unacquainted with the true essence of Islam.

In contrast, individuals with an independent mindset are fundamentally different. Their minds remain open to reflection and thought. They have the capability to recognize truth as soon as it becomes evident and to embrace it without hesitation.

In today's world, the greatest achievement for any individual is the discovery of truth. Realizing that one has found the truth is undoubtedly life's greatest blessing. However, this blessing is reserved for those with an independent mindset. Those trapped in the darkness of an imitative mindset can never experience truth as understood through *maarif* (realization).

## **The Need for a Revolutionary Mindset**

Shah Waliullah (d. 1762), a distinguished Islamic scholar and theologian from India, addressed the concept of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and the qualifications of a *mujtahid* (one who exercises *ijtihad*) in his book, *Aqd al-Jayyid fi Ahkam al-Ijtihad wa al-Taqlid*. He outlined that a *mujtahid* must possess five essential types of knowledge:

1. Knowledge of the Book of God (Quran),
2. Knowledge of the Sunnah of the Prophet,
3. Knowledge of the statements of early scholars, encompassing both consensus and disagreements,
4. Proficiency in the Arabic language,
5. Understanding of *qiyas* (analogical reasoning) and *istinbat* (deduction).

(*Aqd al-Jayyid*, p. 4)

While Shah Waliullah and other scholars accurately outlined these qualifications, they are primarily applicable to restricted forms of *ijtihad*. For unrestricted *ijtihad*, these qualifications alone are insufficient.

## **Two Types of Ijtihad: General and Special**

*Ijtihad* can be categorized into two types: general *ijtihad* and special *ijtihad*. General *ijtihad* addresses external conditions, while special *ijtihad* pertains to internal conditions—those deeper, underlying aspects of a phenomenon that may not be immediately apparent. The distinction can be articulated as follows: general *ijtihad* relates to *basarat* (physical vision), whereas special *ijtihad* requires *basirat* (insight).

For instance, if a mujtahid needs to determine whether the Shariah ruling allowing wiping over leather socks (mas-h 'ala al-khuffayn) applies to modern, factory-made socks, expertise in the five key disciplines is sufficient. Similarly, if the question arises about whether inserting a needle into the body breaks ablution (wudu), then knowledge of these five sciences would also be sufficient to derive a ruling on this matter.

### **The Need for an Additional Qualification**

A mujtahid proficient in these five areas can consult classical jurisprudential texts and identify relevant precedents. For instance, they might examine rulings addressing whether the sting of a scorpion entering a person's body nullifies wudu.

However, for special ijtiḥad, an additional qualification is required beyond the foundational five disciplines. This requirement is highlighted in the Hadith: "A wise person must be aware of his time" (*Sahih Ibn Hibban*, Hadith No. 807)—that is, its spirit, needs, and demands. This emphasizes that a wise individual must possess a thorough understanding of the conditions and complexities of their era.

The additional qualification mentioned in the Hadith can be summarized as an awareness of the conditions of one's time. A mujtahid must be thoroughly familiar with the context of the era and location in which they are exercising

ijtihad. This necessitates an understanding of both traditional and contemporary sciences. Such expertise is acquired through external information, deep reflection, and comprehensive knowledge of relevant facts.

Examples of unrestricted or creative ijtihad are abundant in Islamic history. One notable example is the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah during the Madinan period. At the time of this treaty, the external conditions seemed entirely unfavourable for the Muslims, as the ten-year non-aggression pact was agreed upon unconditionally on the opponents' terms. Accepting this treaty was extremely challenging for the Companions; so much so that Umar ibn al-Khattab referred to it as a humiliation (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3182).

The true nature of this event can be understood from the Quranic verse: "God knew what you did not" (48:27). While the visible aspects appeared disadvantageous, hidden factors were at play. Guided by divine wisdom, the Prophet established this treaty based on these unseen realities.

An external aspect of the Hudaibiyyah treaty was that it was conducted under the unilateral conditions set by the opponents of the Muslims. However, beneath this lay the deeper reality: the state of war had previously halted interactions between Muslims and others in a normal environment. A no-war pact would allow people from both sides to meet freely and engage in dialogue.

This process would naturally lead to the virtues of Islam becoming evident, fulfilling the Quranic description: “people entering God’s religion in multitudes” (110:2).

This is exactly what happened. At the time of the Hudaibiyyah treaty, the Muslim population numbered fewer than 1,500. However, within two years of peaceful conditions, their numbers grew to 10,000. This remarkable increase in strength, achieved without a single battle, enabled Muslims to gain dominance through their sheer numerical presence.

A similar event occurred in the 13th century when the Mongols, a warlike and militarily powerful force, invaded the Muslim world. Their campaigns devastated Muslim cities from Samarkand to Aleppo and brought an end to the Abbasid Caliphate. The severity of the situation was such that Muslims would say, “If you hear that the Tartars have been defeated, do not believe it” (*Al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh* by Ibn al-Athir al-Jazari, vol. 10, p. 353).

This was the external reality. However, beneath the surface lay another truth: while the Mongols wielded military might, they lacked a cohesive ideology or worldview. Through their interactions with Muslims, the Mongols were exposed to the ideology of Islam. Unable to counter its intellectual and spiritual appeal, many of them accepted the teachings of Islam. This significant development was aptly summarized by the Orientalist Philip K. Hitti: “The religion of the Muslims had conquered where their arms had failed” (*History of the Arabs*, P. K. Hitti, 1989, p. 488).

Consider a later period. The first clear example in this context is that of Shah Waliullah Dehlawi. During his time, the Mughal Empire in India had weakened and appeared to be on the verge of collapse. Shah Waliullah dedicated his efforts to stabilizing the Muslim empire. He urged the Muslim rulers of his era to take up arms and fight their enemies to defeat them. (*Al-Tafhimat al-Ilahiyyah* by Shah Waliullah, 1936, Vol. 1, pp. 215-216). He also encouraged Ahmad Shah Abdali, the ruler of Kabul, to invade India to diminish the power of the Sikhs and Marathas, thereby securing the Mughal Empire.

However, Shah Waliullah's approach reflects a focus on immediate and apparent circumstances. He was entirely unaware of the new global wave that was emerging—what I refer to as the era of democracy. Shah Waliullah believed himself to be Qayem-uz-Zaman (the reviver of the era). (*Fuyooz ul Haramain* by Shah Waliullah, p. 111), However, his entire thought process operated within the framework of a bygone monarchy. He did not grasp the significance of the coming democratic age, where the principle of popular sovereignty would dominate, bringing with it the critical issue of majority versus minority.

Had Shah Waliullah understood the direction of these changing times, he might have concentrated his efforts on the front of dawah. The essence of dawah was that even if the Mughal Empire were to fall, Muslims could still maintain a strong, influential position. Unfortunately,

Shah Waliullah failed to recognize the transformative importance of dawah. His renowned book *Hujjatullah al-Baligha* covers numerous subjects but does not include a chapter on dawah.

Now, consider the example of Syed Jamaluddin Afghani (d. 1897). During his time, the British and French had established near-total political dominance over the Muslim world. Syed Jamaluddin Afghani devoted his life to ending this political subjugation. His slogan was, “The East for the Easterners” (*Al-Sharq lil-Sharqiyyin*). Superficially, it may appear that the political dominance of Western nations has ended, as around sixty independent Muslim countries have since emerged on the world map. However, in reality, the situation remains largely unchanged, with Muslim nations still compelled to live under Western supremacy.

This is because Syed Jamaluddin Afghani addressed only the surface-level aspects of the situation, overlooking the deeper realities. He viewed British and French dominance as purely political, overlooking the foundational issue: Western nations had achieved remarkable advancements in knowledge, science, and technology, outpacing Muslims. With his traditional political perspective, Syed Jamaluddin Afghani was unable to grasp these deeper dimensions of the problem.

Had Syed Jamaluddin Afghani recognized the critical importance of intellectual and scientific progress in the modern era, he might have dismissed external dominance

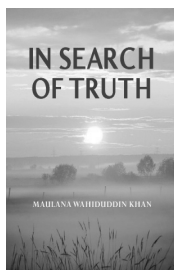
as a temporary concern. Instead, he could have focused his efforts on advancing Muslim intellectual development to match that of the West. By prioritizing intellectual jihad over futile political struggles and guiding his followers toward this path, the history of Muslim nations could have taken a very different path.

These examples illustrate that the aforementioned five qualifications are indeed sufficient for restricted ijtiḥad. However, for unrestricted ijtiḥad, an additional qualification is indispensable: a profound understanding of contemporary circumstances and emerging realities. Without this additional insight, any attempt at ijtiḥad will ultimately prove fruitless and fail to provide meaningful guidance to the community.



## QURAN TRANSLATION, BOOKLETS OF MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

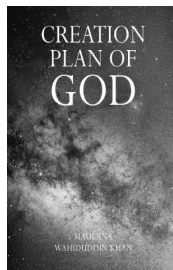
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The purpose of man's existence is to attain the realisation of his Creator and live a God-oriented life to be rewarded with a place in eternal Paradise in the Hereafter.

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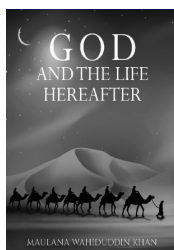
### Creation Plan of God



God made the present world as a selection ground. Those who keep a check on freedom, bow before the truth without compulsion, and lead principled lives will be settled in Paradise after death.

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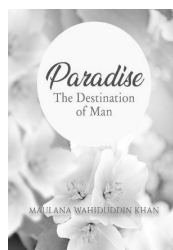
### God and the Life Hereafter



Our hopes and dreams will be fulfilled in the next world after death, and not the present world. This world is an arena for making efforts to determine our future in the eternal life after death.

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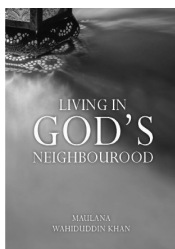
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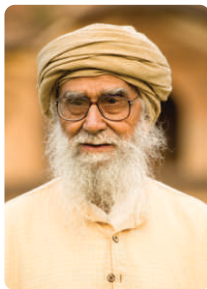
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## REVIVING IJTIHAD

Ijtihad (independent reasoning) is essential for intellectual and societal advancement. In Islamic Shariah, it is the scholarly effort to interpret and apply Islamic teachings to new situations using the principles of the Quran and Sunnah. By addressing societal changes, ijtihaad ensures Islam's relevance and preserves the dynamic nature of Islamic law. In contrast, abandoning ijtihaad in favor of taqlid (imitation) leads to intellectual stagnation, depriving societies of progress and development.

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual guide, and ambassador of peace. His English translation of the Quran and its Commentary are widely appreciated for their simplicity, clarity, and ease of understanding. He has authored over 200 books; and two magazines, *Spirit of Islam* and *Al-Risala*; and recorded thousands of video and audio lectures. Demonstrating the relevance of Islam in the modern idiom, this material delves into Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, its relationship with modernity, and other contemporary issues. For his seminal contributions to world peace, Maulana received numerous national and international awards. The Government of India honoured him with the 'Padma Vibhushan Award' (2021), and the 'Padma Bhushan Award' (2000) for his contributions to spirituality. In 2001, Maulana founded the Centre for Peace and Spirituality International which is actively carrying his legacy forward by distributing copies of the Quran and peacefully conveying the spiritual message of Islam at a global level.



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