

PERDANA LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION
PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 19



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‘ISLAM & ISLAMISATION’

Keynote Address by

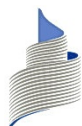
YABhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

Fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia and

Honorary President of Perdana Leadership Foundation



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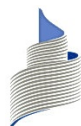


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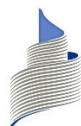
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PROLOGUE

PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES 19: 'ISLAM & ISLAMISATION'

Never has a religion been so steeped in controversy as Islam. Viewed with suspicion and fear by non-Muslims and given multiple – often conflicting – interpretations by Muslims themselves, Islam as a religion is often misconstrued and misunderstood. It is associated with terrorism, oppression, corruption and violence, negative connotations that are often aided and reinforced by a biased or prejudiced media. As such, Islamisation is also perceived negatively, as the imposition of a rigid social and political system on a society.

If we return to the roots of the religion, Islam means peace, purity, submission and obedience. Islam means submission to the will of one God (Allah) and obedience to His law. In the context of a state, Islam safeguards the rights of each and every citizen, Muslim and non-Muslim. In Islam, the rights vested within every citizen include: the security of life and property; the sanctity of privacy and security of private life; equality before the law; the protection of personal honour; the security of personal freedom; the protection of religious sentiments; and the right to participate in the affairs of the state.

Islamisation then is the process of implementing Islamic virtues and principles to achieve a peaceful, just, merciful and virtuous society. However, Islamisation has been mistakenly claimed by certain groups as the process of making a nation entirely and exclusively Muslim. This then involves a gradual but total replacement of culture, laws, value systems, faith, education and worldviews with what is deemed "Islamic". This leads to the type of Islamisation that many around the world fear and oppose: "the erasure of the customs, norms and laws of any country or region in order to purely reflect Islamic sentiment".

Conflicts arise among these differing views of Islamisation and its implementation. In a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, non-Muslims worry that Islamisation will erode their rights. Even within the Muslim community, there are concerns that if a narrow view of Islamisation is pursued then the rights and freedoms of Muslims will be corroded.

The Malaysian government has officially adopted the Wasatiyyah or moderate approach to Islam, giving emphasis to Islamic principles and tenets instead of focusing on specific customs and practices. However, certain groups have called for greater policing by government and wider laws in matters related to Islam and Muslims.

Given the inherent conflicts between the more moderate voices of Islam and increasingly strident demands for strict interpretations of the Quran, what is the best way forward for Malaysia and other nations that seek to become progressive, peaceful, and prosperous Islamic countries?

Questions:

- Is Islamisation the "de-Westernisation" of Muslim societies that seek to carve their own identities?
- Are the worries of the non-Muslims – and some Muslims – towards Islamisation warranted? How can these concerns be assuaged?
- How does Islamisation fit in a country like Malaysia that has a diverse population, the Constitution as the supreme law of the land and a dual justice system – one based on the common law and the other based on Syariah law?
- Is there sufficient understanding among leaders, government agencies, departments, and ministries of the Wasatiyyah approach to Islam – in politics, the law as well as in economics and social settings? Is this knowledge properly communicated to NGOs and the public?
- Are Malaysia and other Muslim nations adequately preparing their young citizens with proper knowledge and understanding of Islam, especially in the context of governing a multi-ethnic country, so that they can make sound policies and judgments for the future?

KEYNOTE SPEECH



YABhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad
Fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia
and Honorary President of Perdana Leadership Foundation

*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,
 Assalamualaikum wrb.*

If you look at the Islamic world today, if you look at the Muslims, if you look at their countries, you will conclude that Islam is really a terrible religion. It is not successful, Muslims are not successful, and the behaviour of Muslims today in many parts of the world simply indicates that Islam does not implant good values among the followers of the religion.

We are seeing today more and more acts of terrorism. I hesitated at first to call these people terrorists because to me, state terrorism as practiced by the US and Israel is as bad as individual or group acts of terror. We are seeing today some Muslims doing everything that we find repugnant. They are actually going against Islam in the name of Islam. There are Muslims today shouting Allahu Akbar (God is great) and then following such utterances by killing other Muslims, an act that is forbidden by Islam. This is happening because today, we are not really practising Islam. Yes, we pray, we fast, we give out zakat, and we perform the Hajj and now, of course, because it is so easy, we perform the Umrah. The Umrah is not compulsory but we perform it almost as if it was. So, we carry out rituals in the name of Islam to show that we are Muslims but we are not really practising Islam and in certain instances, we are going against the teachings of Islam.

Now why has this happened? This has happened because we believe in the Islam that was taught by our teachers, by the interpreters in our society, by the books and the Kitabs that we read. We seem to reject the Quran which contains all the messages of Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and to humanity. That is what the Quran is all about. It is the mother of all Kitabs. It should be our reference if we are lost. But in our society today, there is a tendency to reject the teachings of the Quran in favour of the hadith. If you don't follow the hadith, then you are labelled as anti-hadith; that you follow the teachings of the Quran seems irrelevant. We also have people who claim that the verses in the Quran have already been proscribed and are no longer valid. Who made them invalid? There is certainly no message from Allah to say that this and this verse are no longer applicable. Some people have written to me to tell me that certain verses in the Quran are not in accordance with the hadith. That's putting the cart before the horse. We have turned things upside down.

The Quran is the message of Allah to Muhammad and the Quran is the basis of Islam. The Sunnah of the Nabi is a Sunnah, injunctions that we have the option of either doing or not. We get merit if we do them; it is not a sin if we don't. That's what I understand from the word Sunnah. But it seems as if the word "Sunnah" now means "Wajib" (compulsory). There was a learned ulama' who said that it is wajib to perform the Sunnah. So now they have made the Sunnah compulsory whereas it is the teachings of the Quran which are compulsory.

The Quran contains the message from Allah. Can ordinary people, no matter how learned they may be, say that the teachings of Allah are no longer applicable, and that we should only follow the hadith? It is because of this tendency to place the hadith above the Quran that has led us to the terrible situation that we are in today. If a person like me, for example, says we should return to the Quran and not be constrained by the Sunnah or the hadith, they would call such a person like me anti-hadith. It seems that following the teachings of the Quran is not what qualifies you as a Muslim.

It is because we neglect the original teachings of Islam that we have lost our way. I say we have lost our way because over 1,400 years of what we have learned before have become interpreted and reinterpreted until they no longer resemble the original message of Islam. As they say in Malay, "When you are lost, go back to the beginning". And what is the beginning? Can we say the hadith is the beginning? Surely not. The teach-

ings or the traditions of the Prophet come after he had been given the message by Allah SWT, which is recorded as the Quran. So between the two, the Quran is obviously superior.

If someone follows the Quran, you cannot say that he is less Islamic than those who follow the hadith. To give an example where we prefer the hadith to the Quran, the Quran does not prescribe stoning to death a woman who had committed a sin. The Quran does not but the hadith refers to two occasions where two couples were stoned to death. One was a Jewish couple, the other was a couple who demanded they should be stoned to death. On the basis of these two cases, Islamic Fikh or law insists that the punishment for zina (adultery) is stoning to death. That the Quran doesn't say this is irrelevant. What is important is what the Sunnah said.

But if we return to the Quran, we will find that Islam is a merciful and considerate religion. Indeed, we begin almost everything with the same recitation of Allah (The One): Bismillahirrahmanirrahim referring to Allah who is Merciful and Compassionate. A God who is merciful and compassionate would not enjoy stoning people to death. So, if we take that spirit of being merciful and considerate, we would never accept stoning to death as an acceptable punishment as it is not even mentioned in the Quran. It is mentioned in the hadith but following the hadith is optional. You are not committing a sin if you don't (follow the hadith).

"If we return to the Quran, we will find that Islam is a merciful and considerate religion."

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

The Quran prescribes whipping for people who make accusations without basis, but according to many learned people of Islamic law, when a woman claims that she has been raped, the question to be asked is, "Have you got four witnesses?" Of course the answer would almost always be "No". If she claims she knows who raped her, her claim is still unacceptable. Without eye witnesses, she would be deemed to have made a false accusation and would be whipped 80 times. The man who raped her would get away scot-free. Is that right? Is that justice?

Obviously if you go back to the Quran, the Quran stresses that when you judge, you have to judge with justice. We can work out the procedure

prosecution and punishment but we should not adopt principles that would automatically make any woman claiming rape without four eye witnesses guilty of making a false accusation. If later on, a rape victim becomes pregnant, then she would have been deemed to have committed zina and would be stoned to death. This is not Islamic at all because it is unjust but we are very keen to stone people to death. I would like to stone to death the person who proposes this law.

In Islam, justice is very important. That is why it is repeated 43 times in the Quran. But we ignore the Quran, because we like to show that Islam is very strong, that it doesn't tolerate transgressors. Islam must punish with the heaviest punishment possible. That is how many people regard Islam and this is why the deterioration in the Islamic world today is happening.

As an example, the so-called Islamic State of Lebanon (ISIL) not only kills their prisoners, they prefer to kill them with a short knife instead of an axe or a sword. They stick the short knife into the neck and then slice off the windpipe and kill the person. Is that prescribed by the Quran? There is nothing like that in Quran at all. They then shout, "Allahu Akbar" and call themselves Jihadists. They are not jihadists; they are candidates for hell because they have gone against Islam by killing people. Muslims are forbidden from killing people, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. We are allowed to defend ourselves in the event we are attacked. Killing a helpless prisoner as if he is an animal is not Islamic at all.

This is what Islam has degenerated into for many Muslims, because we have allowed the wrong interpretations of the religion to flourish.

Islam is a great religion. It is the religion that converted the Jahiliah, the ignorant Arabs, into the founders of the greatest civilisation in the history of mankind. A civilisation that spread from China to Spain, to the West. It was a great civilisation, far superior to the civilisation of Europe at that time. Indeed, as mentioned by Tan Sri Azman Hashim, Europe was living in the Dark Ages when Islam was already very far advanced with scientists, mathematicians and intellectuals. I am afraid that when we talk about the past greatness of Islam, we are actually admitting the lack of greatness today. It was glorious before therefore it is not glorious now. And why is it not glorious now?

I believe that in the past, people followed more closely the teachings of the Quran without relying on interpreters. Different interpretations have resulted in Muslims being at odds with one another. We have now the Sunni, Syiah, the Wahabbi, the Alawis and the followers of Ashaari¹, Ayah Pin² and the like. We laugh but I was told that the followers of Ayah Pin even drank the water that he used to wash his feet. That's how stupid we can get. Because of this tendency to follow interpreters rather than referring to the Quran, we have broken up into many different sects and we are fighting each other despite the fact that Islam does not advocate factional fighting. Indeed, Islam forbids killing and Islam declares that all Muslims are brothers and sisters to one another.

Who is a Muslim? Some people are very fond of giving their own interpretations to this question. I was involved once in the conversion of a non-Muslim to Islam and all I did was to hold his hand and ask him to repeat after me; *Lā ilāha illā-llāh* (There is no God but Allah) *Muhammadur Rasūlu-llāh* (Muhammad is His messenger). That was all it took for him to become Muslim.

But we also say that to become a Muslim, we need to be a member of such and such a party. Is this in the Quran? It is not. If you accept that it is the declaration of faith that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet that makes you a Muslim then all of us, whether we are Sunni, Syiah, Wahabbi or whatever, we are all Muslim. Nobody has the right to declare anyone who practices a different interpretation of Islam a non-Muslim. As long as that person makes the declaration of faith on Allah and Muhammad, he or she is a Muslim.

But there are people making new qualifications, such as, "You are not a Muslim if you don't do what I tell you." So Islam has now been broken up into many different sects. This happened, too, to the Christians. Within the Muslim community, the situation is becoming more extreme with Muslims killing and torturing each other in the name of Islam. If we were to return to the Islam that is found in the Quran, I feel that we will become great once again. It is because we deserted the Quran that we have become as divided as we are today, fighting each other.

¹ Hajji Ashaari Mohammad was the leader of the Islamic religious sect Al-Arqam which was banned by the Malaysian government in 1994

² Ayah Pin or Ariffin Mohammed was the cult leader and founder of a sect called the "Selayang Kingdom" based in Terengganu, Malaysia.

Now, we are fond of telling people that Islam is a way of life. A way of life, not a way of death. Islam is Ad-Deen, a way of life because Islam governs everything that you do while you are alive. If you read the Quran in a language that you understand, you will find guidance there for everything that you do. For example, Islam promotes brotherhood and sisterhood among Muslims. In the Quran there are two different verses. One is very clear and specific which anyone can understand; the other is in the form of allegory which you may interpret according to what you understand from the story. The condition is that you have to read the Quran in a language that you understand.

"If you read the Quran in a language that you understand, you will find guidance there for everything that you do."

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad

I completed reading the Quran in Arabic when I was about 13 years old but I knew nothing about its contents. What I knew was what my guru told me and my guru is human. Some of the things he told me were right but there were many things that were not quite right, now that I know more about Islam. But that is the Islam that we practised. Not the Islam of the Quran, but the Islam of our teachers. Our teachers are human, even if they are great scholars. They can make mistakes. The interpretation of one is different from the other. There are many teachers, many ulama', many scholars, and their interpretations on Islam differ from each other so much that they regard others holding a different view than their own as unIslamic. Some have even gone to the extent of saying that these others are no longer Muslim and can be killed. That's the result of following interpretations and not going back to the Quran.

Of course, we are not encouraged to read the Quran in a language that we understand. I suspect this is so because it would be easier for the guru to feed you messages about the Quran and Islam when you don't understand it yourself. This sounds bad but to illustrate how far interpretations can be from what is in the Quran, we can look to the example of crime.

In any crime, we are told that you must have four witnesses who are free from major sins. Can you imagine getting four witnesses free from major sins when a woman is being raped? That these four witnesses only looked

and did not help? This understanding was based on the hadith where one of the wives of the Prophet was accused of doing something bad with a young man. There were no witnesses. Then the Prophet emphasised that there must be four good witnesses. But is it always the case in Islam that before making a judgment, you must have four witnesses? Can you not use circumstantial evidence, for example, as used in the court of law? Is there any permission in the Quran about circumstantial evidence?

You may know the story of Yusuf and Zulaikha. At Malay weddings, inevitably, the man who recites the doa will mention the names of couples who should be your models. Among them are Muhammad and Khadijah, Ibrahim and Sarah, then there would be Yusuf and Zulaikha. Yusuf and Zulaikha were not married. She was married to somebody else but she yearned after Yusuf and thus seduced him. He tried to escape and Zulaikha chased after him. Is this the example of a couple you should use as your model of a good marriage? But beyond that, in the Quran, because the shirt of Yusuf was found to be torn from the back, this was taken as evidence that it was Zulaikha who was chasing after him. There were no four witnesses, just a torn shirt. If the shirt had been torn at the front, then a different conclusion would have been derived. But Yusuf's shirt was torn at the back. The conclusion is that it was Zulaikha who was chasing after Yusuf. From this story, circumstantial evidence can be used in Islam.

Now we are asked to use the Quran as a guide. Crime in Islam is not only about producing four witnesses. It is also about how a Muslim must judge any case that comes before him with justice. You must judge with justice. *Apabila kamu hukum, hukumlah dengan adil.* That is why in the Quran there are stories and allegories along with direct, clear ayat (verses) which anybody can understand.

But somehow, when you read the Quran in Malay or English, the ulama' will tell you that you are not reading the actual Quran because the Quran is in Arabic. I agree that a Quran translation is not a hundred percent equal to the original Quran. However, the religious teacher also teaches in Malay. Can I accept that his teaching comes from the Quran? It is his interpretation of the teachings of Islam communicated in the Malay language. If he were to teach me Islam in Arabic, I wouldn't understand anything.

Those who say that the translation of the Quran is not the Quran should then also teach Islam to their students in Arabic. Then they will find ignorant Muslims all the way through!

Even though the translation of the Quran is not the actual Quran, it does give the meaning of the verses. There are different interpreters and interpretations, of course, but if you compare the translations of different Qurans and they are similar, you can assume that the interpretations are correct. If they differ, we can consider rejecting the interpretations.

If you learn the Quran in a language that you understand, then you will understand what Islam is all about. Everything is covered by the Quran. If you want to do business, the way you weigh your products is given in the Quran; the distribution of inheritance is in the Quran as well as the importance of keeping your word. All these are good lessons which the Quran imparts but which we Muslims have neglected to read. Instead we only follow what the teachers say. Sometimes, we may have leaders like the leaders of the Islamic State, for example, who will quote profusely from the Quran but translate it in a different way. If you know what the contents of the Quran are, then you will be able to judge when people are not telling the truth.

That is why, if we want to be good Muslims, it is important for us to read the Quran in a language that we understand. Reading the Quran in English or in Malay gives us more guidance than reading it in Arabic or memorising it.

Today, we have many Tahfiz schools set up for young boys and girls to memorise the entire contents of the Quran. Why are we doing this? Historically, memorising the Quran was important because there were very few printed copies of the Quran after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). During the Caliphs' era, the Quran was written by hand. Hence, in one village, there could be just one Quran. If that Quran got lost or burnt in a fire, then that village loses its Quran. That was why it was compulsory to have people who could memorise the Quran. If the copy of the Quran was lost, there would still be people to recite the verses.

Today, we publish millions of copies of the Quran. The need to memorise is no longer as important as it was in the past. What is more important is to understand the teachings of the Quran so that it can be a guide to us to live the life of a good Muslim. Believe me, if you read the Quran, you will get ample guidance for whatever it is that you do and you will be successful.

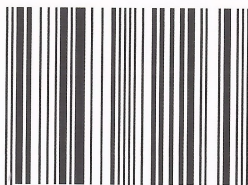
In schools or at sermons, the ulama' generally like to refer to the hadithes

This book contains the proceedings of the 19th Perdana Discourse Series, “Islam and Islamisation” which took place on 6 May 2015. The Discourse featured YABhg Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia and Honorary President of Perdana Leadership Foundation, as keynote speaker, Dr. Mohd Zaidi Ismail, Principal Fellow, IKIM cum Director Institute’s Centre for Science and Environment Studies, IKIM as Moderator and panellists Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, Social Activist, Professor Dr Hashim Kamali, Founding CEO International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS), Professor Ibrahim Mohamed Zain, Dean of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Human Sciences, International Islamic Univeristy Malaysia (IIUM) and Mr. Mohd Nazim Ganti Shaari, Lecturer of Law, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM)

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