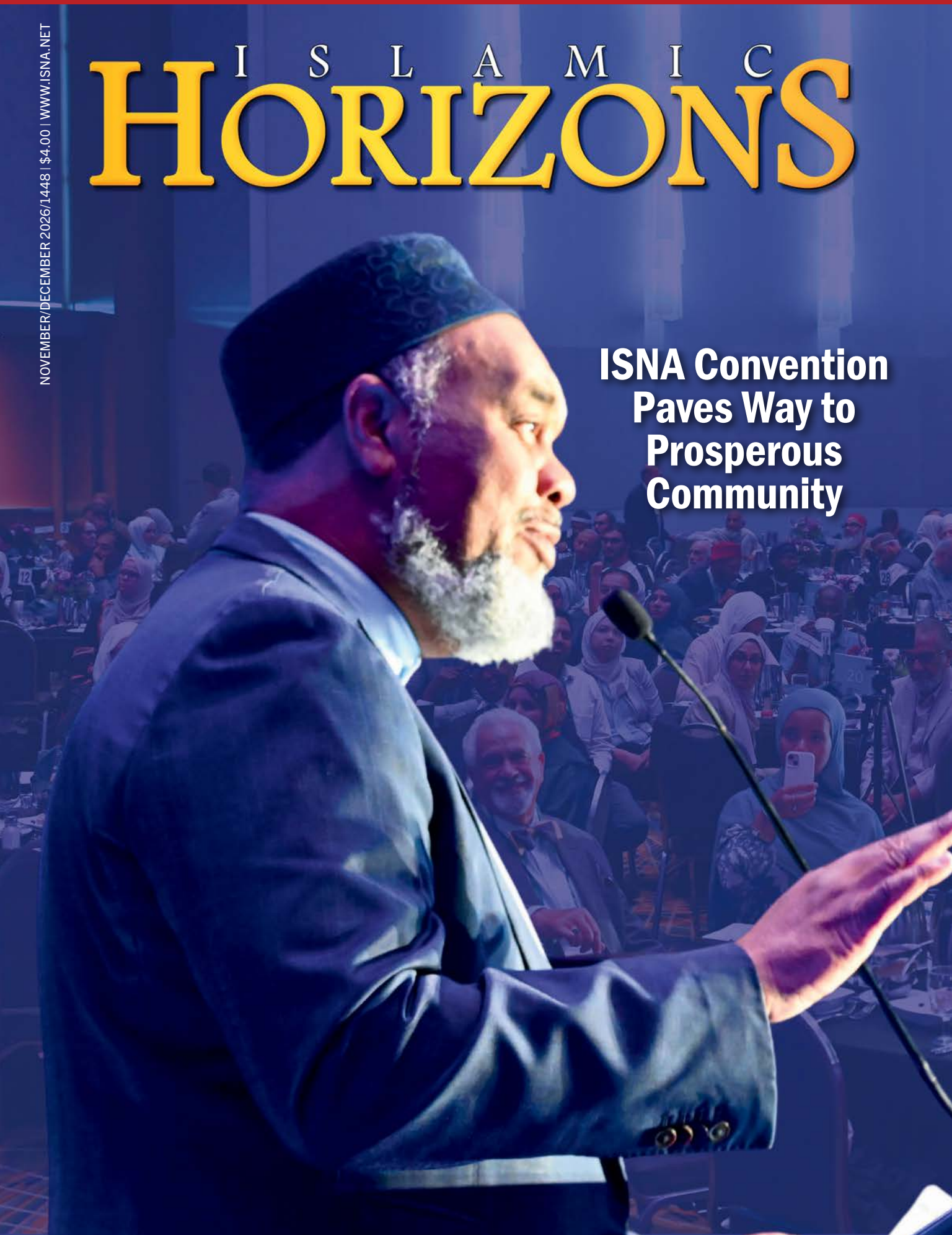
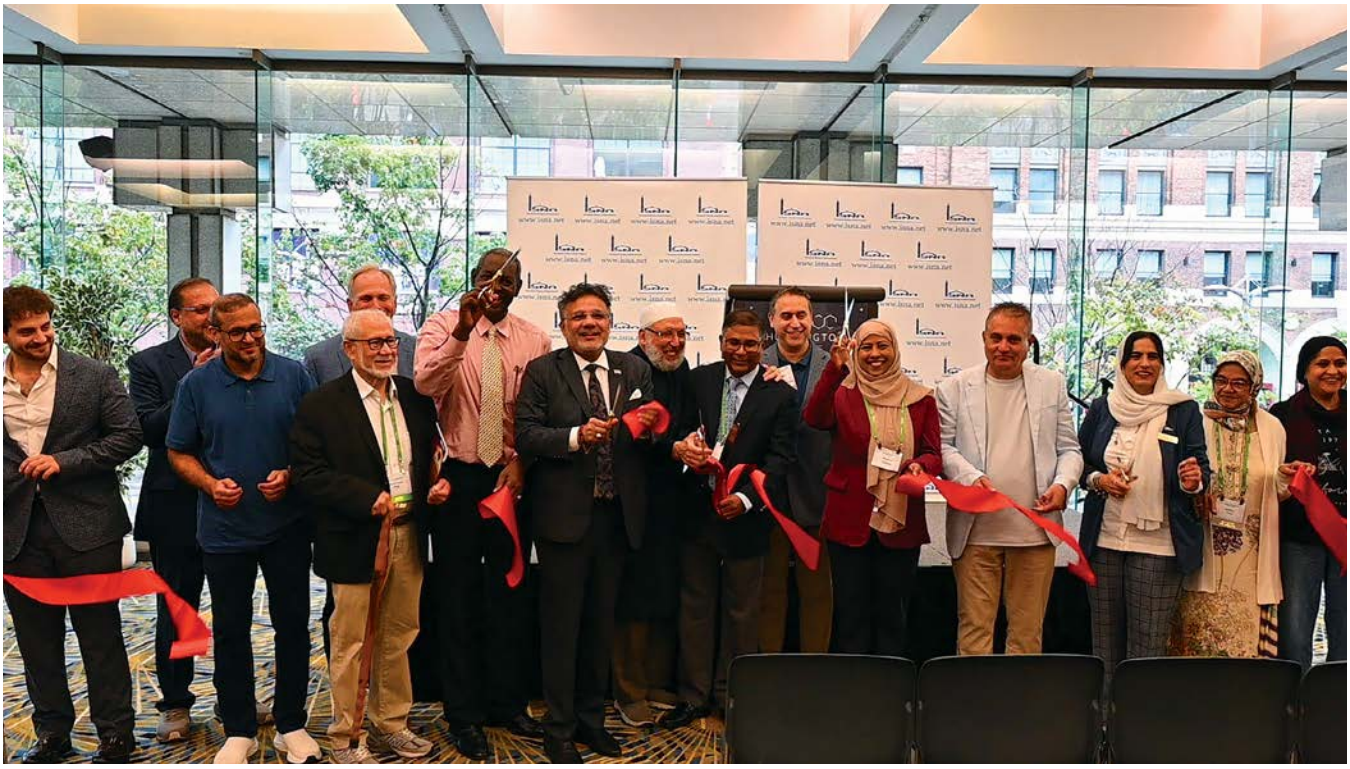
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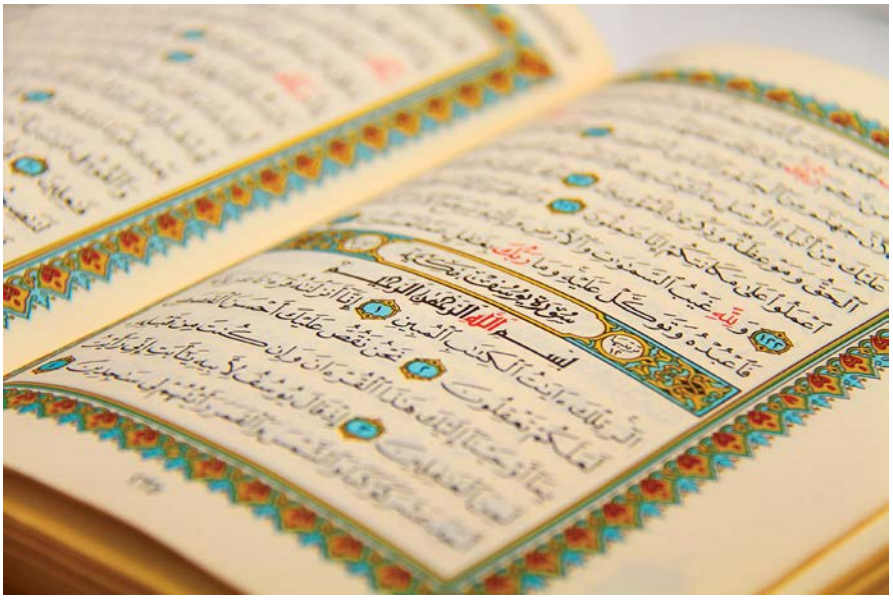
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Are Muslims Doing Justice to the Quran?

Reconnecting With the Holy Book's Purpose

BY MD. MAHMUDUL HASAN

Justice is the most important core value in Islam. It is represented in the Quran mainly by three terms: *`adl*, *qist*, and *mizan*. Although *`adl* and *qist* are synonymous, the former is generally interpreted as justice and the latter as equity or fairness. *Mizan* is the scale or balance that determines the administration and condition of justice.

But *`adl* also has a deeper meaning, that is, equilibrium or putting things in their correct places. In other words, *`adl* is the opposite of *zulm*. Although *zulm* is usually translated as "oppression" or "despotism," it actually denotes disequilibrium or putting things into wrong places. Many Quranic verses and prophetic traditions emphasize the preeminent importance of *`adl* and condemn *zulm*.

The terms *`adl* and *zulm* may even be extended to other beings or the objects that humans handle, and even to how people approach the divine. For example, regarding God with the proper awe, respect, and gratitude that are His due, as well as abiding by His commands, is considered *`adl.* Not doing so is tantamount to *zulm*.

Using the Quran for the correct purposes is considered *`adl*, whereas using it incorrectly or using it only for non-primary purposes may be considered *zulm*. Muslims who, at times, fail to give the Quran its due respect are therefore unwittingly trivializing the word of God.

The Quran's physical desecration is a grave sin, but trivializing it is also a serious offense. Muslims certainly do not disrespect their holy book tangibly or physically. They hold the scripture in profound awe, and their deep reverence for it is clear. They exercise extreme caution when handling it, and most of them encase it, and place it on a raised surface in the house or in places of worship. However, many Muslims, perhaps unaware, profane the sacred book in two important ways: using it for lesser purposes and splitting it into pieces.

Using the Quran for Non-Primary Purposes

The Quran states, "This divine writ — let there be no doubt about it — is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious" (2:2). In verse 2:38, the Quran relates humanity's fall from Paradise, stating: "[For although] we did say, 'Down with you all from this [state],' there shall, nonetheless, most certainly come unto you guidance from Me, and those who follow My guidance need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve."

These and similar verses clearly suggest that the Book serves first and foremost as an instruction manual for humans. It contains guidance. In view of this, *`adl* requires that Muslims approach it primarily as divine guidance, that is to say, they should read, appreciate, and implement its messages into their daily lives.

Although the Quran may have secondary, tertiary, quaternary, and other non-primary applications, using it only for them instead of for its primary purpose is a kind of misdemeanor. This is true of many things.

For example, a pen's main function is to write, a professor's main tasks are to teach and conduct research, and a president or prime minister is entrusted with running a country. But if the pen is used only to scratch one's body or make holes in delicate surfaces, the professor is given only clerical assignments, and the president or prime minister is tasked solely to officiate ceremonial events and is totally excluded from the administration and policymaking, the end result is *zulm*. This is because justice requires that an object/individual be used chiefly for the intended primary purpose.

Many Muslims, however, do not apply this logic to the Quran. They often read it without comprehension and thus fail to approach it as the primary source for comprehensive guidance for all spheres of life. As it is believed that reading one letter of the Quran can give the reciter up to 10 units of virtue, they recite it only to acquire *barakah* or the divine rewards of doing so, again often without comprehension.

They invoke its verses or frame them to hang them on the wall to shield their residence and its inhabitants from evil spirits or to protect them from hazards and possible break-ins. During business-opening rituals, people recite its verses in the hope of securing auspicious trade opportunities. Businesses use its verses in their advertising campaigns, seeking God's blessings and, most importantly, good profits. Students recite verses of the Quran to assist their memory and intellectual ability so they can get good grades. Job applicants do the same to do well in interviews.

Many Muslims also use the Quran as remedial treatment for various diseases. For

example, many read verses of Surah Yasin (Ch. 36) when they fall sick. They recite it and then blow into water and have ill persons drink it — or blow directly on them, believing that such ritualistic practices will cure the sick.

While all such uses of the Quran are not necessarily condemnatory and may even be beneficial and sanctioned by the practices of earlier Muslims, these are not the primary reasons why God sent down the divine writ.

> **[If] non-primary functions predominate and are considered more important, then the Quran is not approached for its primary use at all. The end result can only be the trivialization of the holy book.**

If these non-primary functions predominate and are considered more important, then the Quran is not approached for its primary use at all. The end result can only be the trivialization of the holy book. This deemphasizes and frustrates the core purpose for which it was revealed first and foremost.

Fragmenting the Quran

Another incorrect — yet common — approach is to fragment the Quranic text. Dividing the Quran into fragments can potentially result in exclusive emphasis on some parts of the Quran and negligence to or ignorance about the rest of the book.

Muslims are obliged to abide by all of the Quranic rules and regulations, as they are supposed to seek guidance from (authentic) Hadith literature as well as to emulate the Prophet's deeds and words. However, if they do not read the entire Quran, they will not be able to implement its teachings in their totality.

Most Muslims are, however, selective and mainly focus on those verses that talk about rituals or those verses that have healing powers or protective effects. This is prominently reflected in Friday *khutbah*s (sermons), for most imams emphasize certain verses, rituals, and routines while ignoring many core concepts of Islam.

One dangerous practice is dividing the Quran into small segments, as it is believed they carry special virtues and reading them may benefit the reciter both materially and spiritually. To facilitate this practice, many publishers have printed various fragments (e.g., Surah Yasin) separately.

Thus, many Muslims read only those small portions and rarely turn their attention to other parts of the Quran. Slices of the Quran in print form are found in mosques in almost all countries. Such fragmentation impedes the much-needed transmission of the entire Quranic message and leads to complacency with only hearing and reading selective portions of it. Thus, its primary function is ignored yet again.

Such practices are common among Muslims, which raises an important question: scholars unanimously agree that reform in Muslim society is long overdue, yet how can this occur if Muslims do not restore the Quran to its rightful place in their lives? They must approach it primarily for guidance and with the intention to act upon its teachings. In other words, the sacred text's non-primary functions cannot be allowed to triumph over its primary function.

Even many non-Muslim scholars acknowledge that the Quran is a wonderful book, incomparable to any other work. It is, especially for Muslims, a precious gem whose proper value must be appreciated and acted upon. Unfortunately, among many Muslims today, this is not the case.

Will Muslims ever manage to see a bright hope or a great future ahead for themselves? The answer, perhaps lies, to a great extent, in their correct use and application of the Quran in its entirety. The sooner they rectify their approach to the Quran, the better. ib

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Note: An earlier version of this essay appeared in AboutIslam.net on Nov. 19, 2017 under the title "How Muslims Trivialize the Qur'an."

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