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In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

The Islamic View

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Worldwide Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement (AAHL)

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Child Marriage and Hazrat Aishah, Wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad

Friday khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 21 November 2025



“And give women their dowries (nuptial gift) as a free gift. But if they of themselves are pleased to give you a portion from it, consume it with enjoyment and pleasure.” — ch. 4, *An-Nisā*, v. 4

وَأْتُوا النِّسَاءَ صَدُقَتِهِنَّ نِحْلَةً فَإِنْ طِبْنَ لَكُمْ عَنْ شَيْءٍ مِّنْهُ نَفْسًا فَكُلُوهُ هَنِيئًا مَّرِيَّتًا ﴿٤﴾

“And test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage. Then if you find in them maturity of intellect, make over to them their property...” — ch. 4, *An-Nisā*, v. 6

وَابْتَلُوا الْيَتَامَىٰ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغُوا النِّكَاحَ فَإِنْ آنَسْتُمْ مِّنْهُمْ رُّشْدًا فَادْفَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ...

I have recited these verses to show that, according to the Quran, a woman at the time of her marriage must have decision-making capacity. Unfortunately, in later Islamic law, which was developed by Muslim jurists two centuries and more after the beginning of Islam, the marriage of a girl who is a child 10 or 11 years old is allowed. Child marriage was a custom in many societies in the world. The reasons were often connected with establishing or maintaining a political, tribal or property alliance between families. Here in the UK until 1929 the minimum legal age of marriage was 12 for a girl and 14 for a boy provided they had the consent of the parents. The law was changed in 1929 to raise the age for both girls and boys to 16 with parental consent, and to 21 without need for parental consent. There are still people in the UK, now aged 96 or more, within whose lifetime it was legal in the UK for a girl to be married at the age of 12 years, and for a boy at the age of 14 years.

The first verse I recited requires the husband, at the time of marriage, to bestow a material gift on his wife, which becomes her property. This is generally known as *mahr*. Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his Urdu commentary on the Quran, has emphasised that the *mahr* is a free gift which is given without expectation of any return. He mentions that there was a pre-Islamic custom, which continued among some non-Muslim communities for a long time later on, that this was a payment or bride-price which the husband paid to the parents or guardians of the bride in exchange for the bride. This custom is prohibited in Islam by declaring *mahr* to be a *nihlah* or free gift. It is written in a dictionary of the Arabic of the Quran, compiled 900 years

ago, that the word *niḥlah* comes from the Arabic word for the honey bee, which is *naḥl*, because bees bring free gifts for flowers when they fly over to them. Of course, honey is sweet, and the *niḥlah* given to the bride by the husband must also be a sweet and pleasing thing.

To be a property owner, a man or woman must possess the discretion to make decisions. As every bride is given this *mahr*, which becomes her material property, it clearly means that she should be of age to own property. Moreover, the verse says that if the bride is happy to give back something from it back to her husband as a gift from her, then he should take it with pleasure. This clearly indicates that she has the right to give that property by her own choice and discretion. So she must be of an age to know what she is doing with her possessions and why she is doing it.

The second quotation I read, which is from the start of a verse two verses later, contains instructions for guardians of orphans. Obviously, when orphans grow up, they have to be given independence by their guardians. This verse requires the guardians to apply some kind of test of mental maturity to the orphans, and if they pass it then to hand over to them any property which the guardians were looking after for them. How does marriage come into this? It comes in because the verse says that you should keep on testing orphans till they reach the age of marriage. This clearly shows that in Islam there is a minimum age below which marriage cannot take place, and this is the age when a person attains mental maturity and can handle his or her own money and property.

I mentioned above that in the UK the legal age of marriage was set by law in 1929 at 16 for both girls and boys. At the same time, the British government of India also proposed to pass a similar law for British India, with the ages being 14 for girls and 16 for boys. The purpose was to prevent the widespread custom of child marriages among Hindus and Muslims. Various Muslim religious leaders expressed their opinions on this measure. Maulana Muhammad Ali, in an article in English, wrote:

“Thus it would appear that the bill for fixing an age limit for marriage in the case of boys as well as girls is quite in accordance with the Holy Quran and the *Sunnah*, and must be welcomed by all Muslims and given support to unconditionally. Personally I would like the age limit in the case of girls to be raised to 15 and in the case of boys to 18. ... Even those Muslims who are of the opinion that Islam allows the marriage of minors must concede that this is at the most an exception and also that the general trend of the teachings of Islam is against it, and therefore a law prohibiting the marriage of minors cannot be said to be against the teaching of Islam” (*The Light*, 5 July 1928, p. 7–8).

The Muslim religious leaders who regard child marriage as allowable put forward an argument that it is stated in *Bukhari* that Hazrat Aishah was betrothed to the Holy Prophet, that is, entered into *nikāḥ* or the marriage pact, when she was six years old, and she joined him in his household when she was nine years old. These statements about her age have become widespread among Muslims, non-Muslims, and the critics of Islam. It appears that Maulana Muhammad Ali was the first Islamic scholar directly to challenge that she was this young. He showed from historical evidence that there were, not three years, but five years between her *nikāḥ* and her joining the Holy Prophet’s household, and that her *nikāḥ* took place when she

was at the least ten years old, making her at least fifteen years old when her marital life started. Further research by members of our *Jamaat* has shown that at her *nikāh* she was 14 or 15 years old and 19 years old when her marital life started. She had a sister, Hazrat Asma, about whom it is known that she was ten years older than Hazrat Aishah, and from the date of Hazrat Asma's death and her age at death we find that Asma was 25 years old when Hazrat Aishah's *nikāh* took place. So Hazrat Aishah was 15 at her *nikāh*.

I may mention two further pieces of evidence about her true age. There is a famous biography of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, written about 200 years after his death, known as *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* by Ibn Ishaq, edited by Ibn Hisham. It has been translated from Arabic into other languages, including Urdu and English. It is well-known that Hazrat Abu Bakr was one of the very earliest persons to accept Islam when the Holy Prophet Muhammad started preaching at the age of forty. Then Hazrat Abu Bakr himself started calling others to Islam. In Ibn Ishaq's book there is a list of people who accepted Islam at the invitation of Hazrat Abu Bakr. In that list are mentioned:

“Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr, together with his little daughter Aishah” (p. 116 of the English translation by A. Guillame).

This clearly shows that when the Holy Prophet started his mission, Aishah had not only been born but was capable of accepting Islam as her religion. As she was undoubtedly what is called a child prodigy, she must have been not much less than five years old at the time. This would make her at least 15 years old at the time of her *nikāh*, and at least 20 when she joined him as wife.

Two incidents reported in *Sahih Bukhari* relating to the famous battle of Uhud, which took place about a year after her marriage to the Holy Prophet, also show that she could not possibly have been nine years of age at her marriage. A Companion of the Holy Prophet relates:

“On the day (of the battle) of Uhud when (some) people retreated and left the Prophet, I saw Aishah, daughter of Abu Bakr and Umm Sulaim, with their robes tucked up, so that the bangles around their ankles were visible, hurrying with their water skins. Then they would pour the water in the mouths of the people, and return to fill the water skins again and came back again to pour water in the mouths of the people” (*hadith* 2880). This is in a chapter of *Bukhari* headed: “Women in battle and their fighting along with men.”

Commenting on this report, Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

“It should also be noted that Aishah joined the Holy Prophet's household only one year before the battle of Uhud. According to the common view she would be only ten years of age at this time, which is certainly not a suitable age for the work she did on this occasion. This also shows that she was not so young at this time.”

The second incident about this battle is related by Hazrat Ibn Umar as follows:

“The Messenger of Allah called me to present myself in front of him on the eve of the battle of Uhud, while I was fourteen years of age at that time, and he did not allow me to take part in that battle, but he called me in front of him on the eve of the battle of the Trench when I was fifteen years old, and he allowed me” (*hadith* 2664, 4097).

As the Holy Prophet did not allow Ibn Umar, a male, to join the battle of Uhud because his age was only 14, how could the Holy Prophet allow Hazrat Aishah, a female and his own wife, to come to that battlefield at the supposed age of ten?

It is also abundantly clear from the role which Hazrat Aishah played for the Muslim community for more than forty years after the death of the Holy Prophet, as interpreter and teacher of Islam, and narrator of the sayings and actions of the Holy Prophet, that he married her because of her remarkable qualities, as well as due to the prospect that she would live for a considerable period of time after his death and be able to spread his message to distant generations. The qualities she was blessed with included: a constant inquisitiveness to acquire knowledge, an excellent memory to retain it, and a great power of understanding and reasoning with which to analyse, interpret and apply it. Added to these were her boldness in speaking the truth to anyone, however high they may be, and her extraordinary communication skills to transmit that knowledge to a wide range of audiences, whether it was the prominent Companions of the Holy Prophet or the ordinary believers, scholars or students, males or females.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* writes that many regard Hazrat Aishah “as personifying an early Islamic idealization of women as the social and legal equal of men, valorized for their contributions in both the private and public spheres.” May Allah enable all Muslims to accord that recognition to her, and take her as our role-model — *Ameen*.

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The audio form of this talk is available on YouTube at the link:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-yrxWzHdk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-yrxWzHdk)

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Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad on the Issue of Hazrat Aishah’s Age

In reply to an objection from the Arya Samaj about the age of Hazrat Aishah at the time of her marriage, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad writes as follows:

“اور حضرت عائشہ کا نو سالہ ہونا تو صرف بے سروپا قوال میں آیا ہے۔ کسی حدیث یا قرآن سے ثابت نہیں۔“

“The age of Hazrat Aishah as nine years is only given in some statements which make neither head nor tail. It is not proved from any *hadith* or the Quran.”

Book: *Arya Dharm*, published 1895. See the collection *Ruhani Khaza'in*, vol. 10, p. 64.

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# Age Limit in Marriage

Maulana Muhammad Ali

(from *The Light*, 5 July 1928, pages 7–8)

**(Editor's note: In India under British rule, a law was under consideration in 1928 to set minimum ages of marriages for boys and girls. It was passed in September 1929 as the Child Marriage Restraint Act. While it was being deliberated upon, various Muslim and Hindu groups expressed their views about it. Maulana Muhammad Ali published his opinion as follows in the Lahore Ahmadiyya English organ *The Light*.)**

The second bill before the Legislative Assembly relates to the prohibition of marriage before the age of fourteen in the case of females and sixteen in the case of males. This measure really aims at the reformation of the Hindu custom of child-marriage, but since it applies to all communities, the Muslims would be equally affected by it. The rule among the Muslims no doubt is that marriage does not take place before the two parties have attained the age of puberty, but in exceptional cases marriage does take place in case where one or both parties are minors. If the bill now before the Assembly is passed into a law, such exceptional cases would be illegal and punishable, under the penal code of the country, and therefore it is the duty of all Muslims to see whether penalising child marriage would be against Islamic law and must be opposed, or whether Islam itself is against the marriage of minors.

In this case too we shall first resort to the Holy Quran. Marriage, according to the Holy Book, is a contract:

“They (*i.e.*, your wives) have made with you a firm covenant” (4:21).

Now, both parties to a contract must be able to exercise their discretion in the matter, and hence the mere fact that marriage according to the Holy Quran is a contract is conclusive proof that the parties entering into this contract must have reached the age of discretion. Again the Holy Quran lays down plainly:

“Marry such women as seem good to you” (4:3).

Here, too, a man is required to exercise his discretion and to choose for himself his partner in life. A boy who had not reached the age of majority could not decide what woman was good for him. More explicitly still it speaks of the age of majority as the age of marriage. Thus speaking of the orphans, it says:

“And test the orphans until they attain majority (Ar. *nikah*), then if you find in them maturity of intellect, make over to them their property” (4:6).

The word used for majority in the original is *nikah*, which means *marriage*, and therefore the literal rendering would be until they attain *the age of marriage*, while what is meant is *majority*, as the words that follow show: *if you find in them maturity of intellect*. It is, moreover, clear that when the Holy Quran speaks definitely of an age of marriage, it requires that a marriage-contract should be entered into only after a man has attained to a certain age. And in this respect there is no difference between the male and the female, for the word *orphans*

includes both, and therefore the words *age of marriage* apply to both. The limit may not be the same for both, but that there should be a limit for both is here expressly stated.

It is quite in accordance with what is so clearly stated in the Holy Quran that the Holy Prophet is reported to have laid down the express condition that “the widow should not be married until she is consulted, and the virgin should not be married until her consent is obtained.” It is simply absurd to suppose that a minor can give her consent, and the Holy Prophet, by making it obligatory that her consent should be obtained, only gave expression to what was required by the Holy Quran. Only one who had attained maturity of intellect could give her consent as to the man whom she chose as her partner in life. As against this it is alleged that the Holy Prophet married Ayesha while she was six or seven years of age, but even supposing such reports to be reliable, the laws relating to marriage and divorce as contained in the Holy Quran were revealed at Medina while the Holy Prophet’s marriage with Ayesha took place while he was still at Mecca, and therefore even if this marriage was contracted while Ayesha was a minor, it cannot be advanced as an argument against the law as revealed later on, and against its right interpretation as given by the Holy Prophet himself. But there is reason to believe that Ayesha was not really so young when the Holy Prophet married her. Reliable reports show that she was only ten years younger than her elder sister Asma, who was undoubtedly twenty-seven years of age when the Holy Prophet’s Flight to Medina took place, and thus Ayesha was really sixteen years of age when the Holy Prophet married her about a year before the Flight.

Notwithstanding the clear statements of the Holy Quran and the rule laid down by the Holy Prophet, the Muslim jurists have generally recognised the validity of a minor entering into a marriage contract through his or her guardian. But a difference of opinion does exist on this point. Thus we find in the *Nail-ul-Autar*:

“Ibn-i-Hazm relates from Ibn-i-Shabrama that the father has no right to give away in marriage his minor daughter until she attains majority and gives her consent.”

And according to Mulla Ali Qari in *Sharh-i-Mishkat*, both Ibn-i-Shabrama and Abu Bakr Assam are against the marriage of a minor. As regards the minor son, there is stronger opinion that a marriage contract should not be entered into on his behalf by his guardian. Thus the *Umdat-ul-Qari*, quoting Ibn-i-Hazm, says:

“It is not lawful for the father nor for anyone else to marry the male (child) until he attains majority. If he does so, it shall be cancelled for ever, and this view is adopted by many others.”

The reason is clear; marriage involves a number of responsibilities which the minor is unable to undertake. But this reason equally applies to the female and she, too, if a minor, is unable to undertake marriage responsibilities. In the case of an orphan girl, the Shafa‘i school of thought holds that she should not be married before she attains majority. The argument against her marriage while a minor is based on the words of a tradition which says that “the orphan girl shall not be married until she is consulted.” The Shafa‘i says that if it be objected that the minor (as the orphan must be) cannot be consulted, the reply is that the hint is that her marriage should be postponed until she attains majority when she becomes fit for giving her opinion. Now, this argument applies with equal force to every minor girl, because the Holy Prophet has made it

obligatory that her consent should be obtained before her marriage, and her consent is meaningless until she attains majority. As against the plain statement of the Holy Quran and the clear injunctions of the Holy Prophet, the opinion of those jurists who legalize marriage of minors must therefore be rejected, but it may be added that even according to the jurists, the minor on attaining majority has the right to repudiate a marriage contract which the guardian has made.

Thus it would appear that the bill for fixing an age limit for marriage in the case of boys as well as girls is quite in accordance with the Holy Quran and the *Sunnah*, and must be welcomed by all Muslims and given support to unconditionally. Personally I would like the age limit in the case of girls to be raised to 15 and in the case of boys to 18. Even if the Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet were silent on this point, the Muslims should have supported the bill, for it is quite unreasonable that a contract on which depends the happiness of a man or a woman for the whole of his or her life should be entered into by others while the actual party is unable even to realize the responsibilities which he or she is made to incur as a result. Even those Muslims who are of the opinion that Islam allows the marriage of minors must concede that this is at the most an exception and also that the general trend of the teachings of Islam is against it, and therefore a law prohibiting the marriage of minors cannot be said to be against the teachings of Islam. For instance, Islam did not abolish slavery at once, but the general trend of its teachings was that slavery should be gradually abolished, and hence the law abolishing slavery cannot be said to be against the teachings of Islam. Thus, even if some jurists did allow marriage of minors in exceptional circumstances at an earlier stage, the time has now arrived when all must join hand to abolish a practice which does harm to and entails hardship on the very persons for whose benefit it is sanctioned.

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## **Visit of President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, to the Berlin Mosque on 12 March 2025 at Fast-Breaking Time (*Iftar*)**

On 12 March 2025, which coincided with 12th Ramadan, the President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, visited the Berlin Mosque at fast-breaking time. Before the fast ending he delivered a speech inside the Mosque to a large gathering which had entirely filled the building. The news media and photographers were also present in the Mosque. His speech was followed by a speech by Dr Gerdien Jonker, historian of religion, researcher and author of several publications on the history of Muslims in Germany and the Berlin Mosque. The *Imam* of the Mosque, Mr Amir Aziz, also spoke, and Dr A.K. Saeed, the worldwide Head of the Lahore Ahmadiyya, concluded by thanking the President.

The fast was then ended inside the Mosque with dates and water, and the Call to Prayer was delivered. Then the President and the gathering proceeded to a marquee set up in the Mosque grounds for dinner.

[At this external YouTube link](#), the speech of the President with English subtitles can be viewed.

## Photographs

↓ *Gathering waiting in the Mosque for the President's arrival* ↓



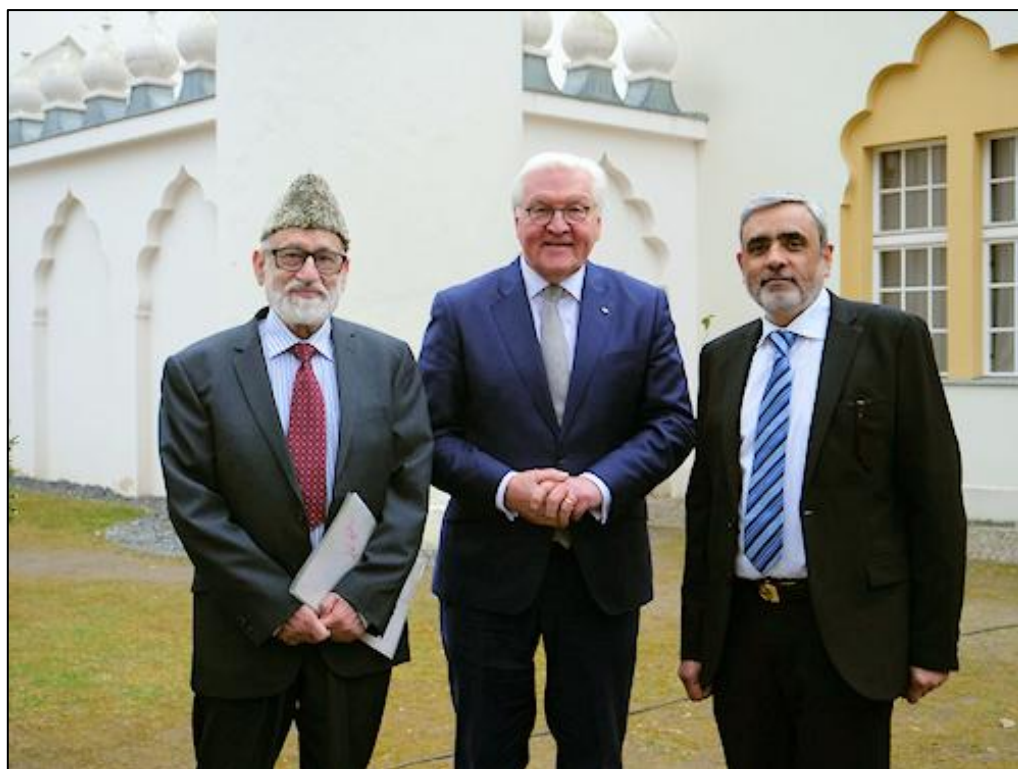
↓ *The President delivering his speech inside the Mosque* ↓



↓ *The President (right) with Imam Amir Aziz (left) as the fast breaks inside the Mosque* ↓



↓ *Dr A.K. Saeed (left), President (centre), and Imam Amir Aziz (right)* ↓



↓ At dinner. ↓

*To the President's right is Dr Gerdien Jonker, and further to the right is Dr A.K. Saeed*



## Reports in the Media

1. *The Pinnacle Gazette* published the following item on 13 March:

### **President Steinmeier Visits Historic Mosque for Ramadan *Iftar* The Visit Symbolizes Unity and Interfaith Dialogue during Ramadan Celebrations**

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier visited the historic Lahore Ahmadiyya Mosque located in the Wilmersdorf district of Berlin on March 13, 2025. His visit coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, and he participated in the traditional *Iftar* meal with community members at the mosque.

This mosque, which celebrated its centennial this year, is not just any mosque; it is the oldest mosque in Germany, established between 1924 and 1928 by the Ahmadiyya Movement, also known as the Lahore Community, headquartered in Pakistan. The mosque's architectural design was created by German architect Karl-Alfred Herrmann, who drew inspiration from the rich patterns of eastern architectural styles.

Since its founding, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Mosque has served as a welcoming space for Muslims from diverse backgrounds. It has become renowned for fostering interfaith dialogue, hosting various events and activities aimed at bringing together individuals from different beliefs and traditions. The mosque itself has enjoyed protected monument status since 1993, indicating its cultural significance, and has held regular Friday prayers since 2010.

During the *Iftar*, President Steinmeier expressed his happiness at being present and stated,

“I am pleased to be here today at this mosque, where people of different beliefs gather for a shared *iftar* meal.”

His words highlight the essence of the gathering, reinforcing the idea of unity among various faiths during Ramadan.

Emphasizing the mosque's role, Steinmeier noted,

“The mosque's history reflects the spirit of tolerance and openness.”

This statement succinctly captures the mosque's commitment to being more than just a place of worship. It functions as a center for serious dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims, showcasing how such interactions can lead to greater mutual respect and coexistence.

Reflecting on the historical backdrop during which the mosque was founded, Steinmeier remarked on the period of significant upheaval after World War I. He pointed out how various religions, including Islam, needed to reevaluate their foundations and seek fresh avenues for communication and greater understandings. This historical perspective adds depth to the mosque's significance as it navigated through contrasting societal challenges.

The architectural elements of the mosque were also highlighted. Steinmeier praised its unique design, which remains one of the outstanding landmarks of Berlin. Consequently, he stated,

“The inclusion of all Islamic influences under one roof reflects the spirit of tolerance.”

This admiration not only recognizes the mosque's aesthetic value but also its symbolic function as a space where diverse Islamic traditions coalesce.

Throughout its 100-year history, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Mosque has embraced

individuals from all walks of life, serving as more than just sacred ground but also as a bastion of intercultural harmony and cohabitation. It was built with the intention of bridging communities through shared religious experiences and heartfelt discussions.

Steinmeier's visit and the *Iftar* meal at the mosque serve as reminders of the significance of such spaces, especially during times of division and misunderstanding. It showcases the importance of open dialogue and community gathering as foundational aspects of society's progress.

The event exemplifies how the mosque continues to uphold its founding principles, which focused on promoting peace, respect, and unity. It stands as a testimony to the Ahmadiyya Movement's vision of fostering interfaith relationships and supporting the discourse on tolerance and acceptance, which is particularly pertinent as societies around the world grapple with increasing polarization.

President Steinmeier's presence at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Mosque doesn't only reinforce the mosque's mission but also showcases the role of political figures in supporting cultural and interfaith initiatives. Such acts can inspire others to join similar endeavors, paving the way for more inclusive environments where diversity is celebrated rather than diminished.

With Steinmeier's remarks and commitment to dialogue, the visit solidifies the mosque's position as not merely historic but also as vibrant and dynamic, continuing to play a significant role within the broader Berlin community and beyond. It encourages people of varying backgrounds to engage with one another, cultivating stronger, lasting relationships rooted firmly in respect and shared human values.

## 2. From *Tagesschau* ([See link](#)):

### ***Älteste Moschee Deutschlands: Steinmeier besucht "Wilmersdorfer Moschee" zum Fastenbrechen***

*Bundespräsident Frank-Walter Steinmeier wird der Lahore-Ahmadiyya-Moschee im Berliner Stadtteil Wilmersdorf am Mittwochabend einen Besuch abstatten. Das Staatsoberhaupt will am traditionellen Fastenbrechen im Ramadan teilnehmen. Das Gotteshaus gilt als Deutschlands älteste noch erhaltene Moschee und feiert dieses Jahr ihr hundertjähriges Bestehen.*

#### ***Einweihung der Kuppel vor hundert Jahren***

*Die Moschee wurde 1924 bis 1928 von der islamischen Lahore-Ahmadiyya-Bewegung, die ihren Sitz in Pakistan hat, gebaut. Sie wird auch "Wilmersdorfer Moschee" genannt. Der Berliner Architekt Karl Alfred Herrmann entwarf den Bau im "Mogulstil", der sich an orientalische Vorbilder anlehnt. Im April 1925, vor hundert Jahren, wurde die Kuppel eingeweiht. Das Haus stand nach eigenen Angaben von Beginn an Muslimen aller Nationen offen und wurde schnell zu einem Ort des interreligiösen Dialogs. Neben dem Gebet werden dort auch Feste, Vorträge und Veranstaltungen für unterschiedliche Gruppen organisiert. Seit 1993 steht das Gotteshaus unter Denkmalschutz.*

English translation:

## **Oldest Mosque in Germany: Steinmeier visits “Wilmerdsdorf Mosque” to Break Fast.**

Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will visit the Lahore-Ahmadiyya Mosque in Berlin’s Wilmerdsdorf district on Wednesday evening. The head of state wants to participate in the traditional breaking of fasting in Ramadan. The church is considered to be Germany’s oldest surviving mosque and is celebrating its centenary this year.

### **Inauguration of the Dome a Hundred Years Ago**

The mosque was built from 1924 to 1928 by the Islamic Lahore-Ahmadiyya Movement, which is based in Pakistan. It is also called “Wilmerdsdorf Mosque”. The Berlin architect, Karl Alfred Herrmann, designed the building in the “Mogulstil”, which is based on oriental models. In April 1925, a hundred years ago, the dome was inaugurated. According to its own information, the house was open to Muslims of all nations from the very beginning and quickly became a place of interreligious dialogue. In addition to prayer, festivals, lectures and events for various groups are also organized there. The church has been listed as a historic monument since 1993.

### **3. Urdu Pakistan newspaper *Jang*. ([See link](#)):**

A brief report with a video was published in its issue of 18 March 2025 entitled:

جرمن صدر برلن کی قدیم مسجد میں مسلمانوں کے ساتھ افطار میں شریک

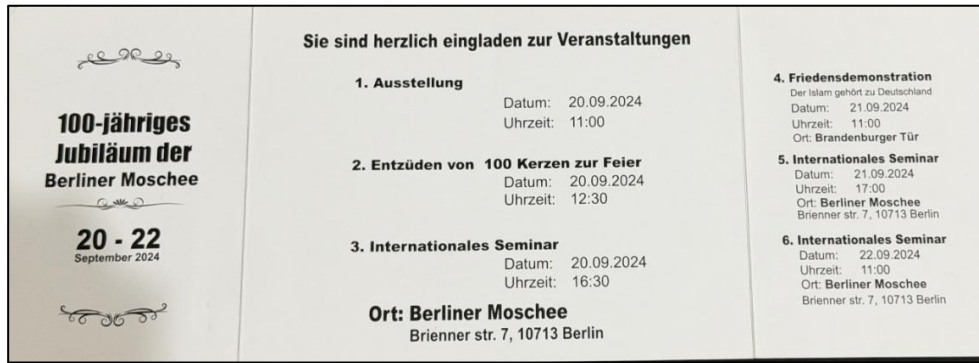
Translation:

“President of Germany joins Muslims in *Iftar* at the Historic Mosque in Berlin”

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Centenary of the Berlin Mosque, 19 – 22 September 2024





Talk delivered at the Centenary, 21 September 2024

The Power of Dialogue

by Dr Gerdien Jonker

Congratulations to the Lahore Ahmadiyya community on their hundredth birthday. Congratulations to the President, Dr [Abdul Karim] Saeed, for safeguarding the community's openness. Congratulations to Imam Amir Aziz, who kept the doors wide open while preparing for the birthday [celebration], including the renovation of the building. Congratulations to the Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf district for safely hosting this mosque for so long. Congratulations to the city of Berlin for having this Muslim community as a vibrant conversation partner. Congratulations to all of you!

My name is Gerdien Jonker, and I am a religious historian. Over a period of eleven years, between 2012 and 2023, I studied the history of this mosque, research that was financially supported by the German Science Foundation. The Lahore Ahmadiyya community gave me access to files that members could not read and trusted me to look at anything I thought was promising. This double support resulted in a very rich outcome. I have been able to publish on a range of lovely subjects, such as the missionaries from Lahore and how they prepared for "Europe"; their German recipients in search of religious renewal; the Muslim-Jewish encounter that took place in this mosque; the restart after the war; the mosque archive, and last but not least, the German Koran, which the first missionary to Berlin, Sadr-ud-Din, published in 1939.

As I presented this research at workshops and conferences, colleagues sometimes asked: Why such a small community? My answer is that the Lahore Ahmadiyya community may be small in numbers, but when it comes to its potential for dialogue, it has an essential openness, range, and reach that is not surpassed by other Muslim communities. Even more, with this potential it has filled a need in European society, and, to all appearances, will continue to do so.

So, what does Lahore Ahmadiyya stand for? In British India, as early as 1900, Ahmadiyya adopted a worldview that was essentially secular and democratic. It registered in the British census as an independent Muslim community, thereby accepting the legitimate government of the British and the separation of religion and state. After the first Ahmadiyya community fell out over fundamental questions of leadership, Lahore Ahmadiyya adopted a democratically elected board with an elected president.

In addition to these fundamental decisions, Lahore Ahmadiyya adopted modern Western knowledge as the key to modernization. She prepared a mission to Europe to explain what she believed Islam was about and to look for European partners — as friends, as discussion partners, as converts. Ultimately, Lahore Ahmadiyya brought a vision of religious progress to Berlin. After the mosque was finished in 1926, it opened its doors to all viewpoints regarding the future development of the religion.

Secular, democratic, modern, open to the viewpoints of others, and, through these, the search for religious progress are the five keywords that, in my opinion, have defined the life of this Muslim community for a century. And that alone is worth a big thank-you to all of you sitting here.

For our better understanding of how the work was done, however, it would be a mistake to present the history of this mosque as continuity. The more interesting question is: How exactly did Lahore Ahmadiyya tackle German modernity and the Nazi takeover, sail through war and destruction, pick up the pieces after the war, and master the vagaries of decolonization, including the havoc, the second wave of decolonization caused in Pakistan?

To understand the history of this mosque and the community behind it, it could be more fruitful to view it as a series of contingencies. In the following, I will sum up some of the deep fissures in world history that shook this mosque, but also, time and again, made possible new ideas, new actors, and new forms of reaching out.

The First World War was just such a contingency. Millions of people from the colonies were relocated to the European theatre of war. The globalization of the world accelerated. For colonial intellectuals, the idea of independence took shape. As a warmongering party, Germany only took notice of the changes after the end of the war. When the Lahore Ahmadiyya missionary Sadr-ud-Din laid the foundation stone for a Berlin Mosque in April 1924, it was a time of extreme unrest. Germany, which had lost the war and was considered the aggressor, was in great difficulty. It suffered bank crashes, armed uprisings from left and right, and deep psychological crises.

Missionaries sent to Berlin viewed this as a positive sign. As Abdul Sattar Kheiri, founder of the Muslim Community of Berlin, wrote in 1922:

“Among all the countries of Europe, there does not appear as much scope for the propagation of Islam as there is in Germany. (...) Everyone here is convinced that rebirth is not possible without following true religion.”

Sadr-ud-Din, the first Lahore Ahmadiyya missionary in Berlin, answered:

“Christianity has proved an utter failure to the West. It has shown that it has no such thing as even the semblance of brotherhood. To these forlorn nations, the Muslim demonstration of the real, practical, and universal brotherhood is an object lesson.”

Sadr-ud-din wanted to prove this by building a mosque in a very short time and attracting a large congregation. In every issue of the *Moslemische Revue* he wrote:

“To become a Muslim, no ceremony is required. Every child is born with it. For this reason, no transformation is needed. You can be Muslim without telling anyone.”

To which Germans did this appeal? Not to the churches, not to the working classes, not to your average German Christian, but to a very special breed of young German moderns. Among them were secular Christian and secular Jewish artists, architects, and orientalists, spearheading a movement in search of a Novel Man, a new society, and new forms of religion. Politically, they were socialist-minded, but ten years later most Christian converts to Islam embraced the Nazi view, whereas Jewish converts were pushed out of the country.

As one can easily see, whereas on the Muslim side the contingency of the First World War gave rise to a positive outreach, on the German side it was continued by several further ruptures. Here, I just mention to you the life reformers, so different from traditional Germans, spearheading religious change in an otherwise conservative country; their transition from left to right, from a universal, cosmopolitan outlook to a narrow, ultranationalist framework, thereby causing a split in the young convert community in this mosque.

What happened next still remains hidden from view. All we know is that, while the last missionary, Sheikh Abdullah, was expelled from Berlin at the start of the war, his community thrived. But who participated, and what was said, is still beyond our knowledge. The silence that governs here is most impressively engraved in the mosque's archive: apart from a handful of monthly bills for electricity, coal, snow removal, and building insurance, for five years, the files remain empty.

A spectacular rupture with what happened during the war occurred immediately afterward when the chairman of the now much reduced Jewish community, Siegmund Wellinger, asked Sheikh Abdullah, *Imam* of the mosque in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, and Guido Auster, librarian of the Buddhist House in Berlin-Frohnau, to work closely with him. In particular, he called on them to form the group “Non-Christian Religions” within the framework of the AKR, the working group of Churches and Non-Christian Religions in Berlin. In this working group, founded in 1947, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists gained visibility and indeed sympathy through radio broadcasts and a broad network of mutual visits and talks. It certainly prepared the ground for Yahya Butt, who, from 1959 to 1989, acted as *Imam* in this mosque and the new Muslim communities that appeared in Berlin as a result of Germany's foreign workers policy. In the Berlin dailies, Butt was coined as “an ecumenical-minded *Imam*.”

All of this could have been easily continued if not for the second wave of decolonization, which rocked the world around 1980. The first wave occurred immediately after the war when the former colonies declared their independence. The second manifested itself thirty years later when those same countries tried to become more independent from the West. The question of “Who are we?” arose, and, in several Muslim nation-states, was answered with a new focus on religion. Pakistan, for example, the homeland of the Lahore Ahmadiyya, used religious orthodoxy to draw new boundaries between who was considered Muslim and therefore to belong, and who was not. Incidentally, Lahore Ahmadiyya was considered not to belong and therefore suffered persecution. This also had serious consequences for the mosque in Berlin. As it became increasingly difficult for Ahmadiyya in Lahore to muster enough energy and money to keep the mosque open, it was even closed for several years.

And with this I have reached the end of my summing up. With a view to Lahore Ahmadiyya in Berlin, I have drawn you a century full of deep ruptures in world history that shook this mosque but also, time and again, made possible new ideas, new actors, and new ways of reaching out. The secret behind lays in this community's power to maintain a secular outlook and be open to the viewpoints of others. It is the power of dialogue. I trust that it will define the life of this Berlin Muslim community for another century.

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## Omissions from the last issue

The audio form of the talks published in the November 2025 issue is available on YouTube at the following links:

***God's Light in the Holy Quran and the Festival of Diwali:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zw1oRHW3u-E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zw1oRHW3u-E)

***Maulana Muhammad Ali's English Translation of the Quran: Necessity, History and Importance:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaClyADrdNQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaClyADrdNQ)

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For books on Islam and the Ahmadiyya Movement, translations of the Holy Quran in Urdu, English, German, French, Russian, Arabic, Javanese, Indonesian, Dutch, Spanish and Turkish, visit our websites:

www.ahmadiyya.org

www.ahmadiyah.org (in Indonesian)

www.alahmadiyya.org

www.aaiil.org

Read a selection of Lahore Ahmadiyya literature on the website archive.org at the link:

<http://bit.ly/4ok2NTj>