

Summary of the CASIS Saturday Night Lecture by Prof. Dr. Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on 14th July 2012

The Meaning of Religion

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Tan Sri Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas explained that the word Islam; referring to religion is new in al-Quran, and had never appeared before. *Dīn* (religion) conveys the meaning being indebted. Being in debt, one is in submission and is under obligation (*dayn*), hence naturally involves judgement (*daynūnah*) and conviction (*idānah*). All of these significance as well as their contraries involved in *dāna* are practicable possibilities only in organized societies involved in commercial life in towns and cities denoted by *mudūn* or *madā'in* which in it exist a judge, ruler, or governor – *dayyān*. Thus the verb *dāna* pictures a civilized living; of societal life of law and order and justice and authority, conceptually connected with another verb *maddana* which means to build cities, to civilize, to refine, and to humanize, from which is derived from another term: *tamaddun* meaning a civilisation and refinement in social culture.

Tan Sri al-Attas then explained that one pays his debt by returning to Allah s.w.t. One learns to pay debt (returning) by following the *sunnah* (words and actions that are the yardstick of the correct way of living as a believer and viceroy of Allah s.w.t) of the Prophet s.a.w. The best returning or surrender is those who surrender whole self to Allah s.w.t. Audiences were reminded that one should not generalize certain culture or religion based on the common people, instead it should be based on its scholars and religious people. The audiences were also enlightened by a beautiful verse of wisdom:

“We are like earth. Without dīn, we are like dead earth without water”

- Y.M Tan Sri Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas