The mood among the courthouse clerical staff was jovial as they left work at the end of long day. A group of friends engaged in friendly banter. Somehow, the conversation turned to athletic prowess. One of the men, who happened to be a Sikh, boasted that no one could run faster than he. His 28 year old Muslim coworker took this to be a communal challenge to all Muslims and countered that he would be happy to race the Sikh man to the next bridge. A mutual friend of the two men volunteered to be the judge of the impromptu track competition. The judge ran ahead to the other side of the bridge so that he could determine the winner. Once there, he signaled for the competitors to start. The young Muslim challenger ran as fast as he could to save the honour of Islam. As he reached the end point ahead of the Sikh, the judge declared him to be the victor. Other Muslims gathered around him to congratulate him. They recalled that another famous 19th century martyr-saint, Syed Ismael, who on hearing that a Sikh man is a great swimmer, took up swimming and after months of painstaking practice challenged the Sikh swimmer and beat him at his own game. That passion to save the honour of Islam led Syed Ismael to lead an army of Muslims against British and die fighting the colonial authorities and their allies (Allen, 2006).

The race took place outside the District Court House in Indian City of Sialkot in 1868. The young Muslim runner was Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the future founder of Ahmadiyya Jama'at, who had left his home village just months ago to take up his first (and only) job in the large multicultural urban centre of Sialkot. Had he lived for another 79 years, Ahmad may have been happy to know that Sialkot (along with the rest of the Western Punjabi cities) was ethnically cleansed of all of its offending Hindu and Sikh inhabitants and had become part of the new Islamic country of Pakistan. One of Ahmad’s ardent followers, Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan, became Pakistan’s first foreign minister. Former Hindu and Sikh Sialkotis moved eastward to Indian Punjab, some of them settling in Ahmad’s home village of Qadian which was left on the Indian side of the border. In one of the largest ethnic cleansings in the world history more than twelve million people were forced to abandon their houses, farms, friendships and in some cases blood relatives. What caused millions of people who had lived with their neighbours for generations to feel threatened and abandon everything they had owned and everyone they had known? Why is it so easy for “us” to become scared of “them”? Why did a young man take an innocuous little boast about athletic prowess to be a challenge to his religious faith? How are actions of partisan individuals such as Ahmad both defined by the intensely sectarian atmosphere in which they grow up and contribute to maintaining and intensifying it? How and why do defenders of faith such as Ahmad end up wanting to change the very religion they purport to defend? How do they end up being reviled by the very community they claim to be saving?
2.1 Wired for Tribal Thinking

According to social identity theory—one of the most well developed social science models of social behavior—having a positive self-esteem is one of the most deep-seated human desires (H. Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Henri Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). Similar to the way, we need food and water to maintain our physical health; we need to feel that we are good people to maintain our mental health. One of the most amazing findings of the social psychological research is that our identity (i.e., our sense of who we are) is not defined just by our individual characteristics (such as the unique shape of our face) but also by the groups that we belong to. Not surprisingly then our self-esteem (i.e., what we think we are worth) is also based on our evaluation of the status of the groups we belong to. We feel happy when our group ranks well compared to other groups and sad when it does not seem to measure up. Just think of how you felt the last time your favourite sports team won a game. Perhaps, you felt the feeling of nirvana similar to the following fans of championship winning teams.

I am so proud to call myself a Packer fan it is just not possible to put it into words. I thought the last Super Bowl win was special but it is not at all comparable to this! WAY TO GO GREEN BAY PACKERS!!!! That includes players, coaches, management and especially fans! We are the best and I am very proud to be a part of it. (Comments on The Green Bay Packers forum)

As the following news report shows, American Football fans are not the only ones susceptible to such euphoric experiences following their team’s victory.

“Iniesta took us up into heaven” after an “agonising” game, said the sports daily Marca. “We suffered, but it was worth it.”

The country’s prime minister, Mr. Zapatero said he was “happy and emotional”.

Fans were left pinching themselves after watching their team triumph.

Said Adolfo, 25, said: “It’s an extraordinary feeling of happiness and nerves.”

“We’re going to celebrate like crazy, all night, all Monday until Tuesday morning,” said 41-year-old Miguel Angel. (Winter, 2010)

Even if you are one of the unfortunate few who have not yet experienced the unmitigated joy and pleasure of basking in the glory of your team’s championship win (sorry Winnipeg Jets, Texas Rangers, and Houston Astros fans), you probably know a die-hard sports fan who seems to be enjoying winning more than the players themselves. Sports psychologists have found that fans are more likely to wear their team’s jersey after a win and claim credit for the win by using terms such as “we won.”
Psychologist Edward Hurt of Indiana University found that ardent sports fans are more confident of winning dates with attractive members of the opposite sex following a win than after a loss. He showed pictures of attractive members of the opposite sex to sports fans whose teams had won and lost and found that fans of winning teams were significantly more confident of being able to obtain a date with persons shown in the pictures. Furthermore, he found that fans were also more confident of their ability to perform well in other unrelated activities such as darts and word games following a win by their team.

Bragging about the greatness of one’s favourite team is a standard part of the sports-fan behavior repertoire. Other unseemly components of this repertoire include verbal arguments and physical violence between spectators at sporting events and these days also on social media. As the following excerpt from a blog report about a Philadelphia-New York Football game shows the quality of arguments between sports fans leaves a lot to be desired.

With Sunday’s 27-17 win over the Giants, the Eagles are easily and hands down the best team in the NFC and possibly all of football. Not the Jets, not the Patriots, not the Falcons, not the Steelers nor the Saints. The Philadelphia Eagles are the best team and the most dynamic as well. The game wasn’t pretty by any accounts, but the Eagles have now shown that they can win by any fashion and how dangerous they are. (Nesgoda, 2010)

If you know any die-hard sports fans, you know that they are convinced that their team is the best, even if it is losing a game. New York Times reporter Warren St. John followed Alabama Crimson Tides fans as they followed their favourite college football team in their RVs from one tailgating party to another. However, instead of learning about the reasons for the blind devotion that fans have for their teams, he ends up confronting his own inner demons. Even though St. John was born and raised in Alabama, he had moved to New York when he was a teenager to study at Columbia. He is horrified to discover that he shares (with die hard Alabama fans) the belief that Alabama is better than other football teams. What’s worse is that he cannot explain why he holds that belief.

Try as I might, it’s impossible for me to admit that I like Alabama “just because” and not due to an objective reality that establishes as more worthy of my affection than Tennessee or Auburn. (As I write this, a part of my psyche is battling for control of my finger tips and screaming out, ‘Oh yes, we are!’) But why? My rational mind asks. Because we cheat less? (Doubtful.) Because we have better colors? (Absolutely, but if tomorrow we changed to mauve I’d reluctantly go along.) Because we’re better than they are? (Some years, yes; some years no - the historical tally is still being counted.) (St. John, 2005: 226)

I can relate to that. Whenever I have struggled with my faith in Ahmadiyya Islam, I have never considered any other Islamic traditions such as Sunni or Shia Islam, nor faiths of Zen Buddhism, or Jehovah’s Witnesses (despite the fact that they insisted on
dropping by our house in Saskatoon clutching a fresh issue of Watchtower magazine every month). Every time, I have asked myself ‘Why not?’, I feel a gut reaction because Ahmadiyya Islam is the better than any other kind of religion, and that somehow the Ahmadiyya belief system is more logical and more reasonable than others. I couldn’t quite explain why but I just knew that Ahmadiyyat made more sense than all other religious belief systems. If I had to believe in an organized religion, it would have to be Ahmadiyyat. Off course, similar to St. John, I didn’t have any rational argument to support my firm beliefs, yet, there it was, somehow lodged deeply inside the core of my being.

Social scientists have a name for such beliefs that are so deeply held that no evidence is considered necessary—myths (Lugli, 2013). Sports fans (both the closeted and the outted ones!) and religious zealots are not the only ones who believe in group superiority myths, many cultural groups hold similar beliefs. Anthropologists studying ethnic groups find that ethnocentric beliefs in “superiority of the ingroup’s culture combined with condemnation of the outgroup as immoral and inferior” are “commonplace. ‘Chosenness’ is a particularly prominent expression of this belief” (LeVine & Cambell, 1972: 6). Political scientist, Stephen Van Evera argues that such chauvinist myths are “hallmark of nationalism, practiced by nearly all nationalists to some degree” (van Evera, 1994). He provides a number of illustrative examples including the Nazi myth of Aryan supremacy, British and American beliefs in rational and intellectual exceptionalism (Longley, 2003), and Russian belief in their extraordinary inventiveness (see Table 1 for these and a number of other group superiority myths from around the world). He could easily have added many more to his list such as the Pakistani belief that one Pakistani Muslim soldier can dominate 10 Indian Hindu soldiers, American Indian belief that they are more spiritual than the more material “white man”, Israeli belief that they are more rational than crazy Arabs, Muslim belief that God chose to favour them as his final chosen people after Christians and Jews strayed from the prescribed path, and the Nation of Islam belief that an evil black scientist created the wicked white man. Group superiority myths are reflected in the literature and art of a group and feature prominently in its creation stories that form the master narrative of a group.

2.2 Muslim Hierarchy-Enhancing Myths

Although it’s easy to see Christianity and Islam as vast and static forces, they are perpetually in flux. Over time each religion has shaped the other. (Griswold, 2010: 12)
Table 3: A sample of group superiority myths from around the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth Type</th>
<th>Myth</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Abkhaz Myth</td>
<td>When God divided up the Earth between nations, the Abkhaz were not present and were left without land. When the Abkhaz finally arrived, God asked them why they were late, and the Abkhaz replied: „Because we had guests and could not leave them to join you.“ God was touched by Abkhaz hospitality and decided to give them the land he had planned to keep for himself. (Baudelaire &amp; Lynch, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Black Myth</td>
<td>Over eight thousand years ago, a brilliant but malevolent geneticist of the tribe of Shabazz named Yacub used his scientific knowledge to create the white man out of the original (Black) man by gradually mutating the latter’s genes. (Marable &amp; Agard-Jones, 2008:250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A German Myth</td>
<td>We Germans are more humane than the other nations; we do have better blood and breeding, more soul, more heart, and more imagination. (Von Bulow, 1915: 46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A British Myth</td>
<td>[British are] the greatest and most highly civilized people that ever the world saw” and are “the acknowledged leaders of the human race in the West (Van Evera, 1994: 48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An American Myth</td>
<td>God… has made us the master organizers of the world… He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among save and senile peoples… He has marked the American as His chosen nation. (Beveridge, 1900)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Islam and Christianity are similar in many ways. Both claim over a billion adherents around the world. Both originated in the Middle East and both claim to be heirs to the Hebrew prophetic tradition starting with Abraham (Silverstein & Stroumsa, 2015). Both ascribe miracles to their founders: Jesus and Muhammad. Both Jesus and Muhammad were persecuted by those in authority. However, only Muhammad headed a state and led an army into battle. According to the Muslim tradition, the first major battle took place in 624 at Badr. Under Muhammad’s leadership, just over three hundred ill-equipped ("naked" and "hungry") Muslims faced close to a thousand battle-ready Meccan *kuffar* (infidels) armed to the teeth with latest weapons and armor.

The Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) turned (his face) towards the Qibla Then he stretched his hands and began his supplication to his Lord:’ Allah, bring about what Thou hast promised to me. O Allah, if this small band of Muslims is destroyed. Thou will not be worshipped on this earth.’ He continued his supplication to his Lord, stretching his hands, facing the Qibla, until his mantle slipped down from his shoulders. So Abu Bakr came to him, picked up his mantle and put it on his shoulders. Then he embraced him from behind and said: Prophet of Allah, this prayer of yours to your Lord will suffice you, and He will fulfill for you what He has promised you. So Allah, the Glorious and Exalted, revealed (the Qur’anic verse): ‘When ye appealed to your Lord for help, He responded to your call (saying): I will help you with one thousand angels coming in succession.’ So Allah helped him with angels. (Sahih Muslim: Book 19, Number 4360)
The prophet grabbed some desert gravel and sand and threw it at the kuffar which caused a sandstorm blinding the kuffar. According to Muslims tradition, this is the incident referred to in Quran (8:15-18):

O ye who believe! when ye meet the unbelievers in hostile array, never turn your backs to them.

If any do turn his back to them on such a day - unless it be in a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own)- he draws on himself the wrath of Allah, and his abode is Hell,- an evil refuge (indeed)!

It is not ye who slew them; it was Allah: when thou threwest (a handful of dust), it was not thy act, but Allah’s: in order that He might test the Believers by a gracious trial from Himself: for Allah is He Who heareth and knoweth (all things).

That, and also because Allah is He Who makes feeble the plans and stratagem of the Unbelievers.

(Quran, 2000)

The infidels were routed. Seventy of them, including their leader, Abu Jihl, died on the battlefield while another seventy were taken hostage. The prophet, “looked at the people of the well (the well in which the bodies of the pagans killed in the Battle of Badr had been thrown) and said, “Have you found true what your Lord promised you?” Somebody said to him, “You are addressing dead people.” He replied, “You do not hear better than they but they cannot reply.” (Sahih Bukhari, Volume 2, Book 23, Number 452).

The dominant Muslim narrative of Badr is that with divine help Muslims were able to beat the odds and win over an enemy with vastly more material resources than them. According to Muslim tradition, this pattern repeated itself over and over again as Muslims quickly conquered Arabia and moved beyond its borders. Unlike the Meccan pagans, they were now up against Christians who also claimed to have God’s final message giving them the divine right to rule. In what they saw a vindication of their claims, Muslims quickly rolled over their opposition taking one city after another in the Middle East and beyond: Bosra in 634, Damascus in 635, Jerusalem in 637, Khuzistan in 639, Alexandria in 641, Cairo in 642, Azerbaijan in 643, Fars, Kerman, Mekran, and Kharan in 644, Cyprus in 647, Kabul in 670, Samarkand in 677, Southern Spain in 711, and Sind in 712. The lightning fast advance firmly established the myth of Islamic exceptionalism. Most Muslims saw God’s hand working behind the scenes to ensure their victories. The narrative that “if you follow Allah’s path of Islam, you will always be victorious” became deeply embedded as a key component of Muslim identity (Upal 2015a; 2015b).

To vindicate his own claims to divine support for Christians, Pope Urban declared the first Crusade as a counter offensive against Muslims in 1095 (Philips, 2015). For the next three hundred years, the two civilizations militarily fought against each other in a broad front extending from Spain in the west to Syria in the east. Christians were able to expel Muslims from Spain, and Sicily while Muslim occupation of former
Christian lands of Middle East, North Africa, Turkey and the Balkans proved to be more durable. While Crusaders didn’t succeed in their declared mission of retaking the Middle East, they did stop the lightning-fast expansion of the Muslim world at the expense of the mainly Christian West. The fatal blow against the Muslim expansion did not come from Christians. Instead, it came from the Mongols, led by Gengis Khan. The Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century were so ferocious that they broke through the Islamic narrative of invincibility. This was the first time that Muslims were forced to ask the question of what went wrong (Lewis, 2003). What reduced this cognitive dissonance for most Muslims was not a revision of the belief in God’s promise of final victory of Islam over all other religions. Instead, as the 13th century cleric Ibn-e-Tamiyya explained, the reason Allah had taken victory away from Muslims was that they had stopped following Islam faithfully enough. The only way to restore the glory of the golden era of Islam was to go back to faithfully following Islamic tenets, in particular Jihad, argued Ibn-e-Tamiyya and others Muslim leaders.

While the Mongol rulers themselves eventually converted to Islam, and the Ottomans had some success in reuniting Muslims under one empire and making further inroads into Eastern Europe, Islamic countries never regained the degree of cultural and material dominance over Europe that they had enjoyed in the 11th and 12th centuries. The myriad reasons for this include the rise of science, reason, and free thinking in Europe and their relative decline in the Islamic countries.