

INTRODUCTION — TO —

إسلام

For Non-Muslims and Muslims'
Misconceptions About Islam

Coeexist

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Introduction to Islam

For Non-Muslims and Muslims' Misconceptions
About Islam

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Preface

Will the Real Islam Please Stand Up?

IN THIS BOOK, a Muslim will explain Islam to non-Muslims. The ideas expressed are not my personal interpretations or opinions on Islam but are taken directly from the Quran, Islam's holy book, or from the Prophet's Traditions, which are Muhammad's clarifications. I am not an academic outsider analyzing another culture's religion. I was born into a Muslim family, and I have devoted most of my life to studying and understanding the Quran. This volume's purpose is not to convert you, preach to you, or present a public-relations version of Islam. It aims to inform non-Muslims about Islam.

Of all the major religions, Islam is perhaps the most misunderstood religion today, not only by non-Muslims but also by Muslims. There are 1.6 billion Muslims today; the majority are non-Arab. Indonesia has the largest population of Muslims, then India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, in that order. Then there are Sunnis and Shiites at war with each other. A non-Muslim looking from outside will be confused as to who is right or wrong. And what is real Islam, after all? The answer is the Quran.

Despite their respect for the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims never mistake him for the earthly cornerstone of their faith. This place is reserved for the Quran, which transmitted divine eloquence. The Quran is a continuation of God's revelation—from the Old Testament prophets to Jesus and finally to Muhammad, the last Prophet. The Quran has not been added to, edited, or altered since its compilation fourteen centuries ago. All of Islam's principles and rules stem from the Quran and the examples of the Prophet Muhammad.

It would be a mistake to judge Islam from the behavior of today's Muslims, as many of us have departed from the spirit of the Quran, just as it would be a mistake to judge Judaism or Christianity by the conduct of some Jews and Christians. Today, many popular beliefs held by Muslims sharply

contrast with what the Quran says. I will point out Muslims' misconceptions about Islam as we go through this book.

Is Islam at Odds with Science?

Is the Quran outdated since it is fourteen centuries old, and is Islam at odds with science? Many Muslims are opposed to scientific ideas of the universe and life on earth. How does the Quran answer the fundamental question of where we all came from? The chapter on genesis according to the Quran will attempt to answer this fundamental question about our origin.

Jihad, Shariah, and Women's Rights

Controversial topics such as jihad and women's rights are discussed in great detail. Is it true that the Quran places the option to nonbelievers to convert or die? What about the oppression of women? In this book, I will present direct quotes from the Quran about these subjects. My only plea to readers is not to prejudge and instead to temporarily suspend their biases.

Call for Unity

Understanding and mutual respect among the three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—will determine the future of the coming generations. It is only tolerance and unity of all good people that will usher peace and prosperity into our troubled world. These are not the author's grandiose ideas; the Quran appeals to all people to unite.

Do Not Break Your Unity

In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Noah—and into which We gave thee [O Muhammad] insight through revelation—as well as that which We had enjoined upon Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus: Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein. [And even though] that [unity of faith] to which thou callest them appears oppressive to those who are wont to ascribe to other beings or forces a share in His

divinity, God draws unto Himself everyone who is willing, and guides unto Himself everyone who turns unto Him. (42:13) And, verily, this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all: remain, then, conscious of Me! (23:52)

Summon All Mankind to Unity and Equality

Because of this, then, summon [all mankind], and pursue the right course, as thou hast been bidden [by God], and do not follow their likes and dislikes, but say: “I believe in whatever revelation God has bestowed from on high, and I am bidden to bring about equity in your mutual views. God is our Sustainer as well as your Sustainer. To us shall be accounted our deeds, and to you, your deeds. Let there be no contention between us and you: God will bring us all together—for with Him is all journeys’ end.” (42:15)

These three monotheistic faiths are not only historically linked, but their adherents worship the same God. God of the Bible and the Quran is the same deity with different names in different languages. The word “God” is derived from the proto-Germanic pagan word “gott.” The Latin word “Deus,” the Spanish word “Dios,” and the French word “Dieu” all descend from the Roman Zeus. In Aramaic, the language of Jesus, the word for God was Alaha, akin to the Hebrew Eloah and the Arabic Allah. In the context of Abrahamic monotheism, the words God, Dios, Alaha, Eloah, and Allah, all refer to the one same deity. “Do not break up your unity” is an unequivocal reference to the unity of all revealed religions. Jews and Christians are part of *ummah* (community of believers) and are not infidels, as some Muslims would have you believe. Summon all humanity and induce them to be more tolerant of one another—an allusion to the bitterness that stands between the various sects and schools of thought in all revealed religions.

Unity in Diversity

Unity in diversity is a concept of unity without uniformity, fragmentation, or chaos. It shifts focus from unity based on mere tolerance, an attitude of mind that implies non judgmental acceptance of differences, towards a more complex unity based on understanding that differences enrich human interactions. The United States of America has often been a shining example of unity in diversity. It is a nation of immigrants, whose bloodlines run from every corner of this earth. A variety of races, religions, languages, and foods is endless, and yet all Americans have worked together and made this country a superpower despite occasional internal strife and animosity often based upon race. Racism, by the way, is a sin in Islam.

It is He who has created you [all] out of one living entity, and out of it brought into being its mate, so that man might incline [with love] towards woman. (7:189) All of mankind was once one single community; [then they began to differ]whereupon God raised the prophets as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, and through them, bestowed revelation from high, setting forth the truth, so that it might decide between people concerning all on which they had come to hold divergent views. (2:213) Unto every community have We appointed [different] ways of worship, which they ought to observe. Hence, [O believer,] do not let those [who follow ways other than thine] draw thee into disputes on this score, but summon [them all] unto thy Sustainer: for, behold, thou art indeed on the right way. And if they [try to] argue with thee, say [only]: “God knows best what you are doing.” (22:67-68)

Man's Proneness to Difference of Opinion

If God had so willed, they who succeeded [apostles] would not have contended with one another after all evidence of the truth had come to them. But, [as it was,] they did take to divergent views, and some attained to faith, while others came to deny the truth. Yet if God had so willed, they would

not have contended with one another: but God does whatever He wills. (2:253)

Diversity in Colors, Languages, and Sexes

And among His wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind, so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you: in this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who think! And among his wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colors: for in this, behold, there are messages indeed for all who are possessed of [innate] knowledge! (30:21–22)

This book is based upon *The Message of the Quran* by Muhammad Asad. It was the first-ever attempt at an idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Quranic message into English. In my opinion, it is the best translation and commentary on the Quran.

Within the translation of the Quran, the reader will find bracketed statements added by the translator for clarity. This human addition of bracketed comments, called *Ijaz* in Arabic, should not be confused with the Quran's language, the word of God. For more details, see [Chapter 4: “Ten Principles behind Interpreting the Quran,”](#) under the heading “Ellipsis.”

Part 1: The Foundation of Islam

1

The Origin of Islam

WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, pre-Islamic Arabs practiced paganism and idol worship; however, knowledge of the monotheistic faiths of Judaism and Christianity was not uncommon. The priest and hierophants attached to the indigenous Arab temples received rich offerings from devotees. Often, bloody conflicts arose between the followers of rival temples. In a masculine world where almost every Arab took part in armed combat and men grew old prematurely, Muhammad was quickly past the age of adventure and ambition.

Suddenly, when he was about forty years old, he had an overwhelming mystical experience. The first five verses of the ninety-sixth chapter “Al-Alaq” (the germ cell) represent the very beginning of the revelation of the Quran, revealed in the last third of the month of Ramadan in 610 of the Christian era. On the outskirts of Mecca lay a huge barren rock known as Mount Hira. In this rock was a cave, which Muhammad, in need of deep solitude, began to frequent. He used to apply himself to ardent devotions consisting of long vigils and prayers. While peering into the mysteries of good and evil, he was unable to accept the crudeness, superstition, and fratricide that were accepted as usual. This great fiery heart, seething, simmering like a furnace of thoughts, was reaching out for God. His vigils often lasted the entire night.

One night at Mount Hira, the Angel of Revelation, Archangel Gabriel, suddenly appeared to him and said, “Read!” At first, Muhammad thought that he was expected to read the actual script, and being illiterate, he was unable to do. He answered, “I cannot read.” In his own words, the angel “seized me and pressed me to himself so hard until all strength went out of me.” The same sequence of events was repeated twice. The third time, the angel seized Muhammad and said:

READ in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created created man out of a germ cell! Read—for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One who has taught [man] the use of the pen, taught man what he did not know! (96:1-5)

In a sudden illumination, Muhammad understood that he was called upon to “read”—that is, to receive and understand God’s message to human. The very first revelation alludes to human’s embryonic evolution from a **germ cell** or a fertilized female ovum, thus contrasting the primitiveness and simplicity of his biological origins with his great intellectual and spiritual potential—a contrast that points to the existence of design and a purpose underlying the creation of life. “The pen” is a symbol for all knowledge recorded by writing, and this explains the symbolic summons, “Read.” human’s unique ability to transmit, by written records, his thoughts, experiences, and insights endows all human knowledge with a cumulative character. Human is “taught by God” because God creates him as a biological entity and implants in him the will and the ability to acquire knowledge. God’s teaching human also signifies His revealing, through the prophets, spiritual truths and moral standards that cannot be unequivocally established through human experience and reasoning alone.

Expression of Confusion and Disbelief

Arousing from his trance, Muhammad felt as if the words he had heard were branded on his soul. He hastened home to his wife and said, “O Khadijah! He of whom one would not have believed it has become either a soothsayer or one possessed—mad.” Muhammad told her what he has seen. She said, “Rejoice, O dear husband, and be of good cheer. In whose hand is Khadijah’s life, He is my witness that you will be the Prophet of these people.”

Soon from this mountain cave was to sound the greatest phrase of the Arabic language, the deep, electrifying cry, which was to rally people to the limits of the known world: “La ilaha illa Allah!” There is no God but Allah! Since “Allah” in Arabic means “the God,” this could also be translated as “There is no god but God!”

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) in his essay, “The Hero as Prophet,” said of Muhammad’s revelation:

Ah no: this deep-hearted Son of the Wilderness, with his beaming black eyes and open social deep soul, had other thoughts in him than ambition. A silent great soul; he was one of those who cannot *but* be in earnest; whom Nature herself has appointed to be sincere. While others walk in formulas and hearsays, contented enough to dwell there, this man could not screen himself in formulas; he was alone with his own soul and the reality of things. The great Mystery of Existence, as I said, glared in upon him, with its terrors, with its splendors; no hearsays could hide that unspeakable fact, "Here am I!" Such *sincerity*, as we named it, has in very truth something of divine. The word of such a man is a Voice direct from Nature's own Heart. Men do and must listen to that as to nothing else; —all else is wind in comparison.

2

The Phenomenon of Divine Revelation

GOD DOES NOT reveal Himself, for God is transcendent, but rather reveals His will or guidance through a series of prophets. Thus, throughout history, human beings could not only know that there is a God but also understand God's desires and commands for His creatures. Prophet Muhammad received divine revelations in several different ways.

Three Modes of Conveying Divine Revelations

- (1) When asked how divine inspiration is revealed to him, Muhammad replied, "Sometimes it is revealed like the **reverberating of a bell**, this form of inspiration is the hardest of all, and then this stage passes off after I have grasped what is inspired."
- (2) "Sometimes the **Angel** comes in the form of a man and talks to me, and I understand whatever he says."
- (3) According to the Prophet's wife Aishah, the commencement of the Prophet's divine inspiration was in the form of **pleasant dreams**, which came true like bright daylight.

The revelations were painful to the Prophet. He once said: "Never did I receive a revelation without feeling my soul was being torn away from me." In the early days, the impact was so frightening that his body would shake and he would often sweat profusely even on a cold day.

It is not given to mortal man that God should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden inspiration, [divine inspiration]. Or [by a voice], as it were, from behind a veil,

[as God spoke to Moses]. Or by sending a messenger [Gabriel] to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills [to reveal]: for, verily, He is exalted, wise. And thus, too, [O Muhammad,] have We revealed unto thee a life-giving message, [coming] at Our behest. [Ere this message came unto thee,] thou didst not know what revelation is, nor what faith [implies]: but [now] We have caused this [message] to be a light, whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants, and, verily, [on the strength thereof] thou, too, shalt guide [men] onto the straightway—the way that leads to God, to whom all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belongs. Oh, verily, with God is the beginning and the end of all things! (42:51-53)

Quran Revealed by the Holy Inspiration

AND THEY will ask thee about [the nature of] divine inspiration. Say: “This inspiration [comes] at my Sustainer’s behest; and [you cannot understand its nature, O men, since] you have been granted very little of [real] knowledge.” And if We so willed, We could indeed take away whatever We have revealed unto thee, and in that [state of need] thou wouldst find none to plead in thy behalf before Us. [Thou art spared] only by thy Sustainer’s grace: behold, His favor towards thee is great indeed! Say: “If all mankind and all invisible beings would come together with a view to producing the like of this Quran, they could not produce it like even though they were to exert all their strength in aiding one another!” For, indeed, many facets have We given in this Quran to every kind of lesson [designed] for [the benefit of] mankind! However, most men are unwilling to accept anything but blasphemy. (17:85-89)

He [Allah] causes the angels to descend with this divine inspiration, [bestowed] at His behest upon whomever He

wills of His servants: “Warn [all human beings] that there is no deity save Me: be, therefore, conscious of Me!” (16:2) Say: “Holy inspiration has brought it down from thy Sustainer by stages, setting forth the truth, so that it might give firmness unto those who have attained to faith, and provide guidance and a glad tidings unto all who have surrendered themselves to God.” (16:102)

The term *ruh* (spirit, soul, or breath of life) is often used in the Quran in the sense of divine inspiration. The expression the “faithful (or trustworthy) spirit” is a designation of Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation. By his purely spiritual, functional nature, he is incapable of sinning and cannot, therefore, be other than utterly devoted to the trust reposed in him by God. Inspiration gives life to hearts that were as if dead in their ignorance and had in religion the same function as a soul has in a body.

The Quran Itself as Muhammad’s Only Standing Miracle

And nothing has prevented Us from sending [this message, like the earlier ones,] with miraculous signs [in its wake], save [Our knowledge] that the people of olden times [only too often] gave the lie to them: (17:59) Now they swear by God with their most solemn oaths that if a miracle were shown to them, they would indeed believe in this [divine writ]. Say: “Miracles are in the power of God alone.” And for all you know, even if one should be shown to them, they would not believe. (6:109-110) Even as We have sent unto you an apostle from among yourselves to convey unto you Our messages, and to cause you to grow in purity, and to impart unto you revelation and wisdom, and to teach you that which you knew not: so remember Me, and I shall remember you; and be grateful unto Me, and deny Me not. (2:151–152)

The teachings of the earlier prophets were adapted to the cultural needs and intellectual maturity of that particular community. Some of these prophets

needed symbolic portents or miracles to make people realize the inner truth of their mission. Sometimes miracles did not convince nonbelievers, a case in point being that Jesus performed many miracles yet in his time only had a handful of followers. Due to earlier Judeo-Christian religious development, a degree of maturity was achieved that enabled understanding the message of the Quran without the aid of portents and miracles.

Prophet Muhammad, the last and greatest of God's apostles, was not empowered to perform miracles. His only miracle was and is the Quran itself. Muhammad was unschooled and could not have produced a book embodying all wisdom and theology essential to human life. It is also grammatically perfect and without poetic equal. The message is perfect in its clarity and ethical completeness, destined forever, for all stages of human development. It is addressed not merely to the feelings but also to the minds of people, open to everyone, whatever his race or social environment, and bound to remain unchanged forever.

The Prophet said, "Ask you a greater miracle than this, O unbelieving people! Than to have your vulgar tongue chosen as the language of that incomparable book, one piece of which puts to shame all your golden poesy and suspended songs?" So high was Prophet Muhammad's regard for it that he considered it the only miracle God worked through him—his "standing miracle" as he called it.

3

The Quran

THE QURAN IS a unique book. Unlike most books, it does not have a beginning, middle, or end. It is not arranged in the chronological order in which it was revealed. The seemingly abrupt transition from one subject to another is also in accord with the Quranic principle of deliberately interweaving moral exhortation with practical guidance.

Surah and Ayah

There are 114 surahs, or chapters, in the Quran. Each verse of the surah is called an ayah. When referring to a particular Quranic passage, a colon and the verse number follow the surah's number: e.g., 3:28 signifies surah 3, verse 28. Without the aid of any computer, every word in the Quran has been counted (77,934), every letter (323,621), and every verse (6,236). The Quranic verses can be categorized in three different ways: (1) Meccan or Medinan (revealed in Mecca or in Medina); (2) Clear (literal) or allegorical; (3) Subject matter (the context/reason behind the revelation of a particular verse).

Quran—A Literal Word of God (Allah)

Theologically, the Quran means the word of God. Any quotation from the Quran can be introduced with "Says God." Therefore, it is the fundamental religious document for Islam and a source of unimpeachable authority for all matters of doctrine, practice, and law. All Muslims, regardless of their sectarian leanings, agree that the Quran is the infallible word of God.

Historical Impact

Uniting Arabia

Early in the seventh century, unnoticed by the rest of the world, a religious movement was born in the interior of Arabia. Within an amazingly short time—little more than twenty years—it gathered momentum and absorbed the unruly tribesmen of the peninsula. A new nation was born from the motley of wild Arabian tribes that had never before united. It shook Arabia and made a nation out of its perennially warring tribes.

Establishing Islamic Civilization

Spilling out from Arabia, it rapidly extended political sway over the surrounding regions and consolidated its hold in the years that followed. By the time a century had passed, Muhammad's followers had conquered Armenia, Persia, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, and Spain, and had crossed the Pyrenees into France. But for their defeat by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in 732 A.D., the entire Western world might today be Muslim. Its advent changed the course of history and enriched human heritage by the creation of an illustrious civilization and the first ideological society known to man. It continues today to be the spiritual anchor and guide of a significant portion of humanity.

Contribution to the Arabic Language

The literary influence of the Quran has been incalculable. The classical Arabic of the Quran is the enduring standard of excellence in speech. It was the first prose book in Arabic that set the style for future books. It kept the language uniform. So, today a Moroccan uses a dialect different from an Iraqi's, but all write in the same style.

Moral Revival

Huston Smith writes:

Looking at the difference between pre- and post-Islamic Arabia, we are forced to ask whether history has ever witnessed a comparable ethical advance among so many people in so short time. Within a half-century, there was effected a near-miraculous change in the moral climate. Before Muhammad there was

virtually no restraint on intertribal violence. Glaring inequities in wealth were accepted without conscience. Women were regarded more as possessions than as human beings Child infanticide was common especially among girls. Drunkenness, large-scale gambling have already been alluded to. Within a half of century there was effected a remarkable change in the moral climate on all of these counts.

Advancement of Science and Literature

Islamic civilization flourished from the mid-eighth century to the end of the twelfth century, unmatched in its brilliance and unprecedented in its literary, scientific, and philosophic output. Through its insistence on the use of reason in all matters of faith, it engendered a spirit of intellectual curiosity and independent inquiry among its followers, ultimately resulting in a splendid era of learning and research, which distinguished the world of Islam at the height of its cultural vigor.

The Revival of Western Culture

The culture fostered by the Quran penetrated in countless ways and byways into the mind of medieval Europe. It gave rise to the revival of Western culture we call the Renaissance. Thus, it also gave birth to the “age of science” we are now living in. During the long centuries of Europe’s Dark Ages, Muslim philosophers and scientists kept the lamp of learning bright, ready to rekindle the Western mind when it roused from its sleep.

The Universality of The Quranic Message

Islam is a religion meant for everyone, not just a particular area or tribe. It appeals to all humanity irrespective of descent, race, or cultural environment. All earlier instances of the divine writ were meant only for the people addressed by their prophet. The Quran is a message for all humanity. The Quran represents the final stage of all divine revelation. The Prophet, who conveyed it to humanity, is the last (in Quranic terminology “the seal”) of all prophets. As with all religions, Islam too has a supernatural realm to deal with, but the Quran’s emphasis is on appealing to reason.

Bring All Humanity Out of the Depth of Darkness

A DIVINE WRIT [is this a revelation] which We have bestowed upon thee from on high in order that thou might bring forth all mankind, by their Sustainer's leave, out of the depths of darkness into the light: onto the way that leads to the Almighty, the One to whom all praise is due—to God, unto whom all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belongs. But woe unto those who deny the truth: for suffering severe. (14:1-2)

This [message] is no less than a reminder to all mankind—to every one of you who wills to walk a straightway. (81:27-29) And why should you not believe in God, seeing that the Apostle calls you to believe in [Him who is] your Sustainer, and [seeing that] He has taken a pledge from you? [Why should you not believe in Him] if you can believe [in anything]? It is He who bestows from on high clear messages [this] unto His servant, and to lead you out of the deep darkness into the light: for, behold, God is most compassionate towards you, a dispenser of grace. (57:8-9)

God's "taking a pledge" from people alludes to the faculty of reason He has endowed to people. And this ought to enable every person to grasp the evidence of God's existence by observing the effects of His creativeness in all nature and by heeding the teachings of His prophets.

Good News for Believers

[A divine writ] unerringly straight, meant to warn [the godless] of a severe punishment from Him, and to give unto the believers who do good works the glad tiding that theirs shall be a goodly reward—[a state of bliss] in which they shall dwell beyond the count of time. (18:2-3)

Quran An Admonition

Verily, all this is an admonition: whoever, then, so wills, may unto his Sustainer find a way. But you cannot will it unless God wills [to show you that way]: for, behold, God is indeed all-seeing, wise. He admits unto His grace, everyone who wills [to be admitted], but as for the evildoers—for them has He readied grievous suffering [in the life to come]. (76:29-31)

Quran a Reminder Lofty and Pure

NAY, VERILY, these [messages] are but a reminder: and so, whoever is willing may remember Him in [the light of His] revelations blest with dignity, lofty and pure, [borne] by the hands of messengers noble and most virtuous. (80:11–16) SAY [O Prophet]: “No reward whatever do I ask of you for this [message]; and I am not one of those who claim to be what they are not. This [divine writ,] behold, is no less than a reminder to all the worlds—and you will most certainly grasp its purport after a lapse of time!” (38:86-88)

“I am not one of those who claim to be what they are not,” or I am not the person who pretends to be more than he is. It indicates the Prophet’s disclaimer of any supernatural status. The Quran is described as “a reminder” because it is meant to bring person’s instinctive though sometimes hazy realization of God’s existence into the full light of consciousness. God has willed to show you the right way by the positive instincts implanted in you as well as through the revelations He has bestowed on His prophets. The choice of the right way is open to everyone willing to make use of God’s universal guidance.

Distinction Between Truth and Falsehood

HALLOWED is He who from on high, step by step, has bestowed upon His servant the standard by which to discern the true from the false so that to all the world it might be a warning: (25:1) Behold, this [divine writ] is indeed a word that cuts between truth and falsehood, and is no idle tale. Behold, they [who refuse to accept it] devise many a false argument [to disprove its truth], but I shall bring all their scheming to naught. Let, then, the deniers of the truth have their will: let them have their will for a little while! (86:13–17) And say: “The truth has now come [to light], and falsehood has withered away: for, behold, all falsehood is bound to wither away!” (17:81) Consider these [messages] that spread [the truth] far and wide, thus separating [right and wrong] with all clarity, and then giving forth a reminder, [promising] freedom from blame or [offering] a warning!” (77:3–6)

Light of Truth Will Wither Falsehood

Say: “Verily, my Sustainer hurls the truth [against all that is false]—He who fully knows all the things that are beyond the reach of a created being’s perception!” Say: “The truth has now come [to light, and falsehood is bound to wither away]: for, falsehood cannot bring forth anything new, nor can it bring back [what has passed away].” (34:48–49)

Quran Full of Wisdom

And, verily, [originating as it does] in the source, with Us, of all revelations, it is indeed sublime, full of wisdom. (43:4) THESE ARE MESSAGES of the divine writ, full of wisdom. Do people deem it strange that We should have inspired a man from their own midst [with this Our message]: “Warn all mankind, and give unto those who have attained to faith the glad tiding that in their Sustainer’s sight they surpass all

others in that they are completely sincere.” (10:1–2) O THOU human being! Consider this Quran full of wisdom: verily, thou art indeed one of God’s message-bearers, pursuing a straight way by [virtue of] what is being bestowed from on high by the Almighty, the Dispenser of Grace, [bestowed upon thee] so that thou mayest warn people whose forefathers had not been warned, and who therefore are unaware [of the meaning of right and wrong]. (36:1–6) Say: “Were I to go astray, I would but go astray [due to my own self, and] to the hurt of myself; but if I am on the right path, it is but by virtue of what my Sustainer reveals unto me: for, verily, He is all-hearing, ever-near!” (34:50)

The wisdom apparent to you in the Quran serves as evidence that you are an apostle of God. God favors above others those who have attained to faith, see the wisdom in the Quran, and demonstrate their sincerity by word, deed, or attitude. “Forefathers” refers to a community’s cultural past. Hence, the reference to those “forefathers” not having been “warned” (i.e., against evil) refers to the defectiveness of the ethical heritage of people who have become estranged from true moral values.

Divine Writ a Natural Phenomenon

BUT NAY! I call to witness the revolving stars, the planets that run their course and set, and the night as it darkly falls, and the morn as it softly breathes: behold, this [divine writ] is indeed the [inspired] word of a noble apostle, with strength endowed, secure with Him who in almightiness is enthroned [the word] of one to be heeded, and worthy of trust! (81:15-21)

Calling to witness certain natural phenomena familiar to man because of their permanent recurrence, what we call “laws of nature,” underscored that they are the observable elements of God’s plan of creation—a plan in which His revelations play a decisive role. By implication, the divine writ granted to

Muhammad is as intrinsically “natural” as any other phenomenon, concrete, or abstract, in the realm of God’s creation.

4

Ten Principles behind Interpreting the Quran

[NOTE: FOR THOSE new to the Quran, there's a lot of detail in this chapter that, while important, could be skipped over or skimmed for now and then returned to later.]

Quran a Living Document

The Quran is a living document and that needs to be reinterpreted in the light of new knowledge. The Quran is rarely a direct declaration. Although the core principles remain the same, many topics in the Quran tend to be deliberately Delphic, allowing varying interpretations with changing times. Nuances and subtleties are interwoven into the language allowing the broad-based and flexible Islamic doctrines and laws to remain relevant throughout the ages. If it were written in stone, in black-and-white terms, it surely would have been outdated by now. Because of its flexibility, the vibrant message of the Quran is timeless. Just a few years ago, the verses about the origin of the universe (21:30 and 51:47) would have been incomprehensible. It is only through science that we now have a better understanding of these verses see “The Origin of the Universe from the Big Bang”). The Quran can be correctly interpreted only if based on these clearly enunciated principles, as described in the Quran itself.

1. Prophet Muhammad's Explanation

Prophet Muhammad serves as a human instrument in bearing divine revelations and where he clarified or elaborated the scriptural text, that explanation is considered as final because who could have known the Quran better than he? He was the “living Quran”—the witness whose words and behavior reveal God's will.

In the measure that We reveal this Quran unto thee, [O Prophet,] We explain it to thee in the best possible way, seeing that ere this, thou wert indeed among those who are unaware [of what revelation is]. (12:3)

2. Clear Messages and Allegory

The understanding of the two types of verses, namely clear and allegorical, is key to understanding and interpreting the Quran. Without a proper grasp of the term “allegorical” or “symbolic,” much of the Quran is liable to be grossly misunderstood.

It is He who has bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ, containing messages that are clear in and by themselves—and these are the essence of the divine writ—as well as others that are allegorical. (3:7)

Ayat Muhkamat (clear) These are ordinances or statements that are self-evident by their wording. These verses are described as the “essence of the divine writ” (umm al-Kitab) because they comprise the fundamental principles underlying its message and, in particular, its ethical and social teachings.

Ayat Mutashabihat (allegorical) These verses are those passages of the Quran expressed figuratively, with a meaning that is metaphorically implied.

Literal and Figurative Expressions

Linguistic expressions in any language are divided into two classes: literal and figurative. Words in literal expressions denote what they mean according to common or dictionary usage. Words in figurative expressions do not represent real things but convey additional layers of meaning through symbolism. A “broken leg” literally means the leg bone has fractured—broken. A “broken heart” is not a cardiac problem but a figurative way of expressing extreme sorrow.

Allegory

An allegory is a figurative mode of representing a meaning other than the literal in which people, things, and happenings have hidden or symbolic meaning. An allegory expresses figuratively something that cannot be adequately expressed in concrete terms because of its complexity and shades of meaning. For example, the entire subject of afterlife falls into this category. Because of this very complexity, it can be grasped only intuitively, as a general mental image, and not as a clear and comprehensive description. This seems to be the meaning of the phrase, “None save God knows its final meaning.” Except perhaps the Prophet Muhammad, no one can claim to have a monopoly in understanding the Quran, and only God knows its final meaning.

Arbitrary Interpretation of Allegorical Passages

Now those whose hearts are given to swerving from the truth go after that part of the divine writ, which has been expressed in allegory. Seeking out [what is bound to create] confusion, and seeking [to arrive at] its final meaning [in an arbitrary manner]; but none save God knows its final meaning. Hence, those who are deeply rooted in knowledge say: “We believe in it; the whole [of the divine writ] is from our Sustainer—albeit none takes this to heart save those who are endowed with insight. “O our Sustainer! Let not our hearts swerve from the truth after Thou hast guided us; and bestow upon us the gift of Thy grace: verily, Thou art the [true] Giver of Gifts.” (3:7-8)

These verses refer to the interpretation of allegorical passages, which deal with metaphysical subjects such as God’s attributes, the ultimate meaning of life, time and eternity, the resurrection of the dead, the Day of Judgment, paradise, and hell, angels, and such. However, many Quranic passages that do not deal with metaphysical subjects are yet still undoubtedly allegorical in intent and expression. The “confusion” referred to is a consequence of interpreting allegorical passages in an “arbitrary manner.” For example, God

says, *why do not you worship the work of my hands?*” (38:75). *“The Merciful has sat down on His throne”* (20:4). Many literal minded Muslims, incapable of understanding the figurative expressions from these passages, consider God as a being having a body with hands and occupying different positions such as sitting. Such anthropomorphic descriptions of God are blasphemy as it contradicts a transcendent God not limited by space or time. *There is nothing like unto Him* (42:11) and, therefore, *“nothing that could be compared with Him”* (112:4). When the Quran speaks of God as being *“in the heavens”* or *“established on His throne”* (al-arsh), we cannot take these phrases in their literal senses, since then they would imply that God is limited in space and thus contradict the concept of an Infinite Being.

Parable

A parable is a short fictitious story or allegory by which moral or spiritual lessons are conveyed. In many passages of the Quran, the parable is used shortly after a description of people conditions in the hereafter. It reminds us that all such depictions related to human imagination.

Parables Make People Think

And [thus it is that] God propounds parables unto men, so that they might bethink themselves [of the truth]. (14:25)

According to Ismaili leader Aga Khan, speaking in 2002, the Quran, “rich in parable and allegory, metaphor and symbols have been an inexhaustible wellspring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of interpretations. This freedom of interpretation is a generosity which the Quran confers upon all believers.” The remarkable diversity of belief and interpretation has characterized Islam over the centuries. A parable allows people to think of it in ways that aptly apply to them and their circumstances.

Good Word

ART THOU NOT aware how God sets forth the parable of a good word? [It is] like a good tree, firmly rooted, [reaching out] with its branches towards the sky, yielding its fruit at all times by its Sustainer's leave. (14:24-25)[Thus,] God grants firmness unto those who have attained to faith. through the word that is unshakably true in the life of this world as well as in the life to come. (14:31)

The “unshakably true” word is the concept that there are no deities save God and that Muhammad is His Apostle, which is an interpretation the Prophet himself gave.

3. Quran Consistent Within Itself

“[Know,] then, [that] God is sublimely exalted, the Ultimate Sovereign, the Ultimate Truth: and knowing this, do not approach the Quran in haste, ere it has been revealed unto thee in full, but [always] say: “O my Sustainer, cause me to grow in knowledge!” (20:114) For We have so arranged its components that they form one consistent whole. (25:32)

Since the Quran is the Word of God, all its parts—phrases, sentences, verses, and surahs—form an integral, coordinated whole. To understand the Quranic message, one must beware of a hasty approach and not draw impulsive conclusions from isolated verses or sentences taken out of context.

Step-By-Step Revelation

AND AS a guide towards the truth have bestowed this [revelation] from on high; with this [very] truth has it come down [unto thee, O Prophet]: for We have sent thee but as a herald of glad tidings and a warner, [bearing] a discourse which We have gradually unfolded, so thou might read it out

to mankind by stages, seeing that We have bestowed it from on high step by step, as [one] revelation. (17:105-106)

Why a Step-by-Step Revelation?

Now they who are bent on denying the truth are wont to ask, “Why has not the Quran been bestowed on him from on high in one single revelation?” [It has been revealed] in this manner so that We might strengthen thy heart thereby—and [that] they [who deny the truth] might never taunt thee with any deceptive half-truth without Our conveying to thee the [full] truth and [providing thee] with the best explanation. (25:32-33)

According to the opponents of Islam, the step-by-step revelation of the Quran points to its having been composed by Muhammad to suit his changing personal and political fortunes. Yet the Bible, too, comes as a step-by-step revelation as God revealed different things to various prophets at different times. The most important reason is that this method is bound to strengthen every thinking believer's faith, and herein lies the rationale for its slow, gradual revelation. Your opponents can never taunt you of “deceptive half-truths,” which implies all manner of seemingly plausible objections meant to throw doubt on Muhammad's claim to prophethood and, hence, on the God-inspired character of the Quranic message.

Divine Writ Consistent and Free of Contradictions

ALL PRAISE is due to God, who has bestowed this divine writ from on high upon His servant, and has not allowed any deviousness to obscure its meaning: (18:1) Will they not, then, try to understand this Qur'an? Had it issued from any but God, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction! (4:82) God bestows from on high the best of all teachings in the shape of a divine writ fully consistent within itself, repeating each statement [of the truth] in forms

manifold [a divine writ] whereat shiver the skins of all who of their Sustainer stand in awe: [but] in the end, their skins and their hearts do soften at the remembrance of [the grace of] God . . . (39:23)

The above verses establish the direct, unambiguous character of the Quran and to stress its freedom from all obscurities and internal contradictions. It should convince them that it has not been “composed by Muhammad,” an accusation leveled against him for fourteen hundred years by the opponents of Islam, but could only have originated from a supra human source.

4. Doctrine of Abrogation

The origin of the doctrine of abrogation (repeal) stemmed from the inability of some Quran commentators to reconcile one Quranic passage with another. They skirted the difficulty by declaring that the earlier verse in question had been “abrogated”—repealed—by the later verse. This arbitrary procedure explains the lack of unanimity among the upholders of the doctrine of abrogation as to which and how many Quran verses have been affected by it. There is not a single Tradition in which the Prophet declared a verse of the Quran abrogated. Besides the Quran, there is no higher authority than the Prophet. In short, the doctrine of abrogation has no validity and must be rejected. It is the reader’s duty to think deeper about the true meanings of the apparently contradictory passages.

Verily, they who are bent on denying the truth of this reminders as soon as it comes to them—[they are the losers]: for, behold, it is a sublime divine writ: no falsehood can ever attain to it openly, and neither in a stealthy manner, [since it is] bestowed from on high by One who is Truly Wise, ever to be praised. (41:41-42) AND CONVEY [to the world] whatever has been revealed to thee of thy Sustainer’s writ. There is nothing that could alter His words. (18:27)

The above is one of the Quranic passages that form the basis for the absolute rejection of the doctrine of abrogation.

And now that We replace one message by another—since God is fully aware of what He bestows from on high, step by step. (16:101)

In the above verse, “replace one message by another” refers to substituting the Quran’s message for earlier beliefs and teachings and does not imply abrogation of Quranic verses by others.

5. Ethical Teachings Underlying Historical Events

AND [remember:] out of all the accounts relating to the [earlier] apostles, We convey to thee [only] that where-with We [aim to] make firm your heart: for through these [accounts] comes the truth unto thee, as well as an admonition and a reminder unto all believers. (11:120) THUS WE DO relate unto thee some of the stories of what happened in the past; and [thus] have We vouchsafed unto thee, out of Our grace, a reminder. (20:99)

The Quran is not a historical but an ethical document. Whenever the Quran refers to past events—whether recorded in the Bible or alive in Arabian tradition—it does so exclusively to bring out moral lessons and elements that are relevant to the ethical teachings.

The purpose underlying every Quranic narrative is to illustrate fundamental truths. The description is often condensed, omitting all that has no direct bearing on the point the Quran meant to bring out. Hence, the historic occasion on which a particular verse was revealed must never be allowed to obscure the underlying purport of that verse and the ethical teaching which the Quran, taken as a whole, propounds.

6. Quran Appeals to Man’s Reason

THESE ARE MESSAGES of a revelation clear in itself and clearly showing the truth: behold, We have bestowed it from

on high as a discourse in the Arabic tongue, so that you might encompass it with your reason. (12:1-2)

The above statements embody the Quranic approach to all questions of faith, ethics, and morality. It is echoed many times in expressions like “so that you might use your reason” or “will you not, then, use your reason.” It describes people who examine a religious proposition in light of their reason. The above verse expresses praise and commendation of following the evidence and of reaching conclusions after the critical examination and logical inference.

Rejection of Blind Faith

Nay, but they say, “Behold, We found our forefathers agreed on what to believe—and, verily, it is in their footsteps that we find our guidance!” And thus it is: whenever We sent, before your time, a warner to any community, those of its people who had lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures would always say, “Behold, We found our forefathers agreed on what to believe—and, verily, it is but in their footsteps that we follow!” (43:22-23)

Commenting on this passage, Razi (died 1228, Muslim scholar, a Persian philosopher) said: “Had there been in the Quran nothing but these verses, they would have sufficed to show the falsity of the principle postulating a Muslim’s blind, unquestioning adoption of another person’s religious opinions.”

Daily Wonders of God and Appeal to Man’s Reason

Verily, in the creation of the heavens and of the earth, and the succession of night and day; and in the ships that speed through the sea with what is useful to man; and in the waters which God sends down from the sky, giving life thereby to the earth after it had been lifeless, and causing all

manner of living creatures to multiply thereon; and in the change of the winds, and the clouds that run their appointed courses between sky and earth: [in all this], there are messages indeed for people who use their reason. (2:164)

Exceptions to the Rules

The doctrine of exception to the rules is grounded in Islamic thought to deal with complex human affairs and the fact that change is the only constant in life. The early Muslim community was under a continuous state of crisis. Besides persecution and physical violence, Muslims faced social, economic, and psychological warfare. Exceptional times call for extraordinary measures. Even during peaceful times, man's social behavior is so complex that simplistic black-and-white answers may not be enough, and solutions may lie in many shades of gray. The only rule in life is that there is always an exception to the rule. In science, the term "outlier" is used to describe things and phenomena that lie outside the typical experience.

Examples: There are very few dogmas and absolutes in Islam, such as God is one, and Muhammad is the last Prophet. There are rules, and then there are sometimes exceptions to the rules. For example, worship five times a day is mandatory, but prayer can be shortened or omitted during war. Monogamy is a rule, and polygamy is an exception; marriage is a rule, and divorce is an exception. Fasting is mandatory during Ramadan, except if a person is ill. The killing of a human being is a cardinal sin, except in a defensive war; every non-disabled Muslim is required to participate in a defensive war—except scholars. Drinking alcohol is not allowed, except if it is an ingredient of a medicine. Pork is not allowed except under conditions of starvation. Keeping oath is a rule; however, under certain circumstances, the breaking of the oath is permitted. Idol worship is the only unforgivable sin, except for Christians who worship Jesus out of love. Angels do not have free will, except Satan. God, the creator, has established laws of nature, and a miracle by definition is a breach of natural law and, therefore, an exception to the rule.

Dualistic versus Dialectical Thinking

The principle of exception to the rule should not be confused with amoral relativistic thinking, where everything goes, because the Quran defines where

an exception to the rule applies. The Quran elevates primitive human thinking in dualistic terms (right or wrong or black and white). Sometimes, there is more than one right way of thinking. In the higher form of dialectical thinking, one sees merit in different viewpoints and multiple solutions to a problem.

7. The uniqueness of the Arabic language

AND THUS have We bestowed from on high this [divine writ] as a discourse in the Arabic tongue, and have given therein many facets to all manner of warnings, so that men might remain conscious of Us, or that it gives rise to a new awareness in them. (20:113) Say [O Muhammad]: “O mankind! Verily, I am an apostle of God to all of you, [sent by Him] unto whom the dominion over the heavens and the earth belongs! There is no deity save Him; He [alone] grants life and deals death!” Believe, then, in God and His Apostle—the unlettered Prophet who believes in God and His words—and follow him, so that you might find guidance! (7:158) AND NEVER have We sent forth any apostle otherwise than [with a message] in his own people’s tongue, so that he might make [the truth] clear unto them. (14:4)

The Quran was revealed in the Arabic tongue to enable the Arabian Prophet to propound it to the people of his immediate environment and, through them, to the whole world. The message of the Quran is universal and not restricted to Arabs alone. Arabic is the only Semitic tongue that has remained uninterruptedly alive for thousands of years.

Ellipticism

Ellipsis is the omission from speech or writing of a word or words that are superfluous or able to be understood from contextual clues. It is called *ijaz* by the Arab philologists, an integral characteristic of the Arabic idiom and the Quran’s language. It is impossible to understand its meaning without being able to reproduce elliptical, associative thought. The ability of the elliptic mode of thinking comes to the indigenous Arab almost automatically

from his early childhood as he learns to understand and speak Arabic. That is not true for the non-Arab acquainted with Arabic at a mature age. The passage below is an outstanding example of the elliptic mode of expression (ijaz) to be found in the Quran.

[For thus it always happens: We seal the doom of all who deny the truth and give the lie to Our messages;] and thereupon We save Our apostles and those who have attained to faith. (10:103)

The long-bracketed interpolation inserted by the translator at the beginning of this verse is necessitated by the adverbial conjunction “thereupon,” which does not relate here to the immediately preceding passage but to a theme repeatedly occurring in the Quran, namely, the experiences of the earlier prophets with their recalcitrant communities and the doom of those who gave the lie to their messages. In every case, a divine deliverance of the Prophet concerned those who followed him. Throughout this English translation, the bracketed interpolations were added by the translator to fill the gaps left by the Quran’s ellipticism.

8. Proper Use of Religious Terms

The terms kufr (denial of the truth) and kafir (one who denies the truth) have become, in the conventional translations of the Quran, unwarrantably simplified into “unbelief,” and “unbeliever” or “infidel,” and have thus been deprived of the wide spiritual meaning which the Quran gives these terms. Hence, in the usage of the Quran, a kafir is one who denies (or refuses to acknowledge) the truth in its widest, spiritual sense. In other words, concealing something that exists or deliberately denying something that is true. Among today’s Muslims, depending on their sectarian leanings, the word kafir is casually and wrongfully applied not only to non-Muslims but also to Muslims belonging to a different sect. The Quran designates non-Muslims such as righteous Jews and Christians as believers in the one God.

As initially used, the word ummah included the entire community of Medina (Muslims, Jews, hypocrites and pagans of Medina). Now ummah constitutes only a community of Muslims or believers.

9. Differences of Opinions in the Interpretation of the Quran

In their commentaries, the great thinkers of our past approached the Quran with their reason. They tried to explain each Quranic statement in the light of their superb knowledge of the Arabic language and of the Prophet's teachings in his *Sunnah*, the established practices of the Prophet Muhammad. The hadith is the written record of the *Sunnah*. Hadith, or the collections of ahadith (Arabic plural for hadith), or Prophet Mohammad's traditions, words, actions, and tacit approval are recognized as second in authority only to the Quran itself. *Sunnah* may supplement Quranic injunctions but may never set them aside.

The store of general knowledge available and historical and cultural experiences was also included in the great thinkers' commentaries. How one commentator understood a particular Quranic statement or expression differed occasionally and sometimes very incisively from the meaning attributed to it by his predecessors. Still, there was no animosity involved, due to their awareness of relativity inherent in all human reasoning. Without the work of those incomparably great scholars of past centuries, no modern translation and explanation of the Quran could be undertaken with any hope of success.

And they were fully conscious too of the Prophet's profound saying, "The differences of opinion among the learned men of my community are an outcome of divine grace." It implies that critical thinking and differences of opinion are the basis of all progress in human thought and, therefore, the most potent factor in man's acquisition of knowledge.

10. Translation Alone Insufficient to Understand the Quran

The Arabic of the Quran is complex, and even Arabs need an explanation of the text of the Quran for proper understanding. The best-known and most widely used tafsir (explanation of the Quran) is by the classical author al-Tabari (died AD 923), a work of great length and enormous erudition that reports the opinions of the Prophet and his companions about each phrase of the text. Other respected and often used commentaries are those by al-Baydawi (died 1292), al-Zamakhshari (died 1144), and Razi (died 1228).

NAY I call to witness the coming-down in parts [of this Quran]—and, behold, this is indeed a most solemn

affirmation, if you but knew it! Behold, it is a truly noble discourse, [conveyed unto man] in a well-guarded divine writ which none but the pure [of heart] can touch: a revelation from the Sustainer of all the worlds! Would you, now, look down with disdain on a tiding like this, and make it your daily bread [as it were] to call the truth a lie? (56:75-82)

Part 2: Islam's Five Articles of Faith

5

God's Unity (Tawhid)—The First Article of Faith

Orthodoxy

RELIGIONS ARE GENERALLY defined by one of three things: belief, practice, or both. These are orthodoxy (belief in a doctrine) and orthopraxy (emphasis on action). In Islam, the emphasis is on practice, but that does not preclude the importance of faith or belief. The five articles or the core of faith in Islam are laid out in the fourth chapter of the Quran, as follows.

1. Monotheism (tawhid) or belief in one God, Allah
2. Faith in all the prophets including the Biblical Prophets, also known as the doctrine of historical continuity of divine revelations
3. Belief in all the revealed scripture such as Old and New Testaments and the Quran
4. Belief in Angels
5. The Day of Judgment

O you who have attained to faith! Hold fast unto your belief in God and His Apostle, and in the divine writ which He has bestowed from on high upon His Apostle, step by step, as well as in the revelation, which He sent down aforetime: for he who denies God, and His angels, and His revelations, and His apostles, and the Last Day, has indeed gone far astray. (4:136)

Allah

The first article of faith is God. The word *Allah* is not a name but Arabic for “the God,” for there is only one God. Christian Arabs of today have no other word for “God” than Allah. Everything in Islam centers in the primal fact of a single God or Allah, who encompasses the entire universe with His power and grace.

AND YOUR GOD is the One God: there is no deity save Him, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace. (2:163) Verily, most surely, your God is One—the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and of all that is between them, and the Sustainer of all the points of sunrise! (37:4-5) GOD—there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being! (3:2) GOD [Himself] proffers evidence—and [so do] the angels and all who are endowed with knowledge—that there is no deity save Him, the Upholder of Equity: there is no deity save Him, the Almighty, the Truly Wise. (3:18)

Our God and Your God Is One and the Same

And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner—unless it be such of them as are bent on evildoing—and Say: “We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: for our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that We [all] surrender ourselves.” For it is thus, that We have bestowed this divine writ from on high upon thee [O Muhammad]. And they to whom we have vouchsafed this divine writ believe in it—just as among those [followers of earlier revelation] there are some who believe in it. (29:46-47)

Islam and Christianity are not simply overlapping ideas or merely compatible, but in the most central sense, are one continuum because the

teachings of Jesus are consistent with Quranic teachings. Similarly, Allah and God the father are the same God. Jesus himself embraced the God of the Hebrew patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Jesus said: “Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Matt 23:9).

Jesus Son of God, and Islam

The suggestion that Jesus is to any degree a deity is perhaps the single most critical issue dividing Islam and Christianity.

Verily, Jesus was human—like Adam—in the sight of God, the nature of Jesus is as the nature of Adam, whom He created out of dust and then said unto him, “Be”—and he is. (3:59) Say [O Prophet]: “If the Most Gracious [truly] had a son, I would be the first to worship him!” Utterly remote, in His glory, is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth—the Sustainer, in almightiness enthroned—from all that, they may attribute to Him by way of definition! But leave them to indulge in idle talk and play [with words] until they face that [Judgment] Day of theirs, which they have been promised: for [then they will come to know that] it is He [alone] who is God in heaven and God on earth, and [that] He alone is truly wise, all-knowing. (43:78-84)

Indeed, the truth deny they who say, “God is the Christ, son of Mary,” seeing that the Christ [himself] said, “O children of Israel! Worship God [alone], who is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer.” (5:72) [See Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; John 20:17.] Say: “O followers of the Gospel! Do not overstep the bounds [of truth] in your religious beliefs, and do not follow the errant views of people who have gone astray aforetime, and have led many [others] astray, and are still straying from the right path.” (5:77)

Islam honors Jesus as a true apostle of God. It even accepts the Christian doctrine of his virgin birth. The Quran describes the immaculate birth of Jesus as a miracle of God, similar to parting of the sea by Moses and many other miracles described in the Bible and the Quran. But at the doctrine of the Incarnation and Trinity, it draws the line, seeing these as concessions to man's inclination to seek a compromise between the human and the divine. In the eyes of Muslims, Christianity has compromised monotheism with the trinitarian God and thereby contradicts Muhammad's teachings. In the eyes of Christians, Islam has demoted their God Jesus to just a human prophet and rejected the concept of vicarious atonement for the sins of mankind, all irreconcilable positions.

Muslims and Christians can agree on what Jesus said and what he stood for and what he has to teach us even today. What is more important from the Islamic point of view is everyday practical issues and how Jesus lived a righteous life as a reminder to the rest of us to follow his example. How you frame the nature of his identity may be critical for Christian theology, but it's a separate and theoretical issue.

Do Not Argue about God

And as for those who would [still] argue about God after He has been acknowledged [by them]—all their arguments are null and void in their Sustainer's sight, and upon them will fall [His] condemnation, and for them is suffering severe in store. (42:16)

The above verses are addressed to the followers of all the prophets who preached one and the same essential truth—namely, the oneness of God—and the same ethical principles. Therefore, all believers in the One God, regardless of their historical denomination, should regard themselves as one single community, notwithstanding the differences in specific statutes and practices.

Arguments about God's attributes and the "how" of His Being are beyond the grasp of the limited human mind. Man cannot fathom even the real nature of His activity beyond the fact that He has imposed on all creations the law of cause and effect so that in the life to come, man will only harvest what his

own hands have wrought in this world. It is presumptuous and futile to argue about the nature of His Being. Hence, all divisive speculations about God's nature are null and void in their Sustainer's sight.

I Have Surrendered Myself unto God

Thus, [O Prophet,] if they argue with thee, say, "I have surrendered my whole being unto God, and [so have] all who follow me!"—and ask those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime, as well as all unlettered people, [who have no revealed scripture of their own] "Have you [too] surrendered yourselves unto Him?" And if they surrender themselves unto Him, they are on the right path; but if they turn away—behold, thy duty is no more than to deliver the message, for God sees all that is in [the hearts of] His creatures. (3:20) Say: "O followers of earlier revelation! Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings for our lords beside God." And if they turn away, then say: "Bear witness that it is we who have surrendered ourselves unto Him." (3:64) For if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender unto God, it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come, he shall be among the lost. (3:85)

We shall not take human beings for our lords—literally, "that we shall not take one another for lords beside God"—since the personal pronoun "we" applies to human beings.

God Is Unique

But limitless in His glory is God, enthroned in His awesome almightiness [far] above anything that men may devise by way of definition! (21:22) Limitless in His glory is He who

has created opposites in whatever the earth produces and in men's own selves, and in that of which [as yet] they have no knowledge, (36:36) and in everything have We created opposites, so that you might bear in mind [that God alone is One]. (51:49)

Far from being able to imagine God, we can only realize what God is not: not limited in either time or space, not male or female, not definable in terms of comparison, and not to be fully encompassed by human thought. Any attempt at defining Him or His attributes is a logical impossibility.

God Alone Has All the Attributes of Perfection

AND GOD'S [alone] are the attributes of perfection; invoke Him, then, by these, and stand aloof from all who distort the meaning of His attributes: they shall be requited for all that they were wont to do! (7:180)

The “attributes of perfection” is a term reserved in the Quran for God alone. It is a blasphemy to call any human being infallible and to apply God's attributes to other beings or objects.

God Is All-Powerful (Omnipotent)

HALLOWED be He in whose hand all dominion rests, since He has the power to will anything. (67:1) God is He save whom there is no deity: the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the One with whom all salvation rests, the Giver of Faith, the One who determines what is true and false, the Almighty, the One who subdues wrong and restores right, the One to whom all greatness belongs! Utterly remote is God, in His limitless glory, from anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity! (59:23)

God has absolute sway over all that exists. The overwhelming sense of God's sovereignty and power is epitomized in the declaration "God is most great" (Allahu Akbar). It has served as a preface to the call to prayer and as the traditional battle cry of Muslim warriors throughout the Islamic history.

God Is All Knowing (Omniscient)

Yea, indeed—for He alone is the all-knowing Creator. (36:81) NOW, verily, it is We who have created man, and We know what his innermost self whispers within him: for We are closer to him than his neck-vein. (50:16) And He knows all that is on land and in the sea; and not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the Earth's deep darkness, nor anything living or dead, but is recorded in [His] clear decree. (6:59) For, not even an atom's weight [of whatever there is] on earth or in heaven escapes thy Sustainer's knowledge; and neither is there anything smaller than that, nor larger, but is recorded in [His] clear decree. (10:61)

Knowledge of the Future: Prediction of Victory for Byzantines

DEFEATED have been the Byzantines in the lands close-by; yet it is they who, notwithstanding this their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years: [for] with God rests all power of decision, first and last. (30:2-4)

This is an unequivocal prediction of events still, at that time, shrouded in the mists of the future. The defeats and victories spoken of the above relate to the last phases of the centuries-long struggle between the Byzantine (Christian) and Persian Empires. During the early years of the seventh century, the Persians conquered parts of Syria and Anatolia, "the lands close-by," near the heartland of the Byzantine Empire. Persians took Damascus, Jerusalem, Egypt, and they laid siege on Constantinople itself. At the time of the revelation of this surah, 615 or 616 of the Christian Era, the destruction of

the Byzantine Empire seemed imminent. The few Muslims around the Prophet were despondent on hearing the news of the utter rout of the Byzantines, who were monotheist Christians.

The Collapse of the Persian Empire

The pagan Quraysh, an Arabian tribe, had sympathies with the Persians, who, they thought, would vindicate their opposition to the one-God idea. When the Prophet announced the above Quran verses predicting a Byzantine victory “within a few years,” the Quraysh received this prophecy with derision. “A few years” denotes any number between three and ten, and, as it happened, in 622—six or seven years after the Quranic prediction—the tide turned in favor of the Byzantines. In that year, Emperor Heraclius succeeded in defeating the Persians at Issus, south of the Taurus Mountains, and subsequently drove them out of Asia Minor. By 624, he carried the war into Persian territory and thus put the enemy on the defensive. At the beginning of December 626, the Persian armies were routed by the Byzantines. In 628, the Persian emperor died, and succession difficulties led in a few years to the complete collapse of the Persian Empire.

Prophecies Regarding the Battle of Badr

And on that day will the believers [too, have cause to] rejoice in God's succor: [for] He gives succor to whomever He wills, since He alone is almighty, a dispenser of grace. [This is] God's promise. Never does God fail to fulfill His promise—but most people know [it] not. (30:4-6) And [since they see that they cannot persuade thee,] they endeavor to estrange thee from the land [of your birth] with a view to driving thee away from it—but, then, after you have left, they themselves will not remain [in it] for more than a little while: [such has been Our] way with all of Our apostles whom We sent before thy time; and no change wilt thou find in Our ways. (17:76-77) Or do they say, “We are a group united, [and therefore] bound to prevail”? [Yet] the hosts [of those who deny the

truth] shall be routed, and they shall turn their backs [in flight]! (54:45-46)

The second prediction was about the battle of Badr, which was to take place eight or nine years later, when the small Muslim army of about three hundred men decisively defeated the one-thousand-strong force of pagan Quraysh. Some Quraysh leaders were killed in the battle.

Multiple Ways of Ascent to God

God, unto whom there are many ways of ascent. (70:3)

“He of the (many) ascents” is a metaphorical phrase stating that there are many ways by which man can ascend to a comprehension of God’s existence and thus to spiritual nearness to Him. It is up to each human being to avail themselves of any of the ways leading toward Him.

The Uniqueness of Islamic Art

The Quran takes its stand as the grand advocate of God’s unity. The strength of Arab arms was to wax and wane, but again and again, the Prophet’s vision of a single God triumphed over peoples like the Mongols and the Turks, who would subdue his followers in physical combat but then convert to Islam. Almost every page of the Quran cries out with a burning zeal: “Your God is one God. *There is no God but He—the Living, the Eternal*” (2:158).

Culturally, the concern not to compromise God’s unity and transcendence led to an absolute ban on any image or representation of God or Muhammad. Many Arab Muslims extended this ban to any representation in the art of the human form for fear that such statues and paintings might lead to idol worship. This attitude resulted in the use of calligraphy (Arabic script) and arabesque (geometric and floral design) as dominant forms in Islamic art.

Freedom of Press versus Defense of Religious Sensibilities

The uncompromising attitude of banning any image of Muhammad explains the violent protests when the Prophet’s image is desecrated in the form of a

cartoon in the name of “freedom of expression.” Such provocateurs are betting on a violent Muslim reaction that will make headlines throughout the world. This successful strategy to sell newspapers and books is shocking for a simple Muslim who grew up in a profoundly religious society. The sacredness of great prophetic and revered figures such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, to name the few, is instilled since childhood. The second article of the Muslim faith is the belief in all the prophets. To challenge those long-held sensibilities in a crude and insensitive manner is psychologically playing with fire. When the core of one’s being is under attack, some mentally vulnerable individuals will become unglued.

The Islamic world will never accept the thesis of unlimited freedom of expression where anyone can blaspheme and curse the name of any esteemed figure. Most people in the West would never resort to violence when Jesus’s name is abused publicly. It is hard for a Westerner who grew up in the secular tradition to understand a Muslim’s reaction under similar circumstances. Unlimited freedom of press will always have a headlong clash with those who will defend what they consider sacred, no matter what the cost. These two extreme positions violate the bedrock principle of the Quran, a call for moderation in every aspect of life. Nevertheless, the Quranic advice as regards blasphemers isn’t to attack them but to ignore them.

6

Belief in All Apostles—The Second Article of Faith

The Doctrine of Historical Continuity of Divine Revelations

THE RELIGION OF the Quran is better understood within the context of the great monotheistic faiths preceding it and which, according to Muslim belief, culminate and achieve their final form in the teachings of Islam. The religion of the Quran is a continuation of Judaism and Christianity, with Muhammad being the last Prophet. In short, without Judaism or Christianity, there would have been no Islam.

The Quran teaches us that God sent messengers to all people on the face of the Earth. Islamic traditions say there were 124,000 such prophets, a symbolic figure suggesting a significant number. No community or civilization has been without prophetic guidance. The Quran naturally singles out apostles who were familiar to the Arabs. When God directly communicates with a human being, that person is a Prophet by definition.

The following is the list of all the Prophets mentioned in the Quran:

1. Adam, 2. Idris (Enoch), 3. Nuh (Noah), 4. Hud (Eber), 5. Salih (Salah), 6. Ibrahim (Abraham), 7. Lut (Lot), 8. Ismail (Ishmael), 9. Ishaq (Isaac), 10. Yaqub (Jacob), 11. Yusuf (Joseph), 12. Ayub (Job), 13. Shuayb (Jethro), 14. Musa (Moses), 15. Harun (Aaron), 16. Daud (David), 17. Sulayman (Solomon), 18. Yunus (Jonah), 19. Ilyas (Elijah), 20. Al-yasa (Elisha), 21. Zakariya (Zechariah), 22. Yahya (John), 23. Isa (Jesus), 24. Muhammad.

Moses is mentioned 135 times, Abraham 67 times, Jesus 25 times, and Prophet Muhammad is mentioned only 6 times in the Quran.

Prophets from the Old and New Testament

BEHOLD, We have inspired thee [O Prophet] just as We inspired Noah and all the prophets after him—as We inspired Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants, including Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon; and as We vouchsafed unto David a book of divine wisdom. [Psalms] And as [We inspired other] apostles whom We have mentioned to thee ere this, as well as apostles whom We have not mentioned to thee; and as God spoke His word unto Moses: [We sent all these] apostles as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, so that men might have no excuse before God after [the coming of] these apostles: and God is indeed almighty, wise. (4:163-165)

Prophets from the House of Abraham

We bestowed upon him [Abraham] Isaac and Jacob; and We guided each of them as We had guided Noah aforetime. And out of his offspring, [We bestowed prophethood upon] David, and Solomon, and Job, and Joseph, and Moses, and Aaron: for thus do We reward the doers of good; (85) and [upon] Zachariah, and John, and Jesus, and Elijah. Every one of them was of the righteous; and [upon] Ishmael, and Elisha, and Jonah, and Lot. And every one of them did We favor above other people. [We exalted likewise] some of their forefathers, their offspring and their brethren. We elected them [all] and guided them onto a straightway. Such is God's guidance: He guides therewith whomever He wills of His servants. And had they ascribed divinity to aught beside Him—in vain, indeed, would have been all [the good] that they ever did: [but] it was to them that We vouchsafed revelation, and sound judgment, and prophethood. (6:84-90)

Although Lot was not a direct descendant of Abraham but a nephew, he is mentioned here because he followed Abraham from his earliest youth as a

son follows his father. In ancient Arabian usage, a paternal uncle is often described as a father and, conversely, a nephew as “son.”

Continuation of Divine Revelations to Muhammad

[And know, O believers, that] Muhammad is not the father of any one of your men, but is God’s Apostle and the Seal of all Prophets. (33:40)

An Ever-True Faith—The Way of Abraham

Islam is not a new religion, and the way of Abraham is the basis of the Islamic faith. Abraham is designated as “your forefather” not only because he was an ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad, to whose followers this passage is addressed. He was also the prototype (and thus, the spiritual forefather) of all who consciously “surrender themselves to God.” The term “Muslim” signifies “one who surrenders himself to God”; correspondingly, Islam denotes “self-surrender to God.” Both these terms are applied in the Quran to all who believe in the One God and affirm this belief by an unequivocal acceptance of His revealed messages. Since the Quran represents the final and most universal of these divine revelations, believers are called upon in the sequence to follow the guidance of its Apostle and thus to become an example for all mankind.

SAY: “Behold, my Sustainer has guided me onto a straight way through an ever-true faith—the way of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him.” Say: “Behold, my prayer, and [all] my acts of worship, and my living and my dying are for God [alone], the Sustainer of all the worlds, in whose divinity none has a share: for thus have I been bidden—and I shall [always] be foremost among those who surrender themselves unto Him.” Say: “Am I, then, to seek a sustainer other than God, when He is the Sustainer of all things?” (6:161-164)

While Abraham was regarded as the ancestor of both Jews and Arabs, it is also an undeniable fact that he was not a Jew or Christian. The Jews are either the followers of Moses or the descendants of Abraham's grandson Jacob. Abraham stood for the worship of God alone.

O FOLLOWERS of earlier revelation! Why do you argue about Abraham, seeing that the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed till [long] after him? Will you not, then, use your reason? Lo! You are the ones who would argue about that which is known to you; but why do you argue something unknown to you? Yet God knows [it], whereas you do not know: Abraham was neither a “Jew,” nor a “Christian,” but was one who turned away from all that is false, having surrendered himself unto God; and he was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught besides Him. Behold, the people who have the best claim to Abraham are surely those who follow him—as does this Prophet and all who believe [in him]—and God is near unto the believers. (3:65-68)

The Muslim Greeting of Peace

And when those who believe in Our messages come unto thee, say: “Peace be upon you.” (6:54)

The peace referred to in the above expression has become the standard form of Muslim greeting. It has a spiritual connotation comprising the concepts of ethical soundness, security from all that is evil, and, therefore, freedom from all moral conflict disquiet. In Arabic: *As-Salaam-Alaikum* (peace be upon you), and the standard response is *Wa-Alaikum-Salaam* (And unto you peace).

And this, too, is a divine writ (the Quran) which We have bestowed from on high, blessed, confirming the truth of whatever there remains [of earlier revelations]—[this] in order that thou mayest warn the foremost of all cities and all

who dwell around it. And those who believe in the life to come, believe in this [warning], and they are ever mindful of their prayers. (6:92)

The foremost of all cities (lit., the mother of all towns) is an epithet applied in the Quran to Mecca because it is the place where the first temple ever dedicated to the One God was built (3:96) and subsequently became the Qiblah (direction of prayer) of all believers. The expression “all who dwell around it” denotes all humanity.

Divine guidance for all humanity

VERILY, those who deny God and His apostles by endeavoring to make a distinction between [belief in] God and [belief in] His apostles, they say, “We believe in the one but we deny the other,” and want to pursue a path in between—it is they who are truly denying the truth: and for those who deny the truth We have readied shameful suffering. But as for those who believe in God and His apostles and make no distinction between any of them—[in point of their being God’s message-bearers] and unto them, in time, will He grant their rewards [in full]. And God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (4:150-152)

All the apostles were true bearers of God’s messages, and from the believers’ perspective, there is no distinction between them. However, it is God’s prerogative only that some of them have been endowed more highly than others. In Islam, the rejection of any or all of God’s apostles constitutes almost as grave a sin as a denial of God Himself.

Worship God and Shun Evil

Behold, [O Muhammad] God can make hear whomever He wills, whereas thou canst not make hear such as are [dead of

heart like the dead] in their graves: thou art nothing but a warner. Verily, We have sent thee with the truth, as a bearer, of glad tidings and a warner: for there never was any community, but a warner has [lived and] passed away in its midst. (35:23-24)

And indeed, within every community, have We raised an apostle [entrusted with this message]: “Worship God and shun the powers of evil!” And among those [past generations] were people whom God graced with his guidance, just as there was among them [many a one] who inevitably fell prey to grievous error. Go, about the Earth, behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth! (16:36-37)

In the Quranic terminology, “worship of God” implies the concept of man’s sense of responsibility before Him. Hence, the above commandment comprises the sum total of all ethical injunctions and prohibitions and is the basis and source of all morality as well as the one unchanging message inherent in every true religion.

7

Belief in All Revealed Books—The Third Article of Faith

(Torah, Psalms, New Testament, and the Quran)

Are Jews the Chosen People?

THE FIRST DIVINELY inspired Law, the Torah, inaugurated a new phase in mankind's religious history. God chose the children of Israel as "forerunners in faith." Arabs, for the most part, were idol worshippers, and it took millennia for them to adjust to the monotheism of Abraham. Therefore, Jews are the chosen people, not because the great prophet Abraham was their ancestor but because they were the forerunner of monotheism in a distinct form.

Divine Origin of Torah

It was Our will to bestow Our favor upon those [very people] who were deemed [so] utterly low in the land, (of Egypt) and to make them forerunners in faith, and to make them heirs [to Pharaoh's glory]. (28:5) We vouchsafed unto Moses [Our] revelation as a means of insight for men, and as a guidance and grace, so that they might bethink themselves [of Us]. (28:43)

Verily, it is We who bestowed from on high the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light. On its strength did the prophets, who had surrendered themselves unto God, deliver

judgment to those who followed the Jewish faith; so did the [early] men of God and the rabbis, in as much as some of God's writ had been entrusted to their care; and they [all] bore witness to its truth. Therefore, [O children of Israel,] hold not men in awe, but stand in awe of Me, and do not barter away My messages for a trifling gain: for they who do not judge in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high are, indeed, deniers of the truth! (5:44)

And yet, before this, there was the revelation of Moses, a guide and a [sign of God's] grace. And this [Quran] is a divine writ confirming the truth [of the Torah] in the Arabic tongue, to warn those who are bent on evildoing, and [to bring] a glad tidings to the doers of good. Behold, for all who say, "Our Sustainer is God," and thereafter stand firm [in their faith]—no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve: it is they who are destined for paradise, therein to abide as a reward for all that they have done. (46:12-14)

AND INDEED, [already] unto the children of Israel did We vouchsafe revelation and wisdom, and prophethood; and We provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favored them above all other people [of their time]. And We gave them clear indications of the purpose [of faith]; and it was only after all this knowledge had been vouchsafed to them that they began, out of mutual jealousy, to hold divergent views: [but,] thy Sustainer will judge between them on Resurrection Day regarding all whereon they differ. (45:16-17)

Divine Origin of the Quran, Gospel, and Torah

Step by step has He bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ (Quran), setting forth the truth which confirms whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations]: for it is

He who has bestowed from on high the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, as a guidance unto mankind, and it is He who has bestowed [upon man] the standard by which to discern the true from the false. (3:3-4)

Why the Quran Differs from Earlier Divine Revelations

Unto every one of you We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God, you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you differ. (5:48)

And upon you [too] have We bestowed from on high this divine writ for no other reason than that thou might make clear unto them all [questions of faith] on which they have come to hold divergent views, and [thus offer] guidance and grace unto people who will believe. (16:64)

Unto every community have We appointed [different] ways of worship, which they ought to observe. Hence, [O believer,] do not let those [who follow ways other than thine] draw thee into disputes on this score, but summon [them all] unto thy Sustainer: for, behold, thou art indeed on the right way. And if they [try to] argue with you, say [only]: “God knows best what you are doing.” [For, indeed,] God will judge between you [all] on Resurrection Day with regard to all on which you differ. Dost thou not know that God knows all that occurs in heaven as well as on earth? All this, behold, is in [God’s] record: verily, [to know] all this is easy for God. (22:67-70)

Divergent Views and the Quranic Explanation

BEHOLD, this Quran explains to the children of Israel most [of that] whereon they hold divergent views; and, verily, it is a guidance and grace unto all who believe [in it]. Verily, [O believer,] thy Sustainer will judge between them in His wisdom—for He alone is almighty, all-knowing. Hence, place your trust in God [alone]—for, behold, that in which you believe is truth self-evident. (27:76-77)

AND, INDEED, [O Muhammad,] We did vouchsafe revelation unto Moses [as well]: so be not in doubt of [thy] having met with the same [truth in the revelation vouchsafed to you]. And [just as] We caused that [earlier revelation] to be a guidance for the children of Israel, and [as] We raised among them leaders who, so long as they bore themselves with patience and had sure faith in Our messages guided [their people] in accordance with Our behest—[so, too, shall it be with the divine writ revealed unto thee, O Muhammad]. (32:23-24)

And We caused Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow in the footsteps of those [earlier prophets], confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah; and We vouchsafed unto him the Gospel, wherein there was guidance and light, confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah, and as a guidance and admonition unto the God-conscious. Let, then, the followers of the Gospel judge in accordance with what God has revealed therein: for they who do not judge in the light of what God has bestowed from on high—it is they, they who are truly iniquitous! (5:46-47)

MUHAMMAD is God's Apostle; and those who are [truly] with him are firm and unyielding towards all deniers of the

truth, [yet] full of mercy towards one another. Thou canst see them bowing down, prostrating themselves [in prayer], seeking favor with God and [His] goodly acceptance: their marks are on their faces, traced by prostration. This is their parable in the Torah as well as their parable in the Gospel: [they are] like a seed that brings forth its shoot, and then He strengthens it, so that it grows stout, and [in the end] stands firm upon its stem, delighting the sowers. . . . [Thus will God cause believers to grow in strength,] so that, through them, He might confound the deniers of the truth. [But] unto such of them as may [yet] attain to faith and do righteous deeds, God has promised forgiveness and a reward supreme. (48:29)

The Sacredness of Houses of Worship (Mosques, Churches, and Synagogues)

Hence, who could be more wicked than those who bar the mention of God's name from [any of] His houses of worship and strive for their ruin, [although] they have no right to enter them save in fear [of God]? For them, in this world, there is disgrace in store; and for them, in the life to come, awesome suffering. (2:114) Those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying: "Our Sustainer is God!"

For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled—would surely have been destroyed [before now]. (22:40) And if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, corruption would surely overwhelm the earth. (2:251)

8

Belief in Angels—The Fourth Article of Faith

Realm Beyond the Reach of Human Perception

AL-GHAYB IN THE Quran denotes hidden realities, those that lie beyond the range of human perception and cannot, therefore, be proven or disproven by scientific observation or even adequately described within accepted categories of speculative thought.

The existence of a realm beyond the reach of human perception (al-ghayb) constitutes the fundamental premise for an understanding of the call of the Quran. It is, indeed, a basic principle of almost every religion, for God himself belongs to this realm. All truly religious cognition arises from the fact that only a small segment of reality is open to our perception and imagination, and by far the larger part of it escapes our comprehension altogether. For instance, metaphysical subjects such as God's attributes, the ultimate meaning of time and eternity, the resurrection of the dead, the Day of Judgment, paradise and hell, the nature of the beings or forces described as angels and jinn, etc., all fall within the category of al-ghayb. Since this hidden sector of reality is beyond the reach of human perception, it must be conveyed to people in allegorical terms.

Angels

Angels, immortal and sexless, are created out of light. They are a transmitter of God's message, communicating divine revelations to the prophets. Thus, Gabriel (Jibril) brought down the Quran to Muhammad. Among the more prominent angels are Michael and Israfil. God is encircled with a boundless realm of angels, who express their love and devotion to Him. They appear in a graduated, individuated hierarchy. These ranks of angels offer God their praise, and they appear active throughout the universe as messengers from God and executors of the divine will. They also function as guardians and

recorders. At the opposite end of the spectrum from God, the principle of good, is Satan (Shaytan), the principle of evil. Satan is the leader of other fallen angels, disobedient servants of God who tempt human beings in their earthly moral struggle.

Respect for Angel Gabriel and Michael

SAY [O Prophet]: “Whosoever is an enemy of Gabriel”—who, verily, by God’s leave, has brought down upon thy heart this [divine writ] which confirms the truth of whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations], and is a guidance and a glad tiding for the believers—“whosoever is an enemy of God and His angels and His message-bearers, including Gabriel and Michael, [should know that,] verily, God is the enemy of all who deny the truth.” (2:97-98)

According to several authentic Traditions, some of the learned men from among the Jews of Medina described Gabriel as “the enemy of the Jews,” for three reasons. First, all the prophecies of the misfortune that befell the Jews throughout their early history were transmitted to them by Gabriel. Thus Gabriel became a “harbinger of evil” (in contrast to the angel Michael, whom they regarded as a bearer of happy predictions and, therefore, as their “friend”). Second, the Quran states repeatedly that Gabriel conveyed its message to Muhammad, whereas the Jews were of the opinion that a legitimate claim of divine revelation can only come from descendants of Israel. Third, the Quran—revealed through Gabriel—abounds in criticism of certain Jewish beliefs and attitudes and describes them as contrary to the genuine message of Moses.

Angels and Divine Revelations

ALL PRAISE is due to God, Originator of the heavens and the earth, who causes the angels to be [His] message-bearers, endowed with wings, two, or three, or four. (35:1) AND [the angels say]: “We do not descend [with revelation],

again and again, other than by thy Sustainer's command. Unto Him belongs all that lies open before us and all that is hidden—from us and all that is in-between. And never does thy Sustainer forget [anything]—the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them! Worship, then, Him alone, and remain steadfast in His worship! Dost thou know any whose name is worthy to be mentioned side by side with His?” (19:64-65)

The “wings” of angels are a metaphor for the speed and power with which God’s revelations are conveyed to His prophets. Their multiplicity (“two, or three, or four”) is perhaps meant to stress the countless ways in which He causes His commands to materialize within the universe created by Him. As stated in an authentic hadith, on the night of his Ascension, the Prophet saw Gabriel “endowed with six hundred wings.”

Angels Surrounding the Throne of God’s Almightyness

THEY WHO BEAR [within themselves the knowledge of] the throne of [God’s] almighty, as well as all who are near it, extol their Sustainer’s limitless glory and praise, and have faith in Him, and ask forgiveness for all [others] who have attained to faith. (40:7)

Angels “bearing” God’s throne of almighty (al-arsh) must be understood in a metaphorical sense. Their carrying and surrounding it (or being near it) is a metaphor of their being mindful of the Lord of the Throne and being instrumental in the realization of His will.

Angels’ Prayer for Forgiveness

“O our Sustainer! Thou embrace all things within [Thy] grace and knowledge: forgive, then, their sins unto those who repent and follow Thy path, and preserve them from

suffering through the blazing fire! “And, O our Sustainer, bring them into the gardens of perpetual bliss which Thou hast promised them, together with the righteous from among their forebears, and their spouses, and their offspring—and for, verily, Thou alone art almighty, truly wise—and preserve them from [doing] evil deeds: for anyone whom on that Day [of Judgment] Thou wilt have preserved from [the taint of] evil deeds, him wilt Thou have graced with Thy mercy: and that, that will be the triumph supreme!” (40:8-9)

Watchful Forces over Human Beings

And yet, verily, there are ever-watchful forces over you, noble, recording, aware of whatever you do! (82:10)

This is a reference to the guardian angels who record, allegorically, all of men's deeds.

Angels Descending on Doers of Good

“[But,] behold, as for those who say, “Our Sustainer is God,” and then steadfastly pursue the right way—upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] “Fear not and grieve not but receive the glad tiding of that paradise which has been promised to you! We are close unto you in the life of this world and [will be so] in the life to come; and in that [life to come] you shall have all that your souls may desire, and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for, as a ready welcome from Him who is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!” And who could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellow-men] unto God, and does what is just and right, and says, “Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to God”? (41:30-33)

Jinn

Somewhere between humans and angels are the invisible, intelligent spirits called jinn (“genies” in English). God is frequently spoken of as “the Sustainer of all the worlds” (rabb al-alamin), and the use of the plural clearly indicates that side by side with the world open to our observation are other worlds. In ancient Arabian folklore, the term jinn came to denote all manners of demons. The usage of the Quran is certainly different from the usage of ancient folklore.

The invisible beings We had created, [long] before that, out of the fire of scorching winds. (55:14-15) The invisible beings He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. (15:27)

Jinn have the ability to assume visible form and, like humans, can be good and bad. They will also be judged on the Last Day and consigned to paradise or hell. Our inability to discern and observe such phenomena is by no means a good reason to deny their existence. Our physical senses can establish contact with them only under exceptional circumstances. Very rare crossings of paths between their modes and ours may well give rise to strange and unexplainable manifestations, which man’s primitive fantasy has subsequently interpreted as ghosts, demons, poltergeists, and other supernatural apparitions.

9

Belief in Judgment Day—The Fifth Article of Faith

Acceptance of Responsibility

BELIEF IN JUDGMENT DAY is a fundamental requirement for man's salvation because it indicates acceptance of responsibility for one's actions. For Muslims, life on earth is the seedbed of an eternal future. After resurrection, each soul will be held accountable for his actions and how well he has observed God's laws. It will be followed by a day of reckoning, which is foreshadowed in the most awesome terms. In the end, all will be returned to God for the final judgment. Depending on how it fares in this accounting, the resurrected person will then go to Heaven or Hell.

God designated man as His vicegerent and bestowed the gift of free will. It is the belief in man's freedom and responsibility that leads directly to Islam's doctrine of the afterlife and resurrection. The mere thought of standing in front of God on Judgment Day to be held responsible for one's actions may act as a deterrent to sin.

Humankind Divided in Three Groups

[On that Day,] then, you shall be [divided into] three kinds of groups: (56:7)

1. The Foremost

But the foremost shall be [they who in life were] the foremost [in faith and good works]: they who were [always]

***drawn close unto God! In gardens of bliss [will they dwell]—
a good many of those of olden times, but [only] a few of later
times. (56:10 -14)***

The foremost among righteous will be those who excelled in their faith and good works in their earthly life. They will enter paradise without accounting. This is the highest stage of development of the soul about to enter heaven. Many of the foremost will come from early days, while more modern people will tend to fit into the second group.

2. After Sinning, Gradually Attained Righteousness

***Thus, there shall be such as will have attained to what is
right: oh, how [happy] will be they who have attained to what
is right! (56:8)***

The second group of human beings will be those who have gradually attained righteousness through true repentance after erring and sinning. They will undergo light accounting. The terror and the tribulations of the Day of Judgment will cause them no lasting grief. The foremost and those who gradually attained righteousness will enter paradise.

Heaven

There are two schools of thoughts within Islamic theology. Some Muslim theologians believe that paradise will be a spiritual experience. They advance the following argument:

The joy of joys consists in the beatific vision in which the veil that divides man from God will drop to disclose His heavenly glory to the soul freed from its earthly flesh. Supporting the non-materialistic interpretation of paradise is the Prophet's statement for the favored of God, to "*see his Lord's face night and morning is a felicity which will surpass all the pleasures of the body, as the ocean surpasses a drop of sweat.*"

And [as for all such believers,] no human being can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them [in the life to come] as a reward for all that they did. (32:17)

The Prophet summed up the impossibility of man's really imagining paradise. He indicated the essential difference between man's life in this world and in the hereafter: "God says, I have readied for My righteous servants what no eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard, and no heart of man has ever conceived." We are told, imagine the most joyous sensations, bodily as well as emotional, accessible to man: indescribable beauty, love physical and spiritual, consciousness of fulfillment, perfect peace and harmony; and imagine these sensations intensified beyond anything imaginable in this world—and at the same time entirely different and you have an inkling, however vague, of what is meant by paradise.

The description of Paradise in the Quran is the concrete expression of an abstract concept. By analogy, the principle of comparison through allegory applies to all references to paradise—i.e., a state of unimaginable happiness in the afterlife. It is only through physical description that the glimpse of paradise can be conveyed to limited human mind.

Others believe the descriptions of paradise are literal as well as metaphorical. The conditions of heavenly bliss are described with all the vividness of Eastern imagery for people who lived in an arid climate. The paradise is referred to as Gardens, plural. The description of a paradise as vast as the "heavens and the earth" is the Quranic metaphor for the entire created universe. We have the image of gardens abounding with deep rivers of cool, crystal water, of milk, honey, and wine. There is neither too much heat in the Garden nor bitter cold. Springs sprout everywhere, lush vegetation of wondrous hues, blissful shade, flowering meadows, boundless fertility, fruits of every kind.

BUT FOR THOSE who of their Sustainer's Presence stand in fear, two gardens [of paradise are readied]—[two gardens] of many wondrous hues. In [each of] these two [gardens] two springs will flow. In [each of] these two will two kinds of every fruit be [found]. [In such a paradise the blest will dwell,] reclining upon carpets lined with rich

brocade; and the fruit of both these gardens will be within easy reach. [When you are promised splendors] as though [of] rubies and [of] pearls—which, then, of your Sustainer's power can you disavow. Could the reward of good be aught but good?

And besides those two will be yet two [other] gardens—two [gardens] of the deepest green. In [each of] these two [gardens] will two springs gush forth. In both of them will be [all kinds of] fruit, and date palms and pomegranates.

In these [gardens] will be [all] things most excellent and beautiful. [There the blest will live with their] companions pure and modest, in pavilions [splendid]. [Companions] whom neither man nor invisible being has touched before then. [In such a paradise will they dwell,] reclining upon meadows green and carpets rich in beauty. HALLOWED be thy Sustainer's name, full of majesty and glory! (55:46-78)

[They will be seated] on gold-encrusted thrones of happiness, reclining upon them, facing one another [in love]. Immortal youths will wait upon them with goblets, and ewers, and cups filled with water from unsullied springs by which their minds will not be clouded and which will not make them drunk; and with fruit of any kind that they may choose, and with the flesh of any fowl that they may desire. (56:15-21)

In that [garden] they will on couches recline, and will know therein neither [burning] sun nor cold severe, since its [blissful] shades will come down low over them, and low will hang down its clusters of fruit, most easy to reach. (76:13-14)

And their Sustainer will give them to drink of a drink most pure. [And they will be told:] “Verily, all this is your reward, since your endeavor [in life] has met [God’s] goodly acceptance!” (76:21-22)

They will be given a drink of pure wine whereon the seal [of God] will have been set, pouring forth with a fragrance of musk. To that [wine of paradise], then, let all such aspire as [are willing to] aspire to things of high account: for it is composed of all that is most exalting—a source [of bliss] whereof those who are drawn close unto God shall drink. (83:25-28)

THE PARABLE of the paradise promised to those who are conscious of God [is that of a garden] through which running waters flow: [but, unlike an earthly garden,] its fruits will be everlasting, and [so will be] its shade. Such will be the destiny of those who remain conscious of God. (13:35)

Righteous Deeds Mirrored in Fruits of Heaven

“Whenever they are granted fruits therefrom as their appointed sustenance, they will say, ‘It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance!’ for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]” (2:25) God’s true servants: [in the hereafter,] theirs shall be a sustenance which they will recognize as the fruits [of their life on earth]; and honored shall they be in gardens of bliss. (37:40-44) Verily, those who are conscious of God [shall find themselves in the hereafter] amidst gardens and springs, [having been received with the greeting,] “Enter here in peace, secure!” And [by then] We shall have removed whatever unworthy thoughts or feelings may have been [lingering] in their breasts, [and they shall rest] as brethren, facing one another [in love] upon thrones of happiness. No

weariness shall ever touch them in this [state of bliss], and never shall they have to forgo it. (15:45-48) [O my friends in paradise,] is it [really] so that we are not to die [again,] beyond our previous death, and that we shall never [again] be made to suffer? Verily, this—this indeed—is the triumph supreme!” (37:58-61)

3. Unrepentant Sinners

And there shall be such as will have lost themselves in evil: oh, how [unhappy] will be they who have lost themselves in evil! (56:9)

The third group will consist of unrepentant sinners who did not mend their evil ways. Unrepentant sinners will continue their spiritual journey in the form of suffering on Judgment Day. There will be a great gathering of sinners for the final judgment. All sinners in their worldly life will go through the process of catharsis or cleansing of their soul through spiritual punishment. During the agonizing wait after the resurrection, the sinners will have ample opportunity to contemplate the imminent recompense for their past deeds. They will temporarily suffer the agony and intense fear of the Day of Judgment: *the length of which will be [like] a thousand years of your reckoning (32:5).*

The whole process culminates in an assembly of unrepentant sinners for the final judgment. The less guilty ones will suffer the terror of Judgment Day only till God reprieves some of them of their misery, and they will be saved from the fire of Hell. Umar Ibn Al Khattab narrates that during one of the battles, a captive woman was frantically searching for her son until she suddenly found him. She pulled him to her chest and breastfed him to comfort the child. At that point, the Prophet said to us, “Do you think this woman would throw her child into a fire?” We said, “No, O Messenger of God.” The Prophet said, “God is certainly more merciful with His servants than this woman is with her child.”

The Prophet also said, “As for those who have been unjust to themselves (by sinning), they shall be detained throughout the long resurrection. Then

God shall cover them with His mercy, and they are the ones who will say, ‘Thanks to God Who has removed the sorrow from us!’” In the end, only the truly guilty and hardened sinners will suffer hellfire.

The fire is one of the symbols of the torment of hell. The fire is a means of purification of the soul, as sinner belatedly gains distressing insight into his personal nature, his past failings and deliberate wrongdoings, and his own responsibility for the suffering that is now in store for him: a state neither of life nor death.

God has rejected the deniers of the truth, and has readied for them a blazing fire, therein to abide beyond the count of time: no protectors will they find, and none to bring them succor. On the Day when their faces shall be tossed about in the fire, they will exclaim, “Oh, would that we had paid heed unto God, and paid heed to the Apostle!” (33:63-66)

They who shall come with evil deeds—their faces will be thrust into the fire, [and they will be asked:] “Is this aught but a just requital for what you were doing [in life]?” (27:90) But [thus it is:] as for those who are bent on denying the truth—garments of fire shall be cut out for them [in the life to come]; burning despair will be poured over their heads, causing all that is within their bodies, as well as the skins, to melt away. And they shall be held [in this state as if] by iron grips; and every time they try in their anguish to come out of it, they shall be returned thereto and [be told]: “Taste suffering through fire [to the full]!” (22:19-22)

And [on that Day,] the evil of their doings will become obvious to them, and they will be overwhelmed by the very thing that they were wont to deride. And [the word] will be spoken: “Today We shall be oblivious of you as you were oblivious of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment]; and so your goal is the fire, and you shall have none to succor you: this, because you made God’s messages the target of

your mockery, having allowed the life of this world to beguile you!” On that Day, therefore, they will not be brought out of the fire, nor will they be allowed to make amends. (45:33-35)

[Verily, in the life to come] the tree of deadly fruit will be the food of the sinful: like molten lead it will boil in the belly, like the boiling of burning despair. [And the word will be spoken:] “Seize him, [O you force of hell,] and drag him into the midst of the blazing fire: then pour over his head the anguish of burning despair! Taste it—thou who [on earth] have considered yourself so mighty, so noble! This is the very thing which you [deniers of the truth] called in question!” (44:43-50)

[And thus it is:] every arrogant enemy of the truth shall be undone [in the life to come], with hell awaiting him; and he shall be made to drink of the water of most bitter distress, gulping it [unceasingly,] little by little, and yet hardly able to swallow it. And death will beset him from every quarter—but he shall not die: for [yet more] severe suffering lies ahead of him. (14:15-17)

HAS THERE COME unto you the tiding of the Overshadowing Event? [i.e., the Day of Resurrection] Some faces will on that Day be downcast, toiling [under burdens of sin], worn-out [by fear], about to enter a glowing fire, given to drink from a boiling spring. No food for them, save the bitterness of dry thorns, which gives no strength and neither stills hunger. (88:1-7)

Limited Suffering in Hell

A parable of the Prophet: “On the Day of Judgment, those who deserve Paradise will enter Paradise, and those who deserve the fire, the fire. Thereupon God, the Sublimely Exalted, will say, ‘Take out of the fire everyone in whose heart there was as much of faith [or, in some versions, “as

much of good”] as a grain of mustard seed!’ And so they will be taken out of it, already blackened, and will be thrown into the River of Life. Then they will come to life [lit., ‘sprout’] as a herb sprouts by the side of a stream: and did you not see how it turned, yellow and budding?”

The characterization as “yellow and budding” indicates the freshness of new life in the pardoned sinner. The fury of the fire of Hell will subside after a given duration. In the end, forgiven sinners will enter paradise and live in the presence of God.

Part 3: The Five Pillars of Islam

Creed of Islam—The First Pillar

Orthopraxy

JUST AS THE five articles represent the core of faith, the five pillars are the core of good works or duties. Both faith and right works are intertwined as righteous acts that demonstrate commitment and faithfulness. Faith without good deeds is without merit and vice versa. In Islam, true orthodoxy is active, not passive. Orthodoxy, right belief, should produce orthopraxy, right action. In other words, orthodoxy and orthopraxy are not mutually exclusive but rather two sides of the same coin—each dependent upon the other for both to be true.

The practice of the obligatory good deeds known as the five pillars of Islam, rather than being a religious goal on its own, is meant to instill spiritual discipline. The purpose of life for a Muslim is not only to affirm but to actualize, not merely to profess belief in God but to realize God's will on earth. The content of that recognition is living an ethically integrated way of life, according to the Quran. The result of the practice of the five pillars of Islam is living a life of moral responsibility—doing good works and avoiding sin. The eventual goal is becoming a better human being through God-consciousness.

He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to the test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct. (67:2) [But] on the Day when thy Sustainer's [final] portents appear, believing will be of no avail to any human being who did not believe before, or who, while believing, did no good works. (6:158)

The Five Pillars

- (1) **Confession of faith, or Shahadah**—“There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of God,” is the first pillar or essence of Islam. It not only refreshes one’s own faith but also bolsters that of others.
- (2) The **five daily prayers**, the second pillar, reinforces the idea of unconditional self-surrender to God as his only Master and Creator.
- (3) **Charity** is the third pillar of Islam. Those who have plenty should help lift the burden of those who are less fortunate.
- (4) **Fasting** is the fourth pillar, which teaches self-discipline in controlling base appetites and sexual desires.
- (5) **Hajj**, pilgrimage, the fifth pillar, reaffirms all the elements of Islam—sacrifice, prayer, an individual connection to God, equality between races, nationalities, and sexes—when pilgrims come together in the Hajj.

Creed of Islam, Confession of Faith, or Shahadah—The First Pillar

There is No God but Allah and Muhammad is His (Last) Prophet

The wording of the first pillar summarizes the basis of Islam. Every religion contains convictions that orient its adherents’ lives in some way. In some religions, these premises are assumed; in most religions, they are condensed and articulated in some creed. The creed of Islam is brief, simple, explicit, and consists of a single sentence. The musical formula (la ilaha illa Allah Muhammadun rasulu Allah) is “there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” They are repeated in the daily muezzin’s call to prayer and on innumerable other occasions. The two dogmas of God’s oneness and Muhammad’s messengership constitute the confession of faith, or shahadah. It speaks at once to the Muslim’s belief in God and the authenticity of the Quran Muhammad transmitted. The wordings of shahadah as such does not appear in the Quran but similar statements are mentioned in the Quran conveying the same meaning.

[Hence,] O you who have attained to faith, pay heed unto God and His Apostle, and do not turn away from Him now that you hear [His message]. (8:20)

At least once during his lifetime, a Muslim must say this creed with full understanding and with heartfelt conviction in its truth. In actuality, practicing Muslims repeat it many times each day, but at least once during one's lifetime is mandatory. The mere pronouncement of the shahadah is an act of piety and is therefore almost constantly on believers' lips.

Becoming a Muslim

Such is the importance of this profession that if a non-Muslim recites this statement three times in front of witnesses, he becomes a Muslim at least nominally. But he should then proceed to the performance of the remaining five pillars.

Prayer—The Second Pillar

THE PURPOSE OF the creation of all rational beings is their recognition of God’s reality and, hence, their conscious willingness to conform to whatever they may perceive of His will and plan. This twofold purpose gives profound meaning to what the Quran describes as “worship” (ibadah). This spiritual call does not arise from any supposed need on the part of the Creator, who is self-sufficient and infinite in His power. It is designed as an instrument for the inner development of the worshiper, who, by the act of his conscious self-surrender to the all-pervading Creative Will, may hope to come closer to an understanding of that Will and, thus, closer to God Himself. The human spirit innately longs to pour forth its love and gratitude toward its Creator and to submit himself to the will of God as rightfully sovereign over his life.

TRULY, to a happy state shall attain the believers: those who humble themselves in their prayer, and who turn away from all that is frivolous, and who are intent on inner purity. And who guard their prayers [against all worldly intent] and who are mindful of their chastity, [not giving way to their desires] with any but their spouses—that is, those whom they rightfully possess [through wedlock]—for then, behold, they are free of all blame, whereas such as seek to go beyond that [limit] are truly transgressors; and who are faithful to their trusts and to their pledges, and who guard their prayers [from all worldly intent].

It is they, they who shall be the inheritors that will inherit the paradise; [and] therein shall they abide. (23:1-11)

Prayer keeps man's life in perspective. Humans tend to place themselves in the center of their universe. By humbling themselves in prayers, their life maintains or regains a proper perspective. On the Day of Judgment, man will have to answer before God for what he did during his life in this world: for it is in prayer that man faces God, spiritually, during his earthly life, and reminds himself of his responsibility towards the Creator.

All True Invocation Due to God Alone

Unto Him [alone] is due all prayer aiming at the Ultimate Truth. (13:14)

The term “al-haqq” (the Truth) is one of the Quranic attributes of God, signifying the Ultimate Reality or Primal Cause of all that exists. Therefore, the prayer should be directed towards Him who is the Ultimate Reality.

The Act of Prayer a Good Deed

[Dost thou deem yourself equal to] one who devoutly worships [God] throughout the night, prostrating himself or standing [in prayer], ever-mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Sustainer's grace? Say: “Can they who know and they who do not know be deemed equal?” [But] only they who are endowed with insight keep this in mind! Say: “[Thus speaks God:] ‘O you servants of Mine who have attained to faith! Be conscious of your Sustainer! Ultimate good awaits those who persevere in doing good in this world. (39:9-10)

Restraint from Evil

CONVEY [unto others] whatever of this divine writ has been revealed unto thee, and be constant in prayer: for, behold, prayer restrains [man] from loathsome deeds and from all

that runs counter to reason: remembrance of God is indeed the highest [good]. And God knows all that you do. (29:45)

Attaining Purity

Hence, thou canst [truly] warn only those who stand in awe of their Sustainer although He is beyond the reach of their perception, and are constant in prayer. And [know that] whoever grows in purity, attains to purity but for the good of his own self, and [that] with God is all journeys' end. (35:18)

True and Sincere

And say [in your prayer]: “O my Sustainer! Cause me to enter [upon whatever I may do] in a manner true and sincere, and cause me to leave [it] in a manner true and sincere, and grant me, out of Thy grace, sustaining strength!” (17:80)

Protection from Hellfire

Oh, verily, unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: well does He know where you stand and at what you aim! And one Day, all [who have ever lived] will be brought back unto Him, and then He will make them [truly] understand all that they were doing [in life]: for, God has full knowledge of everything. (25:64-66)

Not so, however, those who consciously turn towards God in prayer [and] who incessantly persevere in their prayer and who remember their Sustainer far into the night, prostrating themselves and standing; and who pray: “O our Sustainer, avert from us the suffering of hell—for, verily, the suffering

caused by it is bound to be a torment dire: verily, how evil an abode and a station!” (70:22-23)

This does not relate to the mere ritual of prayer but to the attitude of mind and the spiritual need underlying it. Due to man’s restless disposition, if rightly used, prayer leads him towards conscious spiritual growth as well as to freedom from all self-pity and selfishness.

Peace in Paradise

O YOU who have attained to faith! Bow down and prostrate yourselves and worship your Sustainer [alone], and do good, so that you might attain a happy state! (22:77) O YOU who have attained to faith! Remember God with unceasing remembrance, and extol His limitless glory from morn to evening.

[At all times] He it is who bestows His blessings upon you, with His angels [echoing Him], so that He might take you out of the depths of darkness into the light. And, indeed, a dispenser of grace is He unto the believers. On the Day when they meet Him, they will be welcomed with the greeting, “Peace,” and He will have readied for them a most excellent reward. (33:41-44)

Why Sometimes God Doesn’t Answer Prayers

As it is, man [often] prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something good: for man is prone to be hasty [in his judgments]. (17:11) Say: “There is no comparison between the bad things and the good things, even though very many of the bad things may please you greatly. Be, then, conscious of God, O you who are endowed with insight, so that you might attain to a happy state!” (5:100) It

may well be that you hate a thing the while it is good for you, and it may well be that you love a thing the while it is bad for you: and God knows, whereas you do not know.” (2:216)

God Does Not Need Your Prayers

And bid thy people to pray, and persevere therein [but remember:] We do not ask you to provide sustenance [for Us]: it is We who provide sustenance for thee. And the future belongs to the God-conscious. (20:132)

God has enjoined prayer upon men for their benefit alone, as He is sublimely exalted above any need of benefits. In other words, prayer must not be conceived as a kind of tribute to a jealous God—as the Old Testament, in its present form, frequently describes Him—but solely as a spiritual benefit for the person who prays.

The Direction of Prayer (Qiblah)

For every community faces a direction of its own, of which He is the focal point. Vie, therefore, with one another in doing good works. (2:147-148)

Examples of qiblah include Abraham’s choice of the Kabah (the first monotheist temple, built by Abraham and Ishmael, near what is now Mecca, and referred to in the Quran as the Inviolable House of Worship), the Jewish concentration on Jerusalem, the eastward orientation of the early Christian churches, and the Quranic commandment relating to the Kabah. The direction of prayer—however important its symbolic significance—does not represent the essence of faith as such. For, as the Quran says, *“true piety does not consist in turning your faces towards the east or the west” (2:177)*, and *“God’s is the east and the west” (2:115 and 142)*.

Thus, from wherever you may come forth, turn your face [in prayer] towards the Inviolable House of Worship—for, behold, this [commandment] comes in truth from thy Sustainer; and God is not unaware of what you do. Hence, from wherever thou mayest come forth, turn your face [in prayer] towards the Inviolable House of Worship; and wherever you all may be, turn your faces towards it, so that people should not argue against you unless they are bent upon wrongdoing. (2:149-150)

The Quran repeatedly stresses that Muslims are the followers of Abraham. This claim, however, might have been open to objection so long as they prayed in a direction other than Abraham's Qiblah, the Kabah.

Where should a Muslim Pray?

Anywhere. In Islam, a temple is not made with hands, and ceremonies can be performed anywhere on upon God's earth or under his heaven. Every corner of God's earth is equally pure; the faithful are encouraged to spread their prayer rugs wherever they find themselves at the appointed hour.

Houses of Worship

IN THE HOUSES [of worship], which God has allowed to be raised so that His name be remembered in them. There [are such as] extol His limitless glory at morn and evening—people whom neither [worldly] commerce nor striving after gain can divert from the remembrance of God, and from constancy in prayer, and from the charity. (24:36-37)

This implies that only some fulfill the spiritual purpose of those houses of worship, while some congregate in them out of habit.

When to Pray

The Five Daily Prayers

EXTOL, then, God's limitless glory when you enter upon the evening hours, and when you rise at morn; and [seeing that] unto Him is due all praise in the heavens and on earth. [glorify Him] in the afternoon as well, and when you enter upon the hour of noon. (30:17-18)

Constant in Prayer

BE CONSTANT in [thy] prayer from the time when the sun has passed its zenith till the darkness of night, and [be ever mindful of its] recitation at dawn. For, behold, the recitation [of prayer] at dawn is indeed witnessed [by all that is holy]. (17:78)

When should a Muslim pray? Under the usual conditions, the fivefold regular pattern should be maintained. (1) Upon rising at dawn (*fajr*), (2) afternoon shortly after the sun passes its zenith (*zuhr*), and (3) in the middle of the afternoon (*asr*). The “evening hours” have two prayers, (4) immediately after sunset (*maghrib*) and (5) after the night has fully set in (*isha*).

Obligatory Congregational Prayer on Friday

O YOU who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to the remembrance of God, and leave all worldly commerce: this is for your good, if you but knew it. And when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek to obtain [something] of God's bounty; but remember God often, so that you might attain to a happy state! (62:9-10)

While in Islam no day of the week is as sharply set apart from others as is the Sabbath for the Jews or Sunday for the Christians, Friday most-nearly

approximates a holy day. Formality is not a pronounced feature of Islam, but the closest Muslims come to a formal service of worship is to gather on Fridays for noon prayers and collective recital of the Quran. These gatherings are usually in mosques, and visitors to Muslim lands testify that one of the most impressive sights in the religions of man occurs when, in a dimly lighted mosque, hundreds of people stand shoulder to shoulder then kneel and prostrate themselves toward Mecca. Congregational prayer on Friday at noon is obligatory. Nevertheless, Friday is not a day of compulsory rest in Islamic Law. After the prayer services, you may devote yourselves to worldly pursuits.

How to Pray

Call to Prayer (Adhan)

A muezzin of the mosque is responsible for calling the faithful to prayer five times a day. After hearing adhan, believers begin to gather in the mosque or at their place of work or in their homes for worship. At the appointed hours of the day or night, somewhere from minaret, a muezzin will be calling to prayer. The wordings of Adhan do not occur as such in the Quran.

God Is Most Great

I Testify That There Is No God but Allah

I Testify That Muhammad Is the Apostle of Allah

Rise to Prayer

Rise to Salvation

God Is Great

There Is No God but Allah

Ablution (*Wadu*) Before Prayer

O YOU who have attained faith! When you are about to pray, wash your face, and your hands and arms up to the elbows, and pass your [wet] hands lightly over your head, and [wash]

your feet up to the ankles. And if you are in a state requiring total ablution, purify yourselves. (5:6)

Before saying prayers, it is necessary to wash with water those parts of the body that are generally exposed. The worshipper's clothes and body must be clean. One washes hands three times; rinses mouth three times; rinses nostrils three times; washes face three times. Then one washes the right arm to the elbow three times and then repeats the same for the left, runs moistened hands over the head once, washes the right foot up to the ankle three times and repeats the same for the left foot.

The Quran doesn't specify as to how the Muslim should pray or their exact times, both of which are laid down in the Sunnah (authenticated sayings and the practice of the Prophet).

Declaration of Intention to Pray

Standing erect, the believer says to himself that he intends to offer this prayer, or *Salah* (Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib, or Isha). With hands open on either side of his face and his thumbs touching the lobes of his ears, he recites, "Allah Akbar" (God is most great).

The Content of Muslim Prayer

The content of Muslim prayer has two great themes, the expression of praise and gratitude on the one hand, and supplication (to ask for humbly and earnestly) on the other. There is a Muslim saying that every time a bird drinks a drop of water, it lifts its eyes in gratitude toward heaven. The prayer always has to be recited in Arabic, the language of the Quran.

Still standing, he recites in a whispering voice the opening surah of the Quran (Al-Fatihah). Recitation of surah Al-Fatihah is an obligatory part of prayer, and without it prayer is not considered complete.

Bismillah Ir Rahman Nir Rahim [1:1] (In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace)

Alhamdu Lil-Lahi Rab-Bil Alamin [1:2] (All Praise Is Due to God Alone, the Sustainer of All the Worlds)

Ar-Rahman-Nir Rahim [1:3] (the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace)

Maliki Yau-Mid-Din [1:4] (Master of the Day of Judgment)

Iyya-Ka Nabudu Wa-Iyyaka Nastain [1:5] (Thee Alone Do We Worship and Thee Alone We Turn for Aid)

Ihdi-Nas-Sira-Tal Mustaqim [1:6] (Guide Us in the Straight Path)

Sira Tal-Ladhina An-Amta Alahim (The Way of Those Upon Whom Thou Hast Bestowed Thy Blessings)

Ghair-II Maghdubi Alahim (Not of Those Who Have Been Condemned [By Thee])

Walad-Da-Lin (Amin) [1:7] (Nor of Those Who Go Astray!)

Recitation of surah al-Fatihah is followed by other optional selections. The most commonly recited is the hundred-twelfth surah al-Ikhlās (the declaration of God's perfection). As reported in a great number of authentic traditions, the Prophet described this surah as "equivalent to one-third of the whole Quran."

Bismillah Ir Rahman Nir Rahim (In the Name of God, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace)

Qul Hu-Wal-Laho Ahad (112:1) (Say: Allah Is the One and the Only God)

Alla-Hus-Samad (112:2) (God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All That Exists)

Lam Yalid Walam Yulad (112:3) (He Begets Not, And Neither Is He Begotten)

Walam Yakul-Lahu Kufu-Wan Ahad (112:4) (And There Is Nothing That Could Be Compared with Him)

Allah Akbar

Bowing from his hips and placing his hands on his knees, he says thrice

Subhana Rabbi-Yalazim

(Glory to My Lord the Great)

While returning to upright position, he says

Sami Alla Huliman Hamidah Rab-Bana Lakal Hamad

(Allah has heard all who praise Him. Our Lord praise be to Thee)

Allah Akbar

Gliding gently to his knees, he prostrates, places his hands and face to the ground, and repeats these words three times:

Subhana Rab-Bi-Yal Aala (Glory to My Lord, the Most High)

Allah Akbar

He rises to his knees, sits on his heels, and again returns his hands and his face to the ground in second prostration saying:

Allah Akbar

And again, repeats these words three times:

Subhana Rab-Bi-Yal Aala (Glory to my Lord, the Most High)

The prostrations were aimed at countering the hard arrogance and self-sufficiency that was growing in Mecca. The postures of their bodies would re-educate the Muslims to lay aside their pride and selfishness and recall that before God, they are small.

This completes one rakaat of salah. The second rakaat is said in the same way except that after the second prostration, he sits back and silently says these words:

Atta Hiyatu Lilahi Wasala Watu Watayibatu (All prayers and worship through words, action and sanctity are for Allah alone)

Assalamu Alaika Ayuha N-Nabiyu Wa Rahmatul Lahi Wabarakatu (Peace be upon you, O Prophet and mercy of Allah and His blessing)

Assalamu Alayna Wa Ala Ibadila His-Salaihin (Peace be on us and on those who are righteous servants of Allah)

Ashadu Ala Ilaha Ila Lahu (I bear witness to the fact that there is no deity but Allah)

Waas Hadu Anna Muhammadan Abduhu Wa Rasulah (I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Apostle)

In the three rakaat salah (Maghrib) or four rakaat salah (Zuhr, Asr, and Isha), the believer stands up for the final rakaat. On the other hand, if it is two rakaat salah, (Fajr), he remains sitting and recites Darud (blessing for the Prophet) in these words:

Alla Humma Salliala Muhammad Wa Ala Aali Muhammad (O Allah, exalt Muhammad and the family of Muhammad)

Kama Salayata Ala Ibrahima Wa Aali Ibrahima (As Thou did exalt Ibrahim and his family (Jews and Arabs))

In-Naka Hamidum Majid (Thou art the praised, the glorious)

At this point, the worshipper asks God for all the prosperity of this worldly life and the life to come. He terminates his prayer by turning his face to the right and to the left saying this salutation for the worshipper sitting on each side:

Assalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatu Allah (Peace and mercy of Allah be on you.)

The entire routine gives form to the prayer while allowing ample scope for the most heartfelt outpouring of devotion before the Almighty Presence.

12

Charity—The Third Pillar

INEQUALITY OF WEALTH distribution is a fact of life in every society. Islam is not concerned with this theoretical problem. Instead, it turns to the practical question of what people should do about it. Its answer is simple. Those who have much should help lift the burden of those less fortunate through charity, the third pillar of Islam. The charity can be in the form of *zakah* (obligatory tax) or *sadaqah* (voluntary charity). It is a principle twentieth-century democracy has reached in its concept of the welfare state. The central idea is that wealth should circulate freely rather than concentrate in a few hands. The Quranic laws of inheritance, by which women are entitled to inherit wealth, falls under the same principle.

Uneven Distribution of Wealth

Are they, then, not aware that it is God who grants abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure, unto whomever He wills? (30:37) Verily, fully aware is He of [the needs of] His creatures and sees them all. (17:30)

[Nay, as] it is We who distribute their means of livelihood among them in the life of this world, and raise some of them by degrees above others, to the end that they might avail themselves of one another's help—[so, too, it is We who bestow gifts of the spirit upon whomever We will]: and this thy Sustainer's grace is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass. (43:32)

Wealth as a Trust from God

God grants abundant sustenance on some and scant on others. Material things are important in life, but some people have more than others. The second reality is that no matter how much riches one acquires during the life of this world, it will be left behind upon death. Therefore, man is a temporary custodian of wealth, and it is God who is the real owner as He is the Creator of everything. As an added incentive, those who spend freely on others will also be rewarded amply in the afterlife.

BELIEVE in God and His Apostle and spend on others out of which He has made you trustees: for, those of you who have attained to faith and who spend freely [in God's cause] shall have a great reward. (57:7) And why should you not spend freely in the cause of God, seeing that God's [alone] is the heritage of the heavens and the earth? (57:10)

Zakah, or Obligatory Tax

Poverty is present in all societies and if ignored can cause untold hardship for those who cannot take care of themselves or their families. How can we reconcile these two extremes without upsetting basic social harmony? The communist way of attempting to bring equality resulted in massacres and major sociopolitical disruptions. The Islamic answer is an obligatory charity or poor tax upon rich. An Islamic government can use force, if necessary, to collect Zakah, or poor tax. After the death of the Prophet, many Arab tribes revolted and refused to pay zakah to the central government in Medina. The various tribes had to be subdued one by one by troops. The rights of the poor had to be defended even if it required force.

Definition

Whenever the term bears the above legal implication, Zakah is translated as “purifying dues.” Its purpose is twofold. First, it is meant to purify a Muslim’s possessions from the blemish of greed and selfishness. Second, the proceeds of this tax are to be utilized for the welfare of the community.

How Much to Give in Charity?

The Quran does not specify any minimum or maximum amount of Zakah to be given. Prophet Muhammad instituted the distribution of wealth in the seventh century by prescribing a graduated tax on the haves to relieve the circumstances of the have-nots. The figure he set for the minimum amount of zakah was two-and-one-half percent, which provides for the annual distribution of what one possesses to the poor. It looks modest until we discover that it refers not just to income but also holdings. Poorer people owe nothing, but those in the middle- and upper-income brackets must annually distribute among the poor one-fortieth of the value of all they possess. The proceeds of this tax are to be spent mainly on the poor.

Moderation in Giving Charity

And they will ask thee as to what they should spend [in God's cause]. Say: "Whatever you can spare." In this way, God makes clear unto you His messages, so that you might reflect (2:220) on this world and on the life to come. (2:219-220) Whenever they spend on others, they are neither wasteful nor niggardly, but [remember that] there is always a just mean between those [two extremes]. (25:68) And neither allow thy hand to remain shackled to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to the utmost limit [of thy capacity], lest thou find thyself blamed [by thy dependents], or even destitute. (17:30)

"Hand remain shackled to your neck" is a metaphor signifying miserliness and an unwillingness to help others. God does not want to deprive believers of the rightful enjoyment of this world. He expects them to sacrifice only a small part of their possessions in His cause. The imposition of too high a burden on believers would be self-defeating as it might result not in an increase of faith but a decrease. Above is a call to generosity and at the same time to moderation. This passage illustrates the realism of the Quran, which takes into account human nature as it is with all its God-willed complexity and inner contradictions and does not set an impossible ideal as a norm of human behavior.

Charity Versus Squandering

(25) Your Sustainer is fully aware of what is in your hearts. If you are righteous, [He will forgive you your errors]: for, behold, He is much forgiving to those who turn unto Him again and again. And give his due to the near of kin, as well as the needy and the wayfarer, but do not squander [thy substance] senselessly.³² Behold (17:27) the squanderers are, indeed, of the ilk of the Satan—in as much as Satan has indeed proved most ungrateful to his Sustainer. (17:25-27)

“His due” refers to the loving consideration for one’s relatives in need. If someone were to spend all he possesses in a righteous cause, it could not be termed squandering, but if he spends even a small amount in a frivolous cause, it is squandering. Since squandering implies an utter lack of gratitude for the gift of sustenance bestowed by God upon man, squanderers are described as being of the ilk of Satan.

Sadaqah

The Quran employs zakah as the main instrument for the distribution of wealth, but a number of other important measures supplement it. God’s law also limits the hoarding of wealth through voluntary charity, or Sadaqah. The term *sadaqat* (sing. sadaqah) translates as “offerings given for the sake of God.” This comprises everything a believer freely gives to another out of love or compassion, any charitable gift above and beyond the obligatory zakah. Compared with the tithe of Judaism and Christianity, which is directed more to the maintenance of religious institutions than to the direct relief of human need, Zakah is truly charitable.

True Piety and Charity

[Truly pious is he who] spends his substance—however much he himself may cherish it—upon his near of kin, and the orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and the beggars, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage;

and is constant in prayer, and renders the purifying dues. (2:177)

Spend on others out of what We have provided for you as sustenance, ere there come a time when death approaches any of you, and he then says, “O my Sustainer! If only Thou would grant me a delay for a short while, so that I could give in charity and be among the righteous!” But never does God grant a delay to a human being when his term has come, and God is fully aware of all that you do. (63:10-11)

Verily, those who have attained faith and do good works, and are constant in prayer, and dispense charity—they shall have their reward with their Sustainer, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (2:277)

Who Is Eligible to Receive Charity (Zakah)?

The offerings given for the sake of God are [meant] only for the poor and the needy, and those who are in charge thereof, and those whose hearts are to be won over, and for the freeing of human beings from bondage, and [for] those who are overburdened with debts, and [for every struggle] in God’s cause, and [for] the wayfarer: [this is] an ordinance from God—and God is all-knowing, wise. (9:60)

These eight categories cover all the purposes for which zakah funds may be expended, aside from a small portion that may be spent on the officials entrusted with the collection and administration of zakah funds, which alludes to the government role in collecting and distributing zakah fund. “Those whose hearts are to be won over” apparently meant non-Muslims close to understanding and perhaps accepting Islam, and for whose conversion every effort should be made, either directly or indirectly. “For the freeing of human beings from bondage” includes ransoming prisoners of war and freeing slaves. People who are “overburdened with debts” contracted in

good faith, which, through no fault of their own, they are unable to repay are eligible. “In God’s cause” embraces every kind of struggle in righteous causes, both in war and in peace and for all charitable purposes. The “wayfarer” is one far from his home, perhaps a political exile or refugee.

To whom among the poor should charity be given? This too is characteristically prescribed in the Quran.

THEY WILL ASK thee as to what they should spend on others. Say: “Whatever of your wealth you spend shall [first] be for your parents, and for the near of kin, and the orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer; and whatever good you do, verily, God has full knowledge thereof.” (2:215)

Charity to Non-Muslims

It is not for thee [O Prophet] to make people follow the right path, [260] since it is God [alone] who guides whom He wills. And whatever good you may spend on others is for your own good, provided that you spend only out of a longing for God’s countenance: for, whatever good you may spend will be repaid unto you in full, and you shall not be wronged. (2:272)

In the early days after he migrated to Medina, the Prophet, faced by the great poverty prevalent among his community, advised his Companions that “charity should be bestowed only on the followers of Islam”—a view that was immediately corrected by the revelation of the above verse. The Prophet then explicitly instructed his followers to disburse charities to those in need irrespective of their faith. The above verse lays down an injunction binding upon all Muslims that discrimination based on religion is not allowed in Islam. The threat to withhold charity must never become a means of attracting unbelievers to Islam, for faith must be an outcome of inner conviction and free choice.

This is best for all who seek God's countenance: for it is they, they that shall attain to a happy state! Whereas all that you give out in charity, seeking God's countenance, [will be blessed by Him:] for it is they, they that shall have their recompense multiplied! (30:38-39)

Care for the Needy and Handicapped

O YOU who have attained to faith! When you are told, "Make room for one another in your collective life," do make room: [and in return,] God will make room for you [in His grace]. And whenever you are told, "Rise up [for a good deed]," do rise up. (58:11)

The "making room for one another" implies the mutual providing of opportunities for a decent life to all—and especially to the needy or handicapped—members of the community. If one widens the means of happiness and well-being of God's creatures, God will widen for him all that is good in this life and in the hereafter.

Charity in Secret Is Better

For whatever you may spend on others, or whatever you may vow [to spend], verily, God knows it; and those who do wrong [by withholding charity] shall have none to succor them. If you do deeds of charity openly, it is well; but if you bestow it upon the needy in secret, it will be even better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds. And God is aware of all that you do. (2:270-271)

Humans have an inherent capacity to show benevolence to others. However, there may still be a selfish reason, such as exerting power over other people or flaunting one's piety. By giving charity in secret, the Quran appeals to instinctive human benevolence and genuine altruism.

And [God does not love] those who spend their possessions on others [only] to be seen and praised by men, while they believe neither in God nor in the Last Day; and he who has Satan for a soul-mate, how evil a soul-mate has he! (4:38)

Fasting—The Fourth Pillar

THE FOURTH PILLAR of Islam is the observance of fasting during the twenty-nine or thirty days of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. From daybreak to sunset, neither food nor drink passes an observant Muslim's lips, and after sundown, they may partake in moderation. Marital relations are also prohibited during the day's fast. The end of Ramadan begins the festival of *Id Al-Fitr*: the three days of celebration starting from the first day of Shawwal, the month that follows Ramadan. Fitr means "breaking the fast."

O YOU who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God: (2:184) [fasting] during a certain number of days. (2:183)

In man's religious history, fasting has been widely practiced. The extreme rigor and the long duration of the Islamic fast, which is incumbent on every healthy adult man or woman, fulfills the general aim of spiritual purification.

Being a month in a lunar calendar, Ramadan rotates around the year. When it falls in the winter, with its shorter days, its demands are not excessive. When it falls during the scorching summers, to remain active during the long days without so much as a drop of water is an ordeal. Why, then, does the Quran require it?

Commemoration of Two Great Occasions

It was the month of Ramadan in which the Quran was [first] bestowed from on high as a guidance unto man and a self-evident proof of that guidance, and as the standard by which to discern the true from the false. Hence, whoever of you lives to see this month shall fast throughout it; but he that is ill, or on a journey, [shall fast instead for the same] number of other days. God wills that you shall have ease and does not will you to suffer hardship; but [He desires] that you complete the number [of days required,] and that you extol God for His having guided you aright, and that you render your thanks [unto Him]. (2:185)

During the holy month of Ramadan, the Prophet received his initial commission as a Messenger of God and thirteen years later made his historic exodus from Mecca to Medina. To commemorate these two great occasions, able-bodied Muslims not involved in crises like war or unavoidable journey fast during Ramadan.

Those who cannot fast for any of the above reasons shall fast instead for the same number of other days and feed a needy person if they can afford it. “And whoever does more good than he is bound to do,” by voluntary feeding more than one needy person, or to feed the needy for more than the number of days required by the above ordinance, gains merit. “Doing more good than one is bound to do” refers, in this context, to fasting above and beyond the obligation of Ramadan, as the Prophet sometimes did.

Food, Drink, and Marital Relation Allowed After Fasting

IT IS lawful for you to go in unto your wives during the night preceding the [day's] fast: they are as a garment for you, and you are as a garment for them. God is aware that you would have deprived yourselves of this right, and so He has turned unto you in His mercy and removed this hardship from you. Now, then, you may lie with them skin to skin, and avail yourselves of that which God has ordained for you, and eat and drink until you can discern the white streak of dawn

against the blackness of night, and then resume fasting until nightfall. (2:187)

Lunar Calendar to Observe Fasting and Hajj

THEY WILL ASK thee about the new moons. Say: "They indicate the periods for [various doings of] mankind, including the pilgrimage." (2:189)

As well as the fast of Ramadan, the pilgrimage to Mecca is based on the lunar calendar, whose months rotate through the seasons of the solar year.

Advantages of Fasting

1. Fasting makes one think, as every Jew who has watched through the long fasts of Yom Kippur will testify.
2. Fasting teaches self-discipline. He who can endure its demands will have less difficulty controlling his appetites and sexual desires at other times.
3. Fasting underscores man's dependence upon God. Man, says the Quran, is as frail as the rose petal; nevertheless, he assumes airs and pretensions. Fasting reminds him vividly of his essential frailty and dependence.
4. Finally, fasting sensitizes compassion. Only those who have been hungry can know what hunger means. If a man has himself fasted for thirty days within the year, he will be more apt to listen more carefully the next time he is approached by someone in need.

Risks of Fasting

People who fast commonly experience dehydration, largely because their body does not get any fluids during the daytime hours. It is recommended that during Ramadan, Muslims consume plenty of water prior to fasting periods and after breaking the fast.

Avoid fasting if you are underweight, pregnant, recovering from surgery or suffering from any acute or chronic illness such as diabetes.

Fasting is not mandatory for Muslim children until they reach puberty, usually after 14 years Redundant. Even then children should be allowed to end the fast once they can no longer tolerate the hunger.

Hajj—The Fifth Pillar

ISLAM'S FIFTH PILLAR is a five-day religious pilgrimage to Mecca and nearby holy sites in Saudi Arabia. Muslims—and only Muslims—are allowed to visit Mecca to carry out one of the most sacred duties of their lives: the pilgrimage, known in Arabic as the Hajj.

Hajj takes place once a year, in the month of Dhul-Hijja, the twelfth month in the Islamic lunar calendar. Once during one's lifetime, every Muslim who is physically and financially able to do so is expected to journey to Mecca, where God's climactic revelation was first disclosed to Prophet Muhammad.

All the elements of Islam—the sacrifice, the prayer, the individual connection to God, the equality among races and nationalities—come together when the pilgrims perform Hajj. Approximately three to four million believers perform Hajj every year, one of the greatest gatherings of human beings on earth.

God Consciousness

The pilgrimage's basic purpose is to heighten the pilgrim's devotion to God and to His revealed will. They might experience increased consciousness of God through facing the first Temple ever dedicated to Him. The first call to make the Hajj came thousands of years ago when the Prophet Abraham and his first-born son, Ishmael, built the Kabah to worship one God. Mecca was the place for sacred annual rites for Arabian tribes centuries before the advent of Islam.

Brotherhood of Islam

The fellowship of Islam becomes a palpable reality during Hajj, which has some beneficial side effects as well. It raises and renews awareness of being part of a brotherhood embracing all believers, a reminder of the equality among people. Pilgrimage brings together Muslims from various countries, demonstrating that they have in common a loyalty that transcends those to the warring kingdoms of man. Pilgrims become acquainted with the many social and political problems that confront the geographically diverse communities and gain a better understanding of one another.

The performance of Hajj is a commemoration of Abraham's struggle in the cause of monotheism, the patience in adversity exhibited by Hagar and Ishmael under the impossible conditions when they were abandoned in the middle of a barren valley which we now called Mecca, and the human sacrifice of Abraham's son.

1. Abraham's Struggle In the Cause Of Monotheism and his Sojourn to Egypt

Abraham was forced to leave Iraq for Palestine because he worshipped one God and opposed idol worship in his homeland. There is no Quranic description of these events, and so we have to rely on the Old Testament version of this aspect of Abraham's story. There was a famine throughout the land when Abraham arrived in Palestine, and so he went on to Egypt to sojourn there. As they were about to enter Egypt, Abraham said to his wife, Sarah, according to the Bible: "When the Egyptians see that you are a beautiful woman, they will say 'this is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but let you live." Abraham pretended that Sarah was his sister and hence unmarried. (In reality, Sarah was Abraham's half-sister).

The Pharaoh married Sarah, and the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues, although Abraham and Sarah were guilty of deception. When Pharaoh found out that Sarah was married, he returned Sarah to Abraham and gave him many gifts. Abraham became very rich in cattle, silver, and gold. The Pharaoh also gave Abraham a slave girl, Hagar (Genesis 13:10-20). Abraham then returned to Palestine. Since Sarah was childless, she took Hagar and gave her to Abraham as a wife. Sarah mistreated Hagar so that she fled, and while Hagar was on the run, an angel appeared to her. She returned home and soon bore a son named Ishmael.

2. The Patience in Adversity of Hagar Biblical Account of Abandonment of Hagar and Ishmael

And the angel of the Lord said unto her [Hagar], Behold thou art with child, and shall bear a son and shall call his name Ishmael (Genesis 16:11).

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. And God said unto Abraham; Let it not be grievous in thy sight; in all that, Sarah hath said to thee, hearken to her voice. And Abraham rose up early in the morning and took bread and a bottle of water and gave to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder and the child and sent her away: and she departed and wandered through the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went and sat her down over against him a good way off. Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him and lifts up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of Heaven and said unto her, what aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not for God hath heard the voice of the lad. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him in your hand, for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad a drink. And God was with the lad, and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer. (Genesis 21, verses 9-20)

Arabian Account of Abandonment of Ishmael And Hagar

There is no mention of the events regarding Ishmael's birth in the Quran. Arabic account of the expulsion of Ishmael and his mother was based on hadith and popular Arabian legend, narrated by Ibn Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet.

When Abraham had differences with his wife (because of her jealousy of Hagar), he took Ishmael and his mother and went away. Abraham brought Hagar and his son Ishmael while she was suckling him to a barren valley. So, he made them sit under the tree and placed near them a leather bag containing some dates and a small water skin and set out homeward. Hagar

followed him, saying: “O Abraham! Where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we may enjoy, nor is there anything else to enjoy?” She repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him: “Has Allah ordered you to do so?” He said: “Yes.” She then said: “Then He will not neglect us.” While Abraham proceeded onwards and on reaching far enough where Hagar could not see him, raised both hands, invoked God saying the following prayers according to the Quran:

AND [remember the time] when Abraham spoke [thus]:

“O my Sustainer! Make this land secure and preserve my children and me from ever worshipping idols—(14:36) for, verily, O my Sustainer, these [false objects of worship] have led many people astray! “Hence, [only] he who follows me [in this my faith] is truly of me; and as for him who disobeys me—Thou art, verily, much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! (14:35-36)

And, lo Abraham prayed: “O my Sustainer! Make this land secure, and grant its people fruitful sustenance—such of them as believe in God and the Last Day.” [God] answered: “And whoever shall deny the truth, him will I let enjoy for a short while—but in the end, I shall drive him to suffering through fire: and how vile a journey’s end!” (2:126)

Abraham’s Prayer: “O my Sustainer! Make this land secure and grant its people fruitful sustenance,” is answered in the form of one of the largest reserves of oil in the world found in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Ishmael’s mother went on suckling Ishmael and drinking from the water (she had). When the water was gone, she and her child became very thirsty. She was looking at him (Ishmael) tossing in agony. She left him, for she could not endure looking at the dying

child. The hillock of As-Safa was the nearest to her. She climbed to the top and started looking at the valley, but she could not see anybody. Then she descended from As-Safa, and when she reached the valley, she tucked up her robe and ran in the valley like a person in distress and urgency. She crossed the valley and reached the hillock of Al-Marwa. She stood there but could not see anybody. She repeated that running between Safa and Marwa seven times.

During the Hajj ceremony, pilgrims are expected to walk at a fast pace, just like Hagar did to find some help.

The Well of Zemzem

When she reached Al-Marwa (for the last time), she heard a voice, and she asked herself to be quiet and listened attentively. She heard the voice again and said: “O whoever you maybe! You have made me listen to your voice; have you got something to help me?” And behold! She saw an angel at the place of Zemzem, digging the earth with his heel [or his wing] till water flowed from that place. She started to make something like a basin around it, using her hands and started filling her water-skin with water.

Birth of the City of Mecca

Hagar settled down near the spring, which is now called the Well of Zemzem. It may have been that very spring that soon induced a wandering group of Bedouin families belonging to the South-Arabian (Qahtani) tribe of Jurhum to settle there. Ishmael married a girl of this tribe, and so became the progenitor of the Arabianized tribes. Thus, their descent from a Hebrew father and a Qahtani mother. The history of Mecca began with Abraham’s firstborn son and the progenitor of the “northern” group of Arab tribes, and thus of the Prophet Muhammad, who descended in the direct line, through the tribe of Quraysh, from Ishmael.

3. The Human Sacrifice of Abraham’s Son Ishmael The Biblical Account

“And God said, take now thy son, your only son Isaac, whom thou love and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon

one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” (Genesis 22:2).

The Quranic Version

[And he prayed:] “O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me the gift of [a son, who shall be] one of the righteous!” (37:101) Whereupon We gave him the glad tiding of a boy-child gentle [like himself]. And [one day,] when [the child] became old enough to share in his [father’s] endeavors, the latter said: “O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice thee: consider, then, what would be your view!” [Ishmael] answered: “O my father! Do as thou art bidden: thou wilt find me, if God so wills, among those who are patient in adversity!” But as soon as the two had surrendered themselves to [what they thought to be] the will of God, and [Abraham] had laid him down on his face, (37:104) We called out to him: “O Abraham, (37:105) thou hast already fulfilled [the purpose of] that dream vision!” Thus, verily, We do reward the doers of good: (37:106) for, behold, all this was indeed a trial, clear in itself. (37:107) And We ransomed him with tremendous sacrifice, (37:108) and left him thus to be remembered among later generations: (37:109) “Peace be upon Abraham!” Thus, do We reward the doers of good—for he was truly one of our believing servants. (37:100-111)

There is no mention of either Ishmael or Isaac in the verses above. According to ancient Arabian traditions, Ishmael was the only son at that point because Isaac, the younger brother, perhaps was not yet born. Therefore, these events happened in Mecca and not in Palestine. The “tremendous sacrifice” spoken of here is celebrated by sacrificing an animal, not only in connection with the pilgrimage to Mecca (al-hajj) but throughout the Islamic world every year by countless believers. For it commemorates the experience of Abraham and Ishmael and constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam. There is no such commemoration among the followers of the Bible. Arguably it points to Ishmael, and not Isaac, who was offered as a sacrifice.

Yet if it were Isaac offered for sacrifice, Muslims would still celebrate this event with the same enthusiasm because both were prophets of God according to the Quran.

Abraham's Dream

In the Quran, however, Abraham only had a dream vision in which he sees himself sacrificing his son and not a direct command from God as in the Bible. When Ishmael attained an age where he could understand and share in his father's faith and aims, Abraham confided in him about his dream of sacrificing his son. The moral significance of Abraham's dream vision was its test of his readiness to sacrifice what was dearest to him in life, his son, at God's behest. By sending a sacrificial ram at the last moment, God rescued Ishmael from Abraham's misapprehension.

Building of the Kabah

The narration of Ibn Abbas continued: "Once more Abraham thought of visiting his family he had left at Mecca and he told his wife (Sarah) of his decision. He went and found Ishmael behind the Zemzem well, mending his arrows. He said: 'O Ishmael, your Lord has ordered me to build a house for Him.' Ishmael said: 'Obey the order of your Lord.' Abraham said: 'Allah has also ordered me that you should help me therein.' Ishmael said: 'Then I will do so.'" When the building became too high for Abraham to lift more stones, he stood upon the stone of *Al Maqam* (station of Abraham) and kept on handing Ishmael the rocks. The Maqam stone still resides in the Kabah where he once stood.

The Temple (*al-Bayt*)—"House of Worship"—is the Kabah in Mecca. In other places, the Quran speaks of it as "the Ancient Temple" (*al-Bayt al-Atiq*) and "the Inviolable House of Worship" (*al-masjid al-haram*).

The Kabah the First Symbol of God's Oneness

Behold, the first Temple ever set up for mankind was indeed the one at Bakkah: rich in blessing, and [source of] guidance unto all the worlds, (3:97) full of clear messages. [It is] the place whereon Abraham once stood; and whoever enters it

finds inner peace. Hence, a pilgrimage to the Temple is a duty owed to God by all people who can undertake it. And as for those who deny the truth—God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds. (3:95-97)

(37) “O, our Sustainer! Behold, I have settled some of my offspring in a valley in which there is no arable land, close to Thy sanctified Temple, so that, O our Sustainer, they might devote themselves to prayer: cause Thou, therefore, people’s hearts to incline towards them and grant them fruitful sustenance, so that they might have cause to be grateful.” (14:37)

Bakkah is an older name for Mecca (which, correctly transliterated, would be spelled Makkah). In old Arabic dialects, the labial consonants *b* and *m*, being phonetically close to one another, are occasionally interchangeable. “Full of clear messages” in the above verse relates to God’s oneness and uniqueness (symbolized by the Kabah). The Kabah was built by Abraham and Ishmael as the first temple ever dedicated to the One God. Abraham paid many visits to Mecca to see his second family. This is by no means improbable for a camel-riding Bedouin (as Abraham undoubtedly was), a journey of twenty or thirty days. Abraham’s prayer “People’s hearts to incline towards them,” is answered when three to four million Muslims attend the Hajj every year.

And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the Temple, [they prayed:] “O our Sustainer! Accept Thou this from us: for, verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing! “O our Sustainer! Make us surrender ourselves to Thee, and make out of our offspring a community that shall surrender itself to Thee, and show us our ways of worship, and accept our repentance: for, verily, Thou alone art the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Grace! “O our Sustainer! Raise up from the midst of our offspring an apostle from among themselves, who shall

convey to them Thy messages, and impart unto them a revelation as well as wisdom, and cause them to grow in purity: for, verily, Thou alone art almighty, truly wise!” (2:127-129)

And who, unless he is weak of mind, would want to abandon Abraham’s creed, seeing that We have indeed raised him high in this world, and that, verily, in the life to come he shall be among the righteous? When his Sustainer said to him, “Surrender thyself unto Me!”—he answered, “I have surrendered myself to [Thee,] the Sustainer of all the worlds.” (2:130-131)

The Kabah is much older than the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Even in pre-Islamic times, the Kabah was associated with Abraham’s memory, whose personality had always been in the foreground of Arabian thought.

The noun *kabah* denotes any cubical building. The very basic three-dimensional form was chosen deliberately. It represents man’s humility and awe before God, whose glory is beyond anything that man could conceive by way of architectural beauty. The Kabah has been instituted as the direction of prayer (Qiblah) for all Muslims. Its establishment as the Qiblah does not imply any break with Abrahamic tradition. On the contrary, it reestablishes the direct contact with that patriarch and the brotherhood of all believers who, wherever they may be, turn their faces in prayer towards this one focal point.

History of the Kabah According to Western Historians

Thomas Carlyle, one of the great literary geniuses of his time, in his essay “The Hero as Prophet.” described the history of the Kabah in the following words:

To the idolatrous Arabs one of the most ancient universal objects of worship was that Black Stone, still kept in the building called Caabah, at Mecca. Diodorus Siculus mentions this Caabah in a way not to be mistaken, as the oldest, most

honored temple in his time; that is, some half-century before our Era. Silvestre de Sacy says there is some likelihood that the Black Stone is an aerolite. In that case, some man might *see* it fall out of Heaven! It stands now beside the Well Zemzem; the Caabah is built over both. A Well is in all places a beautiful affecting object, gushing out like life from the hard earth; still more so in those hot dry countries, where it is the first condition of being. The Well Zemzem has its name from the bubbling sound of the waters, *zem-zem*; they think it is the Well which Hagar found with her little Ishmael in the wilderness: the aerolite and it have been sacred now, and had a Caabah over them, for thousands of years.

(Diodorus Siculus, Sicilian Greek historian who lived from 90 to 21 BC.)

(Silvestre de Sacy, French orientalist, 1758–1838)

Requisite Conditions for Hajj

1. Total Peace and Nonviolence

Pilgrims are expected to perform Hajj in the state of complete peace, self-denial, and submission to God. Violence in any form is strictly prohibited. Even the cutting of the hair, shaving, and trimming of nails are not allowed. There should not be any fighting, rudeness, or even arguments during the Hajj. These evils are condemned under all circumstances, but the severity of these sins increases during Hajj. Killing and hunting of animals is not allowed, in keeping with the theme of nonviolence. Certain deeds lawful at other times, such as marital relations, are prohibited.

AND LO! We made the Temple a goal to which people might repair again and again, and a sanctuary: take then, the place whereon Abraham once stood as your place of prayer. And thus did We command Abraham and Ishmael: "Purify My Temple for those who will walk around it, and those who will abide near it in meditation, and those who will abide near it in meditation, and those who will bow down and prostrate themselves [in prayer] (2:125)

The word *amn* (lit., “safety”) denotes, in this context, a sanctuary for all living beings.

The pilgrimage shall take place in the month appointed for it. And whoever undertakes the pilgrimage in those [months] shall, while on pilgrimage, abstain from lewd speech, from all wicked conduct, and from quarreling; and whatever good you may do, God is aware of it. And make provision for yourselves—but, the best of all provisions is God-consciousness: remain, then, conscious of Me, O you who are endowed with insight! (2:197-198)

2. No Distinctions of Rank and Hierarchy

Upon reaching the boundary of Mecca, pilgrims take a bath and remove their usual clothes, which tend to carry clear indications of their social status. The boundary lines of forbidden areas are called *miqat* lines, and no pilgrim can go beyond these lines without *ihram*, a costume worn by all male pilgrims, consisting of one piece of white cotton around the waist and hips and another over the shoulder. Hajj restrictions and rules must be observed by a pilgrim so dressed. Everyone as he nears Islam’s earthly focus wears the same thing. All distinctions of rank and hierarchy are removed. Prince and pauper stand before God in their collective humanity.

Women pilgrims do not put on *ihram* and can perform the pilgrimage in their ordinary clothes, preferably white. They perform Hajj side by side with men and are not segregated to some obscure corner, a common and un-Islamic practice in practically all mosques throughout the Islamic world. Men must not cover their heads, and women must not cover their faces. Although women must cover their hair with a scarf, the face veil, known as a *niqab*, and the *burqa*, the garment that covers them from head to toe with only a mesh-like panel through which to see, are not allowed during Hajj. These are the only garments the pilgrim will wear during Hajj. The face veil, *burqa*, and *niqab*, and segregation of women are cultural practices of Byzantines and Persians adopted by later Muslims and have nothing to do with Islam. Pilgrims submerge their individualities to a community of equals before God, with no barrier of race, sex, class, or social status separating one person from another.

The Sequence of Performance of Hajj

The specific rituals carried out by Muslims today date back to the Prophet Muhammad's farewell pilgrimage in 632 A.D.

1. Declaration of Intention (Talbiya)

On entering into the state of ihram, the pilgrims declare their intention to perform the pilgrimage with these words: "O Allah! I intend to perform the pilgrimage and make it easy for me and accept it." Then prayer is offered, and the pilgrims raise their voices in the tradition of Prophet Muhammad. These words are often recited again and again during pilgrimage:

Labbaika, Allah hummah, labbaika (Here am I, O God. Here am I in Your Presence).

La sharika lak labbaika (You have no partner, here I am).

Inn al hamada wal niamata lak (Surely all praise and grace is for You).

Wal mulka la sharika lak (And the Kingdom is Yours, You have no partners).

2. Circumambulation (Tawaf) of the Kabah (eighth day of the month of Dhul Hijja)

On reaching Mecca, pilgrims visit the Grand Mosque, at the center of which stands the Kabah. When they enter the building, they recite the following words: "O Allah. You are peace, and peace comes from you. So, greet us, O Allah, with peace." Tawaf, or going around the Kabah, is the pilgrim's first act upon reaching Mecca and the last act before leaving. The pilgrims go straight to the Black Stone. Tawaf begins from the Black Stone (Hajr-i-Aswad) or its corner. The pilgrims march counterclockwise around the Kabah seven times, starting and finishing each round at the corner of the Black Stone, saying, "Allahu Akbar." The pilgrims then approach the station of Ibrahim (Muqam-i-Ibrahim), where Abraham and Ishmael prayed, and offer prayer. Pilgrims then drink water from the Well of Zemzem.

For, when We assigned unto Abraham the site of this Temple, [Kabah] [We said unto him:] "Do not ascribe divinity to aught beside Me!"—and: "Purify My Temple for those who will walk around it, and those who will stand

before it [in meditation,] and those who will bow down and prostrate themselves [in prayer].” (22:26)

Do not allow this Temple to become an object of worship but make it clear that it is holy only by its being the first temple ever dedicated to the worship of the One God.

3. Sai (Hastening)

[Hence,] behold, As-Safa and Al-Marwa are among the symbols set up by God; and thus, no wrong does he who, having come to the Temple on pilgrimage or on a pious visit, strides to and fro between these two: for, if one does more good than he is bound to do—behold, God is responsive to gratitude, all-knowing. (2:158)

Distraught with thirst and fearing for her child’s life, Hagar ran to and fro between the two rocks and fervently prayed to God for succor. Finally, her reliance on God and her patience were rewarded by the discovery of a spring existing to this day, the Well of Zemzem that saved the two from death through thirst. It was in remembrance of Hagar’s extreme trial and her trust in God that As-Safa and Al-Marwa came to be regarded, even in pre-Islamic times, as symbols of faith and patience in adversity. The pilgrims are expected to walk at a fast pace seven times between these two hillocks. A marble hallway now connects the distance between As-Safa and Al-Marwa for the convenience of pilgrims.

(4) Leaving Mecca to Mina (eighth of Dhul Hijja)

All pilgrims continue their journey on the 8th of Dhul Hijja to Mina. It is located about three miles from Mecca. The pilgrims have to reach Mina before noon, pray, sleep overnight in Mina, and offer Morning Prayer on the 9th of Dhul Hijja. Many pilgrims walk the three miles, but buses are also available. About three to four million people stay in Mina, which is transformed into a temporary tent city.

(5) Halting At Arafat (ninth of Dhul Hijja)

On the ninth of Dhul Hijja, all pilgrims leave Mina after sunrise and reach Arafat by noon. The Arafat plain is a valley surrounded by dry and barren mountains. It is located six miles from Mina and nine from Mecca. Staying in the plain of Arafat is an essential part of the pilgrimage. Any pilgrim who fails to reach Arafat has not performed the pilgrimage. The gathering on the plain of Arafat constitutes the climax of the pilgrimage. It is a symbolic act meant to bring to mind the final meeting on Resurrection Day when every soul will await God's judgment.

(6) Night at Muzdalifah

And when you surge downward in multitudes from 'Arafat, remember God at the holy place, and remember Him as the One who guided you after you had indeed been lost on your way; and surge onward together with the multitude of all the other people who surge onward, and ask God to forgive you your sins: for, verily, God is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (2:198-199)

Immediately after sunset on the ninth of Dhul Hijja, all pilgrims set out to Muzdalifah and stop there for the night. Muzdalifah, the "holy place" referred to in the verse above, is a narrow valley between two mountains where, according to the legend, the invading armies of Abraha, Abyssinian governor of Yemen, were destroyed.

(7) Return to Mina (tenth of Dhul Hijja) and Stoning of the Devil

After the morning prayer on the tenth of Dhul Hijja, pilgrims leave Muzdalifah for Mina, where they throw stones at three pillars, symbolically representing the devil.

The Day of Sacrifice

After the ceremony of throwing stones, pilgrims offer their sacrifice as a conscious, selfless offering in His name of something that one cherishes as necessary and valuable. All those who participate in the Hajj are expected—

provided they can afford it—to sacrifice a sheep, a goat, or the like, and to distribute most of its flesh in charity. Pilgrims are permitted to eat some of the flesh of the animals they sacrificed, although feeding the poor is mandatory and the primary objective of the sacrifice. As well, it commemorates Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his firstborn son. Lastly, it symbolizes each believer's readiness to sacrifice himself in the cause of truth.

And that they might extol the name of God on the days appointed [for sacrifice], over whatever heads of cattle He may have provided for them [to this end]: eat, then, thereof, and feed the unfortunate poor. All this [is ordained by God]; and if one honors God's sacred commandments, it will rebound to his own good in his Sustainer's sight. And all [kinds of] cattle have been made lawful to you [for sacrifice and food], save what is mentioned to you [as forbidden]. (22:28-30)

Sacrifice as an Act of Worship

[And thus, it is:] unto every community [that has ever believed in Us] have We appointed [sacrifice as] an act of worship, so that they might extol the name of God over whatever heads of cattle He may have provided for them [to this end]. (22:34)

Id Al-Adha on tenth Dhul Hijja

The Festival of Sacrifices (Id Al-Adha) begins on the tenth of the lunar month Dhul Hijja and continues for the next three days, marking the end of the pilgrimage. Id Al-Adha is celebrated throughout the Islamic world with the sacrifice of an animal by those who can afford it.

Cutting of Hair

And do not shave your heads until the offering has been sacrificed; but he from among you who is ill or suffers from an ailment of the head shall redeem himself by fasting, or alms, or [any other] act of worship. (2:196)

Tawaf Al-Ifada in Mecca

Thereafter let them bring to an end their state of self-denial, and let them fulfill the vows which they [may] have made, and let them walk [once again] around the Most Ancient Temple. (22:29)

After the sacrifice, pilgrims come out of the state of ihram and proceed to Mecca for tawaf al-Ifada on that day and again go around the Kabah seven times, then walk between Safa and Marwa, and bring to an end the condition of self-denial incumbent on them during Hajj, thus completing the pilgrimage.

The Kabah as God's Symbols for All Humanity

God has laid down that the Kabah', the Inviolable Temple, shall be a symbol for all mankind; and [so, too,] is the sacred month [of pilgrimage] and the garlanded offerings [are symbols] meant to make you aware that God is aware of all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, and that God has full knowledge of everything. (5:97)

The stress on the symbolic character of the rites is meant to draw attention to their spiritual meaning—the realization of God's oneness and uniqueness, as symbolized by the Kabah, and the aim of all true God-consciousness. The essential meaning of this rite is brought out well by the late Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati:

As you circumambulate and move closer to the Kabah, you feel like a small stream merging with a big river. Carried by a wave,

you lose touch with the ground. Suddenly, you are floating, carried on by the flood. As you approach the center, the pressure of the crowd squeezes you so hard that you are given a new life. You are now part of the people; you are now a man, alive and eternal. The Kabah is the world's sun whose face attracts you into its orbit. You have become part of this universal system. Circumambulating around Allah, you will soon forget yourself. You have been transformed into a particle that is gradually melting and disappearing. This is absolute love at its peak.

Part 4: The Islamic Way of Life

God-Consciousness

THE BEDROCK PRINCIPLE of the Islamic way of life is God-consciousness, or *taqwa*. A *muttaqui* is someone who has become conscious of God and His all-presence. The five articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam are meant to instill spiritual discipline in general and God-consciousness in particular.

God-consciousness is a disposition that follows from belief in an all-powerful, omnipresent God who has commanded obedience and that the Muslim is morally responsible and accountable to Him. A Muslim desires to mold his existence around this awareness and guards himself against evil. Such a believer lives his life ever mindful of eternal consequences that await on Judgment Day. The feeling of indebtedness for his very existence fosters a sense of humility towards God and His creations.

Criteria of God-Consciousness

HIS DIVINE WRIT—let there be no doubt about it is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious who believe in (1) [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception, and are constant in prayer, and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance; and who believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon thee, [O Prophet,] as well as in that which was bestowed before your time: for it is they who in their innermost are certain of the life to come! It is they who follow the guidance [which comes] from their Sustainer; and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state! (2:2-5)

“Spend on others” is mentioned here in one breath with God-consciousness and prayer because it is precisely in such selfless acts that true piety comes to its full fruition. The reference to “before your time” refers to the historical continuity of divine revelation before the Quran as described before under the articles of faith.

Gift of Love through Faith and Righteous Deeds

VERILY, those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds will the Most Gracious endow with love: only to this end We have made this [divine writ] easy to understand, in thine own tongue, [O Prophet,] so that you might convey thereby a glad tiding to the God-conscious, and warn thereby those who are given to [futile] contention. (19:96-97)

On those who attain Faith, God bestows His love and endows them with the capability to love His creation and cause them to be loved by their fellow men. This gift of love is inherent in the guidance offered to man through divine revelation. Since man is incapable of understanding the “word” of God as such, it has always been revealed to him in his human tongue and always been expounded in concepts accessible to the human mind.

Personal Morality

A muttaqui becomes conscious of personal morality. He becomes humble, selfless, truthful, and compassionate. He not only helps others but strives to self-improvement through education.

Compassion

The basis of true moral behavior is empathy and compassion.

And be in, withal, of those who have attained to faith, and who enjoin upon one another patience in adversity, and enjoin upon one another compassion. Such are they that have attained to righteousness. (90:17-18)

Humility

For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on the earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace; (25:63) and [who], whenever they pass by [people engaged in] frivolity, pass on with dignity. (25:72)

Keep Promises and Speak only the Truth

And be true to every promise—for, verily [on Judgment Day], you will be called to account for every promise you have made! (17:34)

O you who have attained to Faith! Remain conscious of God and [always] speak with a will to bring out [only] what is just and true—[whereupon] He will cause your deeds to be virtuous and will forgive you your sins. (33:70-71)

Help Enemies become Friends

But [since] good and evil cannot be equal, repel thou [evil] with something that is better—and lo! He between whom and thyself was enmity [may then become] as though he had [always] been close [unto you], a true friend! Yet [to achieve] this is not given to any but those who are wont to patient in adversity: it is not given to any but those endowed with the greatest good fortune! (41:34-35)

Jesus spoke similar words, profound yet counterintuitive to our divisive human nature. “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless anyone who curses you, do good to anyone who hates you and pray for those who carry you away by force and persecute you, so that you may become sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes His sun to shine upon the good and the

bad, and who pours down His rain upon the just and upon the unjust” (Matt. 5:44-48). “You must love your neighbors as yourself.” (Mark 12:31)

Strive Hard in God’s Cause

And strive hard in God’s cause with all the striving that is due to Him: it is He who has elected you [to carry His message]. It is He who has named you—in bygone times as well as in this [divine writ]—“those who have surrendered themselves to God,” so that the Apostle might bear witness to the truth before you, and that you might bear witness to it before all mankind. Thus, be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and hold fast unto God. He is your Lord Supreme: and how excellent is this Lord Supreme, and how excellent this Giver of Succor! (22:78)

Patience in Adversity

And give thou the glad tidings [of God’s acceptance] unto all who are humble—all whose hearts tremble with awe whenever God is mentioned, and all who patiently bear whatever ill befalls them, and all who are constant in prayer and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance. (22:34-35)

Verily, that which is with God is by far the best for you, if you but knew it: all that is with you is bound to come to an end, whereas that which is with God is everlasting. And most certainly shall We grant unto those who are patient in adversity their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did. As for anyone—be it man or woman—who does righteous deeds and is a believer withal—him shall We most certainly cause to live a good life and most certainly shall We

grant unto such as these their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did. (16:95-97)

NO CALAMITY can ever befall [man] unless it be by God's leave: hence, whoever believes in God guides his [own] heart [towards this truth]; and God has full knowledge of everything. (64:11)

The good life may relate either to life in this world as a true believer who invariably finds happiness in his God-consciousness, or to the happiness that awaits him in the hereafter, or to both. Guide your heart towards self-surrender to God's will, gratitude in times of ease, and patience in times of misfortune.

Gratefulness a Virtue

AND INDEED, We granted this wisdom unto Luqman: "Be grateful unto God—for he who is grateful [unto Him] is but grateful for the good of his own self; whereas he who chooses to be ungrateful [ought to know that], verily, God is self-sufficient, ever to be praised!" (31:12)

Luqman was a fabled ancient wise man who appears in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish traditions.

Self-Improvement

Importance of Education

[And] God will exalt by [many] degrees those of you who have attained to faith and, [above all,] such as have been vouchsafed [true] knowledge: for God is fully aware of all that you do. (58:11)

Scholars Exempted from War

With all this, it is not desirable that all of the believers take the field [in time of war]. From within every group in their midst, some shall refrain from going forth to war, and shall devote themselves [instead] to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the Faith. And [thus be able to] teach their homcoming brethren, so that these [too] might guard themselves against evil. (9:122)

Although the above verse mentions specifically religious knowledge, it has a positive bearing on every kind of knowledge because the Quran does not draw any dividing line between the spiritual and the worldly concerns of life. The Quran calls upon the believer to observe all nature and to discern God's creative activity in its manifold phenomena and laws. The Quran itself is addressed to "those who think." Intellectual activity is a valid way to better understand God's will. The obligation of scholars is to devote themselves to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the Faith and of God's works and to impart it in every branch of knowledge to their fellow believers.

Acquisition of Knowledge and Divine Revelation

WE SHALL teach thee, and thou will not forget [aught of what thou are taught], save what God may will [thee to forget]—for, verily, He [alone] knows all that is open to [man's] perception as well as all that is hidden [from it]—and [thus] shall We make easy for thee the path towards [ultimate] ease. (87:6-8)

The above verses relate to mankind's cumulative acquisition of empirical and rational knowledge, handed down from generation to generation and from one civilization to another, except what God may cause man to forget as redundant by virtue of his new experiences and his acquisition of wider knowledge. Yet all knowledge arrived at through our observation is limited in scope and does not suffice to give us an insight into ultimate truths beyond

the reach of human perception (al-ghayb). Since human knowledge must forever remain imperfect, man is dependent upon the aid of divine revelation, which shows us the path toward peace of the spirit.

Acquiring of Knowledge and the Prophet's Sayings

The Quranic principle of acquiring knowledge has been emphasized in many well-authenticated sayings of the Prophet. For instance:

- “Striving after knowledge is a sacred duty for every man and woman who has surrendered himself or herself to God.”
- “The superiority of a learned man over a (mere) worshipper, i.e., one who merely prays, fasts, etc. is like the superiority of the full moon over all the stars.”
- “Whoso honors the learned, honor me.”
- “Go in quest of knowledge even unto China.”
- “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.”
- “To spend more time in learning is better than spending more time praying.”
- “That person who shall die while he is studying, in order to revive the knowledge of religion, will be only one degree inferior to the prophets.”
- “The pursuit of knowledge is a divine commandment for every Muslim.”
- “The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr.”
- “He who leaves his home in search of knowledge, walks in the path of God.”
- “One hour’s meditation on the work of the Creator is better than seventy years of prayer.”

Helping Others

A muttaqui will work to benefit others simply because they are created equal by the same one God. Thus, a genuine sense of love, brotherhood, and peace develops for every other human being without exception. The concept of good works encompasses the immediate family, community, and humanity at large. The stress on the action is an integral part of faith and is of fundamental importance in the ethics of the Quran. There is a frequent

juxtaposition of the concepts of believing and doing good works and the condemnation of all who, while believing, do no good works.

Revere Your Parents

NOW [among the best of the deeds which] We have enjoined upon man is goodness towards his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months. (46:15)

His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his utter dependence on her lasted two years: [hence, O man,] be grateful towards Me and towards your parents, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys' end. (31:14)

Child nurture includes the entire period of conception, gestation, birth, and feeding and weaning in infancy—the period of a child's utter dependence on its mother. Thus, gratitude towards parents, who were instrumental in one's coming to life, goes along with man's gratitude towards God, who is the ultimate cause and source of his existence.

Guiding Family

O YOU who have attained to faith! Ward off from yourselves and those who are close to you that fire [of the hereafter] whose fuel is human beings and stones. (66:6)

A person's responsibility is not confined to making efforts for their own salvation. His responsibility includes helping "those who are close," his family, to become morally upright. The Prophet said: "Each one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his herd. The ruler is accountable for his subjects; the man is a shepherd of his family and is accountable to them, and

the woman is a shepherd of her husband's house and children and is accountable concerning them."

Helping Community

And do good to your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbor among your people, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, and the wayfarer, and those whom you rightfully possess. (4:36)

The expression "your own people" refers to the community and not to one's actual relative. "The friend by your side" is one's wife or husband. "Those whom you rightfully possess" refers to slaves.

Have We not shown him the two highways [of good and evil]? But he would not try to ascend the steep uphill road . . . And what could make you conceive what it is, that steep uphill road? [It is] the freeing of one's neck [from the burden of sin], or the feeding, upon a day of [one's own] hunger, of an orphan, near of kin, or a needy [stranger] lying in the dust. (90:10-16)

Taking Care of Orphans

And they will ask thee about [how to deal with] orphans. Say: "To improve their condition is best." And if you share their life, [remember that] they are your brethren: for God distinguishes between him who spoils things and him who improves. And had God so willed, He would indeed have imposed on you hardships which you would not have been able to bear: [but,] behold, God is almighty, wise! (2:220)

The implication is that if one shares the life of an orphan in his charge, one is permitted to benefit by such an association—for instance, through a business partnership—provided this does not damage the orphan’s interests in any way.

Helping Widows

The Prophet said, “The one who looks after for a widow or a poor person is like a warrior fighting for God’s cause; or like a person who fasts during the day and prays all the night.”

Love Thy Neighbor

Prophet often stressed a believer’s moral obligation towards his neighbors, whatever their Faith. “Whoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him do good unto his neighbor. Gabriel continued to recommend me about treating the neighbors kindly and politely, so much so that I thought he would order me to make them as my heirs.” Such mundane acts as returning salutations or saying, “God have mercy on you” when someone sneezes, to accept invitations, to visit the sick, to follow funerals, visit to a family member to preserve the bond of kinship, speaking kindly, and respecting parents, all are considered good deeds and recommended by the Prophet.

Helping Fellow Man

The circle of generosity is extended to all humanity.

BEHOLD, God enjoins justice, and the doing of good, and generosity towards [one’s] fellowmen. (16:90)

“Generosity towards [one’s] fellowmen” refers to a relationship common to all human beings, the fellowship of man. This concept implies the fundamental ethical postulate to care for one another’s material and spiritual welfare.

Guiding Others

Now, among those whom We have created, there are some people who guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light. (7:181) Say [O Prophet]: “No reward do I ask of you for this [message] other than [that you should] love your fellow men.” For if anyone gains [the merit of] a good deed, We shall grant him through it an increase of good: and, verily, God is much-forgiving, ever responsive to gratitude. (42:23)

Care for Animals

The Prophet urged humane treatment of animals in the following parable: He said, “A thirsty man came across a well, got down to it, drank water and came out. Meanwhile, he saw a dog licking mud because of excessive thirst. He went down the well again and watered the dog. God thanked him for that deed.”

In another parable, the Prophet said, “A woman entered the hellfire because of a cat which she had tied, neither giving it food nor setting it free to eat from the vermin of the earth.” When asked if there was a reward in serving animals, the Prophet said, “Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate [living being]. If any Muslim plants any plant and a human being or an animal eat of it, he will be rewarded as if he had given that much charity.”

The Flight of Time

In the name of God, the most gracious, the dispenser of grace. CONSIDER the flight of time! Verily, man is bound to lose himself unless he be of those who attain to faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity. (103:1-3)

Sayings of the Prophet Regarding Good Works

“God, exalted be He, says: ‘If a servant of mine [merely] desires to do a good deed, I shall count this [desire] as a good deed; and if he does it, I shall count it tenfold. If he desires to commit a bad deed but does not commit it, I

shall count this as a good deed, seeing that he refrained from it only for My sake.’ The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended.” Some Christians are taught that even to think of sinning is a sin. It’s hard to control what we think, but we can usually control what we do. For a Muslim, sin or virtue lies in deeds and the intentions behind them.

Moderation as a Way of Life

The Islamic way calls for moderation in every aspect of life. The Quran exhorts believers not to place too great an emphasis on the physical and material aspects of their lives. Muslims are encouraged to establish a balance between living this life to its fullest (i.e., seeking family, wealth, position, legitimate enjoyment, and other such worldly pursuits) and remembering that whatever this life offers is temporary. To achieve this balance, one has to partake of but not indulge in what this life has to offer.

The Islamic attitude towards man’s existence is that his urges and desires relating to this “life of the flesh” are God-willed and legitimate. There is no inherent conflict between the spirit and the flesh, and a bold affirmation of the natural, God-willed unity of this twofold aspect of human life. This balanced attitude, peculiar to Islam, flows directly from the concept of God-consciousness.

And thus, have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you. (2:143)

Any form of extreme behavior such as excessive religiosity (asceticism), licentiousness, exulting in riches, hopelessness in adversity, wastefulness, miserly attitude, etc. fall outside the norm of moderation in Islam. The broad principle, which guides Islamic way of life, can be summed up in often-repeated call for moderation in all actions including religion.

Do Righteous Deeds and Enjoy Good Things of Life

Those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds incur no sin by partaking of whatever they may, so long as they are conscious of God and [truly] believe and do righteous deeds, and continue to be conscious of God and to believe, and grow ever more conscious of God, and persevere in doing good: for God loves the doers of good. (5:93)

This applies to eating and drinking, as well as, metaphorically, to partaking of anything that may be desirable. God has not prohibited “the good things of life” and their pleasures, and believers need not deny themselves.

Enjoy Good Things but Do Not Waste

O CHILDREN of Adam! Beautify yourselves for every act of worship, and eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: verily, He does not love the wasteful! Say: “Who is there to forbid the beauty which God has brought forth for His creatures, and the good things from among the means of sustenance?” Say: “They are [lawful] in the life of this world to all who have attained to faith—to be theirs alone on Resurrection Day.” Thus clearly do We spell out these messages unto people of [innate] knowledge! (7:31-32)

Beautify yourself with the things that do not disgrace or render unseemly either in the present world or in that which is to come. Thus, it signifies anything of beauty whether physical or moral. All good and beautiful things of life—i.e., those which are not expressly prohibited—are lawful to the believers. While in the life of this world, believers and unbelievers alike share those good things, they will be denied to the unbelievers in the hereafter.

Dietary Rules

Lawful to you is the [flesh of every] beast that feeds on plants, save what is mentioned to you [hereinafter]: (5:1) He has forbidden to you only carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than God's has been invoked; but if one is driven by necessity—neither coveting it nor exceeding his immediate need—no sin shall be upon him: for, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (2:173)

Today, all the good things of life have been made lawful to you. And the food of those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime is lawful to you, and your food is lawful for them. (5:5) Lawful to you is all water-game, and what the sea brings forth, as a provision for you. (5:96)”

“And the food of those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime” refers to the dietary rules in the Old Testament.

THEY WILL ASK thee about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: “In both, there is great evil as well as some benefit for man; but the evil which they cause is greater than the benefit which they bring.” (2:219)

Alcohol—and drugs having a same effect as alcohol—as well as gambling are prohibited.

No Hardship Pertaining to Islam

[God] and has laid no hardship on you in [anything that pertains to] religion, [and made you follow] the creed of your forefather Abraham. (22:78)

The absence of any hardship in Islam stems from (1) avoiding complicated rituals or a system of taboos, which would impose undue restrictions on

man's everyday life; (2) rejecting all self-mortification and exaggerated asceticism; (3) taking fully into account that "man has been created weak." (4:28).

God Does Not Overburden Human Beings

And [withal,] We do not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear: (23:62) "O our Sustainer! Lay not upon us a burden such as Thou didst lay upon those who lived before us! O our Sustainer! Make us not bear burdens, which we have no strength to bear! (2:286)

"Lay not upon us a burden" refers to the heavy burden of rituals imposed by the Law of Moses upon the children of Israel as well as to the world renunciation recommended by some followers of Jesus.

Goal of Religion of Islam

The entire spiritual exercises in believing in the five articles of faith and observing the five pillars is to instill God-consciousness. This in turn results in development of morality and the character of the individual, performing good works, practicing the principle of moderation in every aspect of life, and avoiding evil acts. Such a person becomes a highly productive member of the society and thus enters into the final stage of excellence in conduct. The Quran defines the goal of man's life:

[God reminds you of your dependence on Him] in order to test you [and thus to make manifest] which of you is best in conduct. (11:7) HALLOWED be He in whose hand all dominion rests, since He has the power to will anything: He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct, and [make you realize that] He alone is almighty, truly forgiving. (67:1-2)

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Evil Deeds, Repentance, and Atonement of Sins

Sin

THE CONCEPT OF sin has been present in many cultures throughout history, usually equated with an individual's failure to live up to external standards of conduct or moral codes. Sinful acts are viewed as a misuse of free will and defiance of God's commandments, attributable to human false pride and self-centeredness. Like Judaism, Islam teaches that sin is an act and not a state of being. Sin is disobedience or refusal to submit to the moral law. It is the arrogance and ingratitude of those who forget or turn away from their Creator and Sustainer. Repentance is simply remembering or returning to God's path, the straight path of Islam.

Iblis, or Satan

The Arabic term *shaytan* appears in the Quran in both the singular and the plural, often interchangeably with Iblis, the defiant angel ejected from heaven for disobeying God. Iblis as a shaytan tempts Adam and Eve into disobedience. The English word "devil" is derived from the Greek diabolos, which is a Hellenized form of the Arabic name Iblis, fallen angel. The term Iblis originates from the root-verb *ablasa*, "he despaired" or "gave up hope."

Satan Not the Primary Cause of Sin

The Satan of the Quran is not an all-powerful monster lurking above human beings forcing them to commit evil. All Satan can do is tempt man. In Islam, there is no such excuse as "Satan made me do it," as it contradicts the very concept of free will. After committing a grave sin, some people blame their

actions upon Satan in an attempt to avoid responsibility. Evil is not an independent, esoteric factor of life but rather a result of men succumbing to the temptations arising from their own moral failings. The power of the negative principle symbolized by Satan has no intrinsic reality. It becomes real only through men choosing willfully a wrong course of action. Satan says of the human race:

[Whereupon Iblis] said: “Now that Thou hast thwarted me, I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Thy straight way, and shall most certainly fall upon them openly as well as in a manner beyond their ken, and from their right and from their left: and most of them Thou wilt find ungrateful.” (7:16-17) Indeed, if Thou wilt but allow me a respite till the Day of Resurrection, I shall most certainly cause his descendants—all but a few—to obey me blindly!” (17:62)

Satan will address sinners on Resurrection Day. ***“And when everything will have been decided, Satan will say: “Behold, God promised you something that was bound to come true! I, too, held out [all manner of] promises to you—but I deceived you. Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you—and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine.” (14:22)***

Behold, he has no power over those who have attained to faith and in their Sustainer place their trust: he has power only over those who are willing to follow him, and who [thus] ascribe to him a share in God’s divinity. (16:99-100)

Spiritual Sins

Breaking Bond with God and Blood Ties

But as for those who break their bond with God after it has been established [in their nature,] and cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined, and spread corruption on earth—their due is rejection [by God], and theirs is a most evil fate [in the life to come]. (13:25)

The fundamental sin, according to the Quran, is denying the existence of God. The “bond with God” stands for something that is rooted in human nature. It can be perceived instinctively and to some extent, through human reasoning. Without belief in God, and His ultimate judgment, there is no basis for an acceptance of absolute moral values—i.e., values that are independent of time and social circumstances. The phrase “what God has bidden to be joined” refers to all ties arising from human relationships—e.g., the bonds of family.

DO NOT set up any other deity side by side with God, lest thou find thyself disgraced and forsaken: for thy Sustainer has ordained that you shall worship none but Him. (17:22-23)

And [so,] whenever they commit a shameful deed, they are wont to say, “We found our forefathers doing it,” and, “God had enjoined it upon us.” Say: “Behold, never does God enjoin deeds of abomination. Would you attribute unto God something of which you have no knowledge?” (7:28)

Distorting God’s Message

VERILY, they who distort the meaning of Our messages are not hidden from Us: hence, which [of the two] will be in a better state—he that is [destined to be] cast into the fire, or he that shall come secure [before Us] on Resurrection Day? Do what you will: verily, He sees all that you do. (41:40)

Turning Others Away from God

Behold, those who are bent on denying the truth, and on turning others away from the path of God, have indeed gone far astray. Behold, those who are bent on denying the truth and on evildoing—God will indeed not forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road but the road that leads to hell. (4:167-168)

Misleading Others into Sin

And [He is aware, too, that] they who are bent on denying the truth speak this, as it were, to those who have attained to faith: “Follow our way [of life], and we shall indeed take your sins upon ourselves!” But never could they take upon themselves aught of the sins of those [whom they would thus mislead]: behold, they are liars indeed! (29:12-13)

Denial of Afterlife

And on the Day when those who were bent on denying the truth will be brought within sight of the fire, [they will be told:] “You have exhausted your [share of] good things in your worldly life, having enjoyed them [without any thought of the hereafter]. And so today you shall be requited with the suffering of humiliation for having gloried on earth in your arrogance, offending against all that is right, and for all your iniquitous doings!” (46:20)

False Pride

And turn not thy cheek away from people in [false] pride, and walk not haughtily on earth: for, behold, God does not

love anyone who, out of self-conceit, acts in a boastful manner. (31:18-19)

Making Mockery of God's Message

Woe unto every sinful self-deceiver who hears God's messages when they are conveyed to him, and yet, as though he did not hear them, persists in his haughty disdain! Hence, announce unto him grievous suffering—for when he does become aware of any of Our messages, he makes them a target of his mockery! For all such, there is shameful suffering in store. 45:7-11)

Hypocrisy

God has promised the hypocrites, both men and women—as well as the [outright] deniers of the truth—the fire of hell, therein to abide: this shall be their allotted portion. For, God has rejected them, and long-lasting suffering awaits them. (9:68)

Apostasy

Verily, as for those who are bent on denying the truth after having attained to faith, and then grow [ever more stubborn] in their refusal to acknowledge the truth, their repentance [of other sins] shall not be accepted: for it is they who have truly gone astray. On the Day [of Judgment] some faces will be dark [with grief]. And as for those with faces darkened, [they shall be told:] “Did you deny the truth after having attained to faith? Taste, then, this suffering for having denied the truth!” (3:106-107)

Contentiousness

But We send [Our] message-bearers only as heralds of glad tidings and as warners—whereas those who are bent on denying the truth contend [against them] with fallacious arguments, so as to render void the truth thereby, and to make My messages and warnings a target of their mockery. (18:54-57)

Sinful Thoughts versus Evil Deeds

The Prophet said, “God has forgiven my followers the evil thoughts that occur to their mind, as long as such thoughts are not put into action or uttered.”

Entertainment and Music

There is no reference to music in the Quran; however, there are many occasions where the Prophet was involved in singing or encouraged others to do likewise. Call to prayer and recitation of the Quran is a form of singing. Horse racing was one of the pastimes for the Prophet and his companions. When a deputation of Africans came to Medina and performed in the compound of the Mosque, the Prophet himself showed this performance to his wife Aishah.

Sins against Fellow Man

Sin Of Devouring an Orphan’s Possessions

Behold, those who sinfully devour the possessions of orphans but fill their bellies with fire: for [in the life to come] they will have to endure a blazing flame! (4:10)

Mistreating Your Old Parents

Say: “Come, let me convey unto you what God has [really] forbidden to you: “Do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to aught beside Him;” and [do not offend against but, rather,]

do good unto your parents. (6:151) Should one of them, or both, attain to old age in thy care, never say “Ugh” to them or scold them, but [always] speak unto them with reverent speech, and spread over them humbly the wings of your tenderness, and say: “O my Sustainer! Bestow Thy grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!” (17:22-24)

Three Cardinal Sins: Idol Worship, Murder, and Adultery

And who never invoke any [imaginary] deity side by side with God, and do not take any human being’s life—[the life] which God has willed to be sacred—otherwise than in [the pursuit of] justice, and do not commit adultery. And [know that] he who commits aught thereof shall [not only] meet with a full requital [but] shall have his suffering doubled on Resurrection Day: for on that [Day] he shall abide in ignominy. (25:68-69)

Zina means both adultery and fornication (24:2). *Zina* is sex outside marriage regardless of whether one is married or not. There is no comparably broad word in English, so “adultery” is used in translation to convey *zina*.

Envy

Say: “Verily, my Sustainer has forbidden only shameful deeds, be they open or secret, and [every kind of] sinning, and unjustified envy and the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him—since He has never bestowed any warrant therefore from on high and the attributing unto God of aught of which you have knowledge.” (7:33)

Blaming Others for One’s Own Sin

But he who commits a fault or a sin and then throws the blame therefore on an innocent person, burdens himself with the guilt of calumny and [yet another] flagrant sin. (4:112)

Breaking an Oath

And do not use your oaths as a means of deceiving one another—or else [your] foot will slip after having been firm, and then you will have to taste the evil [consequences] of your having turned away from the path of God, with tremendous suffering awaiting you [in the life to come]. (16:94)

By a false pledge, you will offend against God because every pledge given by man to man is synonymous with a pledge to God. The breaking of a pledge unavoidably leads to a gradual disappearance of all mutual trust and to the decomposition of the social fabric.

Anger

Hence, if it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs thee up [to blind anger], seek refuge with God: behold, He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing! (41:36)

Persecution of Believers

Verily, as for those who persecute believing men and believing women, and thereafter do not repent, hell's suffering awaits them: yea, suffering through fire awaits them! (85:10)

Cruelty to Animals

Although there is no direct Quranic reference to cruelty to animals, the Prophet's Traditions have made it clear that those who inflict cruelty to animals risk damnation in the eternal life. In the story of the tribe of Thamud and prophet Salih, a she-camel was treated cruelly resulting in the destruction of the tribe of Thamud.

Social Sins

Spreading Rumors

O YOU who have attained to faith! If any iniquitous person comes to you with a [slandorous] tale, use your discernment, lest you hurt people unwittingly and afterwards be filled with remorse for what you have done. (49:6-7)

Slander

Verily, as for those who like [to hear] foul slander spread against [any of] those who have attained to faith—grievous suffering awaits them in this world and in the life to come: for God knows [the full truth], whereas you know [it] not. (24:19)

Self-Righteousness

He is fully aware of you when He brings you into being out of dust, and when you are still hidden in your mothers' wombs: do not, then, consider yourselves pure—[for] He knows best as to who is conscious of Him. (53:32)

Do Not Deride, Defame, Insult, Spy and, Backbite

O you who have attained to faith! Avoid most guesswork [about one another]—behold, for some of [such] guesswork is [in itself] a sin; and do not spy upon one another, and neither allow yourselves to speak ill of one another behind your backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would loathe it! And be conscious of God. Verily, God is an acceptor of repentance, a dispenser of grace! (49:11-12)

Intrigue and Conspiracy

NO GOOD comes, as a rule, out of secret confabulations—save those which are devoted to enjoining charity, or equitable dealings, or setting things to rights between people. (4:114).

Although, the “secret confabulations” spoken of in this passage relate to intrigues aimed against the Prophet and his followers by some of their unbelieving contemporaries, the passage also has a general import, and is, therefore, valid for all times.

General Antisocial Conduct

Furthermore defer not to the contemptible swearer of oaths, [or to] the slanderer that goes about with defaming tales, [or] the withholder of good, [or] the sinful aggressor, [or] one who is cruel, by greed possessed, and, in addition to all this, utterly useless [to his fellow-men]. (68:10-13) [Whereupon God will command:] “Cast, cast into hell every [such] stubborn enemy of the truth, [every] withholder of good [and] sinful aggressor [and] fomenter of distrust [between man and man—everyone] who has set up another deity beside God: cast him, then, cast him into suffering severe!” (50:24-29)

Corrupt and Oppressive Leaders

Blame attaches but to those who oppress [other] people and behave outrageously on earth, offending against all right: for them, there is grievous suffering in store! (42:42) And you wilt see them exposed to that [doom], humbling themselves in abasement, looking [around] with a furtive glance. Oh, verily, the evildoers will fall into long-lasting suffering. (42:45)

Sectarianism

VERILY, as for those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects—thou hast nothing to do with them. Behold, their case rests with God: and in time He will make them understand what they were doing. (6:159) And be not like those who have drawn apart from one another and have taken to conflicting views after all evidence of the truth has come unto them: for these it is for whom tremendous suffering is in store. (3:105)

The followers of the Bible became Jews and Christians—sects of monotheistic religion—and broke up into even smaller sects of those larger sects. Likewise, the followers of the Quran, Muslims, split in various sects, although all three communities have a common belief source in the Quran.

Tribalism, Nationalism, and Jingoism

Say: “If your fathers and your sons and your brothers and your spouses and your clan, and the worldly goods which you have acquired, and the commerce whereof you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you take pleasure—[if all these] are dearer to you than God and His Apostle and the struggle

*in His cause, then wait until God makes manifest His will.
(9:24)*

While recognizing differences in status, wealth, and tribal origin, the Quran teaches unity and equality of all believers before God. It includes Jews, Christians, Muslims, and followers of other monotheists faiths. Common faith, not tribal or family ties, binds the community together. The passage above rejects the tendency to regard ties of kinship and national affiliation, expressed in the term “your clan,” as the decisive factors of social behavior. This may be an allusion to the inevitable degeneration and decline of communities, which place narrow self-interest above ethical values.

Worship of Wealth

Unto him who cares for [no more than the enjoyment of] this fleeting life, We readily grant thereof as much as We please, [giving] to whomever it is Our will [to give]; but in the end, We consign him to [the suffering of] hell, which he will have to endure disgraced and disowned! (17:18) Is it because he is possessed of worldly goods and children that, whenever Our messages are conveyed to him, such a one says, “Fables of ancient times”? [For this], We shall brand him with indelible disgrace! (68:14-16)

The criteria of righteousness in the materialistic mind are the signs of material success in the form of wealth and children, especially sons. These evildoers think that their material success is evidence of their righteousness, hence proof of needing no further guidance. We shall stigmatize him with indelible disgrace.

Discarding Laws of inheritance

These are the bounds set by God. And whoever pays heed unto God and His Apostle, him will He bring into gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide: and

this is a triumph supreme. And whoever rebels against God and His Apostle and transgresses His bounds, him will He commit unto fire, therein to abide; and shameful suffering awaits him. (4:13-14)

Severe punishment has been promised for breaking the laws of inheritance, such as depriving women or weaker family members of their due inheritance, a widespread practice in many Islamic societies.

Amassing Wealth without Giving Charity

But nay! Verily, all [that awaits him] is a raging flame, tearing away his skin! It will claim all such as turn their backs [on what is right], and turn away [from the truth], and amass [wealth] and thereupon withhold [it from their fellow men]. (70:1518) And thereupon [from usry], may keep his past gains, and it will be for God to judge him; but as for those who return to it—they are destined for the fire, therein to abide! (2:275)

Lust for Wealth by Religious Leaders

O you who have attained to faith! Behold, many of the rabbis and monks do indeed wrongfully devour men's possessions and turn [others] away from the path of God. But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of God—give them the tiding of grievous suffering [in the life to come]: on the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith, [those sinners shall be told:] “These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves! Taste, then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures!” (9:34-35)

Above is a reference to the wealth of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious leaders and communities and their misuse of this wealth, or any who hoard their wealth without spending anything thereof on righteous causes.

Repentance

In Islam, sins are broadly classified into two categories from the perspective of repentance and forgiveness.

(1) Sins against God

Performing rituals, dogmas, practices, and beliefs usually fall under God's rights (*Huquq Ullah*). For example, the five articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam are duties every Muslim owes to God. Omitting any of these duties constitutes a sin of omission. God, an almighty and independent entity, needs no defenders or human worship. The fulfillment of God's rights is a private matter between the individual human and God. There is no punishment ordained in the Quran for not fulfilling the duties we owe to God. If a Muslim will repent and ask God's forgiveness during his lifetime, God, being merciful and loving, can forgive any indiscretion since the man is created weak. God may forgive even the most hardened sinners if they truly repent and mend their ways.

Say: "[Thus speaks God:] O you servants of Mine who have transgressed against your own selves! Despair not of God's mercy: behold, God forgives all sins—for, verily, He alone is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace!" Hence, turn towards your Sustainer [alone] and surrender yourselves unto Him ere the suffering [of death and resurrection] comes upon you, for then you will not be succored. (39:53-54)

Law of Grace and Mercy

And when those who believe in Our messages come unto thee, say: "Peace be upon you. Your Sustainer has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy—so that if any of

you does a bad deed out of ignorance, and thereafter repents and lives righteously, He shall be [found] much forgiving, a dispenser of grace.” (6:54)

God “has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy” and consequently does not punish sinners without taking all their circumstances into consideration. The Quran places great importance on divine mercy, without which repentance would be irrelevant.

Yet he who does evil or [otherwise] sins against himself, and thereafter prays to God to forgive him, shall find God much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace: for he who commits a sin, commits it only to his own hurt; and God is indeed all-knowing, wise. (4:110-111)

For the life of this world is nothing but an enjoyment of self-delusion. [Hence,] vie with one another in seeking to attain to your Sustainer’s forgiveness, and [thus] to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for those who have attained to faith in God and His Apostle. Such is the bounty of God, which He grants unto whomever He wills—for God is limitless in His great bounty. (57:20-21)

Vie with one another for God’s forgiveness rather than for glory and worldly possessions because no man is free from faults and transgressions, and hence, everyone needs God’s forgiveness.

But unto him who shall have stood in fear of his Sustainer’s Presence, and held back his inner self from base desires, paradise will truly be the goal! (79:40-41)

(2) Sins against fellow man

For, never would thy Sustainer destroy a community for wrong [beliefs alone] so long as its people behave righteously [towards one another]. (11:117) And never would We destroy a community unless its people are wont to do wrong [to one another]. (28:59)

These are willful acts that violate the rights of others. Suffering severe, according to the immutable laws (His decree), which God has laid down for His creations. God's chastisement does not afflict any people merely on account of their holding beliefs amounting to shirk and kufr. But afflicts them only if they persistently commit evil in their mutual dealings, and deliberately hurt other human beings and act tyrannically towards them.

Human beings are dependent upon the fulfillment of certain natural rights to live a dignified life. The rights of one's fellow man (*Huququl Ibad*) are more important to fulfil than God's rights. Peoples' rights are considered universal and should be observed without exception. Hence, those who are learned in Islamic Law hold that men's obligations towards God rest on the principle of His forgiveness and liberality. Whereas the rights of men are stringent in nature and must always be strictly observed. The reason is that God is almighty and needs no defender, whereas man is weak and needs protection.

The attitude of many modern-day Muslims' attitude is, as long as they fasted, prayed, paid Zakat, and went to Hajj (*Huquq ullah*, God's rights), it did not matter how they treated people (*Huququl Ibad*). Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The Prophet said,

“In my community, the poor is he who appeared before God on the Day of Resurrection with his acts of the prayer, fast and charity; the while he had abused someone, usurped the property, shed blood or hit still another. Then his virtuous deeds were given over to each of his victims. When nothing was left of his good deeds to pay compensation, some of the sins of each wronged one were transferred to him, and he shall be cast into Hell.”

Forgiveness Begets Forgiveness

And We ordained for them in that [Torah]: A life for a life, and an eye for an eye, and a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth, and a [similar] retribution for wounds; but he who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins. (5:45)

When human beings' rights are violated, it is no longer a private matter between the sinner and God. Now, it is up to the person whose rights were violated whether to forgive his abuser. If the victim chooses to forgive out of charity, then God will atone some of his past sins.

As for the victims of others' sins, there are serious mental, emotional, and physical consequences of an unforgiving heart. People who do not have profound faith have a more difficult time forgiving. Forgiveness has its limit, and one should not condemn those who choose not to forgive. Forgiveness will bring closure, but also seeing that offenders get what they deserve can bring closure.

When Ali ibn Talib was asked what true repentance is, he replied, "You should feel penitent for the wrong you have done. Carry out the duties that you have ignored, restore the rights that you have usurped, ask forgiveness of him whom you have wronged, resolve not to repeat the sin, and dedicate yourself in obedience to God." In the case of sins against God, sincere repentance is all that is needed for God's forgiveness. For the repentance of sins against a fellow man, one has to restore the usurped rights and ask forgiveness of him and God.

Atonement of Sins

Mitigation of Sinful Deeds

As a religious act, atonement is an effort to make up for wrongdoings. An apology is an act of atonement. Many religions have rituals of atonement, such as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when Jews repent for their sins. The following elements have a direct influence on the possible mitigation of the effects of sinful actions: (1) Charity (2) Striving in God's cause (3) Pain

and sorrow (4) Avoiding further heinous and grave sins (5) Effacing bad deeds through good deeds.

Charity and Forgiveness of Sins

If you do deeds of charity openly, it is well; but if you bestow it upon the needy in secret, it will be even better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds. And God is aware of all that you do. (2:271)

Those Who Strive in God's Cause

And yet, behold, thy Sustainer [grants His forgiveness] unto those who forsake the domain of evil after having succumbed to its temptation, and who thenceforth strive hard [in God's cause] and are patient in adversity: behold, after such [repentance] thy Sustainer is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! (16:110)

Pain and Sorrow

In the sight of God, the unhappiness caused by unjust persecution confers—as does every undeserved and patiently borne suffering—a spiritual merit on the person thus afflicted. The Prophet said, “Whenever a believer is stricken with any hardship, or pain, or anxiety, or sorrow, or harm, or distress—even if it be a thorn that has hurt him—God redeems thereby some of his failings.”

According to another well-authenticated hadith, if a person dies a violent death not caused, directly or indirectly, by his sinful actions, and since he had no time to repent his previous sins, he will be forgiven. In cases of unprovoked murder, the murderer is burdened—in addition to the sin of murder—with the sins his innocent victim committed but is now absolved of.

Righteous Living and Forgiveness of Sins

VERILY, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God, and all believing men and women, and all truly devout men and women who are true to their word, who are patient in adversity, and who humble themselves [before God], and who give in charity. All self-denying men and women, who are mindful of their chastity, and who remember God unceasingly: for [all of] them God has readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward. (33:35)

Faith, Good Works, and Effacing of Sins

Whereas those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds, and have come to believe in what has been bestowed from on high on Muhammad—for it is the truth from their Sustainer—[shall attain to God's grace]. He will efface their [past] bad deeds, and will set their hearts at rest. (47:2-3)

Avoidance of Heinous Sins

If you avoid the great sins, which you have been enjoined to shun, We shall efface your [minor] bad deeds, and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory. (4:31) As for those who avoid the [truly] grave sins and shameful deeds—even though they may sometimes stumble—behold, thy Sustainer is abounding in forgiveness. (53:32)

Whoever shall come [before God] with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof; but whoever shall come with an evil deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof; and none shall be wronged. (6:160)

Whereas good deeds will be rewarded with far more than their merits may warrant, evil will be recompensed with no more than its equivalent.

Repentance and Salvation

And once again: Behold, thy Sustainer [shows mercy] to those who do evil out of ignorance and afterward repent and live righteously. Behold, after such [repentance] thy Sustainer is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (16:119)

Repentance and atonement of sins is an essential part of man's quest for salvation. There are no easy ways or shortcuts to salvation in Islam. Evangelical Christians claim that salvation is free; this movement within Protestant Christianity believes in salvation by grace alone, solely through Faith. In Islam, salvation has to be earned to some extent by avoidance of evils and doing good works. Leading a righteous life exemplifies good-faith effort on the part of the believer. In the final analysis, God's mercy is the key to salvation. All human beings including highly exalted Prophets are in need of God's forgiveness. The Prophet said, "Act and try to act as righteously as you possibly can but know that the action of a person alone will not make him enter Paradise." When asked about his own actions, Muhammad replied, "Yes, even I will not go to paradise on the strength of my actions unless my Lord covers me up in His mercy."

Jesus' Explanation

"Behold," one came to him and said, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

He said to him, "Why do you call me good? [Jesus stressing his humanness] No one is good but one; that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

"Which ones?"

Jesus said, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not offer false testimony. Honor your father and mother. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. Jesus said to his disciples, “Most assuredly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a rope to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.”

When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”

Looking at them, Jesus said, “With men this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:16–26).

It is only through righteous deeds and God’s mercy that one will enter eternal life—a concept consistent with Quranic teachings.

Timeless Doctrine of Salvation

VERILY, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (2:62) For, verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (5:69)

The Quranic passages lay down a fundamental doctrine of salvation, which transcend all religious affiliations. It is of timeless import, as it applies to Adam down to the last human on this earth. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, salvation is granted by the grace of God for having faith, belief in Judgment Day, and doing good works while avoiding major sins. If good deeds exceed sins, salvation will be granted through God’s grace regardless of the person’s denomination.

Part 5: Genesis—According to the Quran Where Did We All Come From?

The Origin of the Universe from the Big Bang

The Big Bang

NEARLY EVERY CULTURE on Earth has a creation story. Philosophers for thousands of years and scientists for hundreds of years have endeavored to find an objective, verifiable account of the origin of the universe. According to almost all modern astrophysicists, all matter and energy in the universe originated from the explosion of one entity about 13.7 billion years ago, the so-called Big Bang theory.

The Expanding Universe

Einstein and other scientists had postulated a rather stable universe that wasn't growing any larger. Big Bang skeptics took this idea as evidence that the universe had always been here rather than suddenly burst into existence. But somehow the math didn't support this steady-state idea. In 1929, astronomer Edwin Hubble made a stunning discovery. He observed that almost every galaxy was rushing away from the earth. If the universe is expanding, then it must have had a beginning to expand from. To some, this even suggested a Creator as well as creation.

These discoveries were not news to anyone who had studied the Quran.

ARE, THEN, they who are bent on denying the truth not aware that the heavens and the earth were [once] one single entity, which We then parted asunder? (21:30) AND IT IS We who have built the universe with [Our creative] power, and, verily, it is We who are steadily expanding it. (51:47)

The Quran verses quoted above are unmistakable references to the unitary origin of the universe, the Big Bang, and the expanding universe.

The First Cause

Everything that begins to exist must have a cause—and if the universe began to exist, it must have had a cause. The most persuasive case for the existence of God is the cosmological or “First Cause” argument. It starts from a premise that cannot be disputed—every effect has a cause. A thing cannot be without having been caused, hence cause and effect. Although everything has to be caused by something else, this regression in the chain of causation logically cannot extend backward into infinity. At some point, the chain of causation goes back to something that was not dependent for its existence on something else but was independent—the “cosmological argument,” the cause without a cause.

SAY: “He is the One God: God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Being.” (112:1-2) The Originator is he of the heavens and the earth: and when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, “Be”—and it is. (2:117)

God is the absolute Creator, and His power is such that His mere command “Be” is sufficient to cause the Big Bang and thus the formation of the universe out of nothing. In His supreme wisdom, He created all that exists, according to His overall plan to which humans are not privy. The operation of the universe, according to natural law, implies a force behind it. The design of the universe suggests a purpose or direction.

God Is Time Absolute

Before the creation of the universe, time did not exist. The First Cause of the universe must be some entity operating utterly independent of the time dimension of the cosmos. The Prophet said, “God says, ‘I am time absolute.’” What men conceive of as time has no meaning to God. He is timeless.

And, behold, in thy Sustainer's sight, a day is like a thousand years of your reckoning. (22:47) All the angels and all the inspiration [ever granted to man] ascend unto Him [daily,] in a day the length whereof is [like] fifty thousand years. (70:4)

According to the traditional Islamic view, time represents one continuous span to the present and by implication onward to the Day of Resurrection, when finally time ceases to exist and merges into the realm of the everlasting. The starting point is the creation of the universe. Time and history are a continuum of God's creation and He continually acts to maintain and support the existence of all that He has brought into being. The end of time will be the new state of existence, the ultimate manifestation of God's creative act in the recreation of human beings to be brought into God's presence for the final judgment.

The Evolution of the Universe after the Big Bang

VERILY, your Sustainer is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six eons and is established on the throne of His almightiness. (7:54) And He [it is who] decreed that they became seven heavens in two eons and imparted unto each Heaven its function. (41:12)

“Sky” or “Heaven” in the Quran often has the connotation of universe, or, in the plural, heavens or cosmic systems. In Arabic, the number seven is synonymous with several, just as seventy or seven hundred often mean many or very many. With the accepted linguistic definition, the “seven heavens” may be taken as denoting the multiplicity of cosmic systems.

The Arabic word *yawm* denotes any period, whether extremely long (eon) or very short (moment). Its application to a day of twenty-four hours is only one of its many connotations. In the cosmic sense in which it is used in the Quran, the plural *ayyam* is best rendered as “eons.” The creation of the universe in six “days” should be understood within the context of God's timelessness and not from the human perception of time. The “day” of which the Quran so often speaks has nothing to do with human time definitions.

Instead, it alludes to an ultimate reality in which the concept of time has neither place nor meaning. In other words, a day, an eon, a thousand years, or fifty thousand years are similar to Him, since the reality of time only holds sway in the created world and not with the Creator.

The Evolution of Our Solar System

And He [it is who] applied His design to the skies, which were [yet but] smoke [i.e., a gas]. And He [it is who] said to them and the earth, “Come [into being], both of you, willingly or unwillingly!”—to which both responded, “We do come in obedience.” (41:11)

After the Big Bang, the universe existed in the form of fundamental particles and molecular gas. At this stage, the universe was composed mostly of hydrogen and helium gas, which physicists regard as the two elements from which all matter in the universe evolved and is still evolving. From the primary particles and other forces, the earliest stars, quasars, galaxies, and later our solar system emerged. Some researchers call the systematic development of all this physical structure over billions of years “cosmic evolution.”

Nine billion years after the Big Bang, halfway out on one spiral arm of the Milky Way galaxy, the sun and the rest of our solar system were formed from a giant rotating cloud of gas and dust, the solar nebula. As gravity caused the nebula to collapse, it spun faster and flattened into a disk. Thus, the sun emerged from a condensing molecular cloud. The infant solar system was chaotic, and the ever-growing fragments collided, shattered, and then reassembled themselves into ever-larger bodies. From this carnage, all the planets emerged. Soon, the developing sun accumulated so much mass that it ignited, becoming a full-fledged star, and the planets saw their first sunrise. Our solar system is estimated to be about 4.6 billion years old. None of this astronomical history conflicts with the Quran’s account of creation.

Heavenly Bodies Moving In Their Orbits

The celestial bodies such as planets are held on their courses by the God-willed laws of cosmic movement. Only at the Last Hour will there be a universal cosmic catastrophe.

And indeed, We have created above you seven [celestial] orbits; and never are We unmindful of [any aspect of Our] creation. (23:17) And [that it is He who] holds the celestial bodies [in their orbits], so that they may not fall upon the earth otherwise than by His leave? (22:65) CONSIDER those [stars] that rise only to set and move [in their orbits] with steady motion, and float [through space] with floating serene, and yet overtake [one another] with swift overtaking: and thus they fulfill the [Creator's] behest! (79:1-5)

All this is cited as evidence of God's planning and creativeness.

Sun and Moon Floating in Their Orbits

And We have built above you the seven firmaments and have placed [therein the sun] a lamp full of blazing splendor. (78:12-13) CONSIDER the sun and its radiant brightness, and the moon as it reflects the sun! Consider the day as it reveals the world and the night as it veils it darkly! (91:1-4) [He is] the One who causes the dawn to break, and He has made the night to be [a source of] stillness, and the sun and the moon run their appointed courses. [All] this is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All-knowing. (6:96)

He has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws], each running its course for a term set [by Him]. (39:5) And [they have a sign in] the sun: it runs in an orbit of its own. [And] that is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. And [in] the moon, for which We have determined phases [which it must traverse] until it becomes

like an old date-stalk, dried-up and curved. [And], neither may the sun overtake the moon, nor can the night usurp the time of day, since all of them float through space [in accordance with Our laws]. (36:38-40)

Anaxagoras was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher who was the first to discover that moonlight was derived from Sun. Early in the seventeenth century, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler propounded laws that first described the orbits of the planets around the Sun. The English physicist Isaac Newton later explained the physical causes of Kepler's laws. The Sun runs on its course without having any rest, i.e., unceasingly. The moon traverses through different phases until it resembles the raceme of the date palm, which, when old and dry, becomes slender and curves like a crescent.

The Evolution of Earth

Our earth is an example of creation through conscious planning. The size, location, temperature, physics, and chemistry of the earth are perfect for all creatures great and small that live on the third rock from the sun. Earth is not too close to the sun, and our planet is situated in the goldilocks region, where the moderate temperature allows water to remain liquid, which is an essential precondition for life. The presence of the moon stabilizes the earth's polarity and thus regulates temperature. A strong magnetic field, generated by the rotation of the liquid iron core in the earth, shields us from powerful solar winds that stripped away most of Mars's surface water and oxygen after it lost its magnetic field long ago. The nitrogen and oxygen gases in our atmosphere protect the earth by blocking ultra-violet and other short-wave radiation that would otherwise sterilize the planet.

Another key factor is Earth's size. Mars is only half our size. Due to its much larger size, Earth remains warm and active to this day. Continents drift about on a layer of molten rocks—a process known as plate tectonics—thrusting up mountains and pushing huge plates back into the interior. The dynamic turnover of the crust recycles carbon and keeps atmospheric carbon dioxide, the major cause of global warming, at moderate levels. The earth's deeper interior is composed of molten and gaseous matter. The hard crust of the earth is formed from the process of cooling and hardening. It is the solidity of the earth's crust—as contrasted with its fluid and less stable

interior—which makes life on earth possible. Due to a congenial environment, the earth is a cradle of life.

SAY: “Would you indeed deny Him who has created the earth in two eons? And do you claim that there is any power that could rival Him, the Sustainer of all the worlds?” (41:9) For He [it is who, after creating the earth,] placed firm mountains on it, [towering] above its surface, and bestowed [so many] blessings on it, and equitably apportioned its means of subsistence to all who would seek it: [and all this He created] in four eons. (41:10) And We adorned the skies nearest to the earth with lights and made them secure: such is the ordaining of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. (41:12)

Earth a Garden of Eden

And after that, the earth: wide has He spread its expanse and has caused its waters to come out of it, and its pastures, and has made the mountains firm: [all this] as a means of livelihood for you and your animals. (79:29-33) He it is who has made the earth a cradle for you and has provided for you ways [of livelihood] thereon so that you might follow the right path. (43:10) And [who] sends down waters from the sky: and by this means We bring forth various kinds of plants. Eat, [then, of this produce of the soil,] and pasture your cattle [thereon]. (20:53-54) And the earth have We spread out wide—and how well have We ordered it! (51:48)

Theistic Evolution of Life

Evolution of Life from Water

And He it is who has created the heavens and the earth in six eons, and [ever since He has willed to create life,] the throne of His almightiness has rested upon the water. (11:7) And [that] We made out of water every living thing? Will they not, then, [begin to] believe? (21:30)

MANY DETAILS OF how life began on earth remain a fundamental mystery, but liquid water is essential for all life on earth. In modern times, science has reached this same conclusion.

Darwin's Theory of Evolution

For millennia, philosophers, religious thinkers, and scientists have attempted to explain the history of life on earth. In 1859, Charles Darwin, in his book *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*, described the process of evolution. He could not, however, fully explain the mechanism that caused life forms to change from generation to generation.

Many religious fundamentalists of various stripes opposed the theory. They considered Darwin's ideas blasphemous for contradicting the predominant view held in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that God created every organism on earth more or less as it exists now.

Even today, many Muslims object to evolution because the thought of man's origin in common with animals is abhorrent to them. It diminishes man's status and, according to them, implicitly justifies some men's amoral animal-like behavior. Ironically, centuries earlier, during the Golden Age of

Islam, Muslim scientists Ibn Kathir, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Arabi, Ibn Sina, and other scholars believed in some form of evolution of life on the earth. Some of Darwin's critics, such as Sir William Draper, called his ideas the "Mohammedan Theory of Evolution," accusing Darwin of plagiarism. Today, many literal-minded Muslims believe that God came down to earth and molded Adam out of mud and then breathed His spirit into him. No statement in the Quran justifies that God physically came to the earth to create man.

Science is limited to physical phenomena and cannot entertain the role of the divine in evolution. Science has not been able to explain how the Big Bang originated. On the other hand, religion alone doesn't explain evolution, which clearly exists. A more holistic approach that includes both spiritual and physical aspects of the origin of life can arrive at a understanding of where we came from. The scientific study of evolution doesn't replace faith; it complements it, and exploring natural phenomena helps bring us closer to God and his creations.

Numerous references in the Quran support creationism, the idea that God directly caused almost instantaneous events such as the Big Bang. However, the Quran also, in mentioning a long creative timeframe such as the recently quoted "six eons," indicates time spent on gradual evolution.

And it is God who has created all animals out of water; and [He has willed that] among them are such as crawl on their bellies, and such as walk on two legs, and such as walk on four. God creates what He will: for, God, verily, has the power to will anything. (24:45)

Evolution of Man

HAS THERE [not] been an endless span of time before man [appeared]—[a time] when he was not yet a thing to be thought of? (76:1)

There has indeed been an immensely long span of time before man appeared on earth. In other words, the physical world existed long before man. From

the Big Bang to the appearance of a man, it took billions of years of evolutionary time.

Man Created out of Water

And He it is who out of this [very] water has created man and has endowed him with [the consciousness of] descent and marriage-tie: for thy Sustainer is ever infinite in His power. (25:54) AND, INDEED, We have created man out of sounding clay, out of dark slime transmuted. (15:26)

We have here a description of the primeval biological environment, out of which man has evolved following God's plan of creation. These verses point to the evolution of the human species, which, starting from the most primitive organisms living on earth, gradually ascended to ever higher development stages. "Through descent and marriage-tie," God has enabled man to attribute spiritual value to and to derive strength from, his organic and social relationships.

The term "sounding clay" adds a further dimension to the concept of man's evolution out of clay, dust, water, etc. In the Quran, the sounding clay "that emits a sound" when struck is used exclusively regarding the creation of man. It seems to allude to the matrix of man's physical body and the power of articulate speech, which distinguishes man from all other species, as well as to the brittleness of his existence.

Human Soul Is of the Spirit of God

And then He forms him in accordance with what he is meant to be, and breathes into him of His spirit. [Thus, O men], He endows you with hearing, and sight, and feelings as well as minds: [yet] how seldom are you grateful! (32:7-9)

At a certain point in human evolution, God endowed man with soul and consciousness. God's breathing His spirit into man is a metaphor for the

divine gift of life, consciousness, and soul. The soul of every human being is of the spirit of God.

Miracles Are All Around Us

And they say, “Why has no miraculous sign been bestowed on him from on high by his Sustainer?” Say: “Behold, God has the power to bestow any sign from on high.” Yet most human beings are unaware of this—although there is no beast walks on earth and no bird that flies on its two wings, which is not [God’s] creature like yourselves: no single thing have We neglected in Our decree. (6:37-38)

God alone has the power to create in the true sense of the word—that is, to bring into being something that did not exist, either in its entirety or in its components.

Islam and the Quran are not at odds with the scientific view of the Big Bang and evolution of life. In essence, Islam is saying that science got everything right, and as a Muslim you don’t have to take sides and choose either religion or science.

Part 6: Islam in the Modern World

Introduction to Shariah

DEMAGOGUES AND ISLAMOPHOBES routinely demonize the word Shariah as incompatible with the United States Constitution. Some of them whipped up mass hysteria surrounding a so-called threat of Sharia law in the United States. A few states have banned so-called Shariah laws.

Differences between Shariah and Western Laws

There are two significant differences between Shariah and Western laws.

First, the scope of Shariah is much broader since it regulates man's relationship not only with his neighbors and the state, which is the limit of most legal systems, but also with his own conscience and with God. Shariah includes a great deal that, for the modern world, has nothing to do with law. About six hundred of the six thousand verses in the Quran are concerned with matters of prayer and ritual that cannot be termed as "law" in the strict definition of this word. For instance, it regulates everything respecting religion, both beliefs or faith and rituals. The covenants between God and man or man's obligations toward God have been summarized as the Five Pillars. How can anyone ban praying five times a day, giving charity to poor, or fasting during Ramadan? There is a basic lack of understanding of what Shariah stands for.

Second, Sharia Law does not apply to non-Muslims.

Yet had We so willed, We could indeed have imposed Our guidance upon every human being: but [We have not willed it thus] (32:13). NOW HAD IT BEEN Our will [that men should not be able to discern between right and wrong], We could surely have deprived them of their sight, so that they

would stray forever from the [right] way: for how could they have had insight [into what is true]? (36:66–67) Have, then, they who have attained to faith not yet come to know that, had God so willed; He would indeed have guided all mankind aright? (13:31)

God endowed human beings with the guidance of reason and a moral sense that is as much a part of human nature as the senses of hearing, seeing, and feeling. Insistence on blind faith is contrary to reason. The Quranic picture illustrates the structure of God's plan. Behind the flow of all events is a grand, divine, macrocosmic scheme. Man's life from birth to death is a microcosm of a larger overall divine plan. Human freedom is confined within the compass of God's omnipotent will, and past a certain point, man cannot act outside God's ordination. Man is virtually free, but he is not entirely independent.

Freedom of Religion

THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing. (2:256)

Protection of Infidels and Pagans

And if any of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God seeks thy protection, grant him protection, so that he might [be able to] hear the word of God [from thee]. And thereupon convey him to a place where he can feel secure: this, because they [may be] people who [sin only because they] do not know [the truth]. (9:6)

Prohibition of Defiling What Others Hold Sacred

But do not revile those [beings] whom they invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite, and in ignorance: for, goodly indeed have We made their own doings appear unto every community. In time, [however,] unto their Sustainer they must return: and then He will make them [truly] understand all that they were doing. (6:108)

This prohibition of reviling anything that other people hold sacred—even in contravention of the principle of God’s oneness—is expressed in the plural and addressed to all believers. While Muslims are expected to argue against the false beliefs of others, they are not allowed to abuse the objects of those beliefs and hurt the feelings of their erring fellow men. When unfriendly critics of Islam abuse Muhammad calling him all kinds of epithets, you will never come across any Muslim defiling the name of Jesus or Moses. This courtesy is extended to idol-worshipers such as Hindus, and their myriad gods are never subjected to ridicule.

Islamic Laws

Laws concerning family, inheritance, and crime are well defined in Shariah, mostly for the purposes of justice, peace, and protecting the weak from depredation. The only draconian punishment is cutting off a hand of the thief. At the present, this punishment is only applied in Saudi Arabia and even then, only on rare occasions. The rest of the Islamic world has set aside this punishment because of poverty.

Women's Rights

PERHAPS NOWHERE WAS Muhammad's struggle for economic redistribution and social egalitarianism more evident than in the rights and privileges he bestowed upon the women in his community. Huston Smith writes in *The Religions of Man*:

Chiefly because it has permitted a plurality of wives, Islam has been accused of degrading women. If we approach the question time-wise, comparing Arabian women's status before and after Muhammad, the charge is patently false. Women were regarded as little more than chattel to be done with as their fathers or husbands pleased. In the face of these conditions, a very birth of a daughter was regarded as a calamity.

Right to Life

The Quran forbids female infanticide.

“For whenever any of them is given the glad tiding of [the birth of] a girl, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger, avoiding all people because of the [alleged] evil of the glad tiding which he has received, [and debating within himself:] Shall he keep this [child] despite the contempt [which he feels for it]—or shall he bury it in the dust? Oh, evil indeed is whatever they decide! (16:57–59) [On the Day of Resurrection]: and when the girl-child that was buried alive is made to ask for what crime she had been slain? (81:8–9)

Historically, this is a reference to the pre-Islamic Arabian custom of burying unwanted female children alive, as well as to the occasional—though much rarer—sacrifices of male children to some of their gods. Beyond this, however, the above prohibition has a timeless validity, as it also relates to abortions undertaken for fear of poverty.

Inheritance Rights

With a few notable exceptions (like Muhammad's wife Khadija), women in pre-Islamic Arabia could neither own property nor inherit it from their husbands, since a wife was herself considered property.

MEN SHALL have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, whether it be little or much—a share ordained [by God]. (4:7) CONCERNING [the inheritance of] your children, God enjoins [this] upon you: The male shall have the equal of two females' share. (4:11) MEN SHALL take full care of women with the bounties, which God has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions. (4:34)

Men are given preferential treatment over women in the laws of inheritance. Islamic Law lays the burden of maintaining the family on the male. The son inherits a share equivalent to that of two daughters. It is the husband's obligation to support his wife and children.

The Quran goes to great lengths to emphasize the equality of the sexes in the eyes of God. At the same time, the Quran acknowledges that men and women have distinct and separate roles in society; it would have been unrealistic to claim otherwise in seventh-century Arabia.

Dowry as a Gift

And give unto women their marriage portions in the spirit of a gift; but if they, of their own accord, give up unto you

***ought thereof, then enjoy it with pleasure and good cheer.
(4:4) And unto those with whom you desire to enjoy
marriage, you shall give the dowers due to them. (4:24)***

The gift of dowry signifies the giving of something willingly, of one's own accord, without expecting anything in return for it. In pre-Islamic Arabia, upon the death of her husband, both the widow and her dowry would be inherited by the male heir of her deceased husband. If the male heir was uninterested in the widow, he could hand her over to his kin—a brother or a nephew—who could then marry her and take control of her dead husband's property. But if she was too old to marry again, or if no one was interested in her, she and her dowry would revert to her clan.

With Islam, women in the Ummah were, for the first time, given the right both to inherit the property of their husbands and to keep their dowries as their own personal property throughout their marriage. Muhammad also forbade a husband to touch his wife's dowry, forcing him instead to provide for his family from his own wealth. If the husband died, his wife would inherit a portion of his property; if he divorced her, the entire dowry was hers.

Above Quranic injunctions did not sit well with the male members of the community. If women could no longer be considered property, men complained, not only would their wealth be drastically reduced, but their own meager inheritances would now have to be split with their sisters and daughters—members of the community who, they argued, did not share an equal burden with the men.

From the perspective of the intervening fourteen centuries, the positive changes in women's status were revolutionary. The Quran did not give equal rights to women from a twenty-first-century standard. One cannot realistically expect that fourteen hundred years ago, women would be given equal rights overnight; however, due to the advent of Islam, a giant leap was taken toward the goal of equality. Since then, though, time has stood still, and Muslim women have not made much progress. Muslim men in general and some ignorant mullahs have been the biggest obstacles in advancing the rights of Muslim women. They fear the loss of the privileged position they enjoy. Many Muslim men to this day believe in controlling all aspect of their

women's lives. Men will lose that control if women are not financially dependent upon them.

For personal gains, they are willing to sacrifice a universal principle that all men and women are created equal and, therefore, should have equal rights. Nevertheless, Islamic reforms improved the status of women enormously.

Domestic Violence

And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy which God has [ordained to be] guarded. And as for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then part with them; and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. Behold, God is indeed most high, great! (4:34)

In this context, a wife's ill will implies a deliberate, persistent breach of her marital obligations, such as being guilty of lewd or indecent behavior. In this verse, the Arabic *daraba* is translated as "part with them." This word has many uses, varying from "tap" to "walk in stride" to "strike at something" to "set a clear example," to "have intercourse," and many others. *Daraba* also means indignation and disregard or "parting and separation," which is consistent with the context of the verse. Some translators of this verse, all men, have used the word "beat" or "hit" or even "scourge" to represent the word "daraba."

Right to Divorce

The Quran gave women the legal right to divorce. Most Western women had nothing comparable until the nineteenth century. The pre-Islamic Arabian custom was extraordinarily lax when it came to both marriage and divorce. In Bedouin societies, both men and women practiced polygamy, and the concept of traditional marriage was not the norm. On one hand, Muhammad clearly accepted polygyny (within limits) as necessary for the survival of the Ummah, especially after war with the Quraysh resulted in hundreds of

widows and orphans who had to be provided for and protected by the community.

And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among [other] women such as are lawful to you—[even] two, or three, or four: but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then [only] one. (4:3)

On the other hand, the Quran makes it clear that monogamy is the preferred model of marriage.

And it will not be within your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire it; and so, do not allow yourselves to incline towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her in a state, as it were, of having and not having a husband. But if you put things to rights and are conscious of Him—behold, God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (4:129)

Marriages of Muhammad

After having lived a monogamous life with Khadija for more than twenty-five years, Muhammad, in the course of ten years in Yathrib, married nine different women. The most shocking aspect of Muhammad's marriages is not his ten years of polygamy in Yathrib, but his twenty-five years of monogamy in Mecca, something practically unheard of at the time.

With very few exceptions, the later marriages were not sexual unions but political ones. This is not to say that Muhammad was uninterested in sex; on the contrary, the traditions present him as a man with a robust and healthy libido. But as Shaykh of the Ummah, it was Muhammad's responsibility to forge links within and beyond his community through the only means at his disposal: marriage. Thus, his unions with Aishah and Hafsa linked him to the two most important and influential leaders of the early Muslim community, Abu Bakr and Umar. His marriage to Umm Salamah a year later cemented an important relationship with one of Mecca's most powerful

clans, the Makhzum. His union with Sawdah—by all accounts an unattractive widow long past the age of marriage—served as an example to the Ummah to marry those women in need of financial support. Her husband had died from wounds suffered in the battle of Badr. His marriage to Rayhana, a Jew, linked him with the Banu Qurayza, while his marriage to Mariyah, a Christian and a Copt, created a significant political alliance with the ruler of Egypt. Muhammad's union with a nine-year-old girl may be shocking to our modern sensibilities, but his betrothal to Aishah was just that: a betrothal. Aishah did not consummate her marriage to Muhammad until after reaching puberty, which is when every girl in Arabia became eligible for marriage.

The Tradition of Veiling

The tradition of veiling and seclusion (known together as hijab) was introduced into Arabia long before Muhammad, primarily through Arab contacts with Syria and Iran, where the hijab was a sign of higher social status. After all, only a woman who need not work in the fields could afford to remain secluded and veiled. In the Ummah, there was no tradition of veiling until around 627 C.E., when the “verse of hijab” was revealed, that was addressed not to women in general, but exclusively to Muhammad's wives.

O YOU who have attained to faith! Do not enter the Prophet's dwellings unless you are given leave; [and when invited] to a meal, do not come [so early as] to wait for it to be readied: but whenever you are invited, enter [at the proper time]; and when you have partaken of the meal, disperse without lingering for the sake of mere talk: that, behold, might give offence to the Prophet, and yet he might feel shy of [asking] you [to leave]: but God is not shy of [teaching you] what is right. And [as for the Prophet's wives,] whenever you ask them for anything that you need, ask them from behind a screen: this will but deepen the purity of your hearts and theirs. (33:53)

This restriction makes perfect sense when one recalls that Muhammad's house was also the community's mosque, the center of religious and social life in the Ummah. People were constantly coming in and out of this compound at all hours of the day. When delegations from other tribes came to speak with Muhammad, they would set up their tents for days at a time inside the open courtyard, just a few feet away from the apartments in which Muhammad's wives slept. And new emigrants who arrived in Yathrib would often stay within the mosque's walls until they could find suitable homes.

When Muhammad was little more than a tribal Shaykh, this constant commotion could be tolerated. But by the year 627, when he had become the supremely powerful leader of an increasingly expanding community, some kind of segregation had to be enforced to maintain the inviolability of his wives. Thus came about the tradition, borrowed from the upper classes of Iranian and Syrian women, of veiling and secluding the most important women in society from the peering eyes of everyone else. That the veil applied solely to Muhammad's wives is further demonstrated by the fact that the term for donning the veil, *darabat al-hijab*, was used synonymously and interchangeably with "becoming Muhammad's wife." For this reason, during the Prophet's lifetime, no other women in the Ummah observed hijab. In the most sacred of all places during Hajj, women are not allowed to cover their faces.

Modesty for All

TELL the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity: this will be most conducive to their purity—[and,] verily, God is aware of all that they do. (24:30)

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof; hence, let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms. (24:31) O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters, as well as all (other) believing women, that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments [when in public]:

this will be more conducive to their being recognized [as decent women] and not annoyed. But [withal,] God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! (33:59)

Of course, modesty was enjoined on all believers, and women in particular were instructed to draw their clothes to cover their breasts when in the presence of strange men. Otherwise modest dress code for women is a vague term to accommodate various cultural differences.

—Reza Aslan, *No god but God*

The treatment of women in some Muslim countries is not mandated by the Quran. Freedom of movement is not the monopoly of Muslim men. The Prophet said, “O women! You have been allowed by God to go out for your needs.” Muslim women can work outside the home to earn a living. There is no mention of mandatory male relative escort. Women not allowed to drive is a cultural phenomenon and has nothing to do with Islam. Protecting women is one thing, imprisoning them is another. It is not Islam but social customs and regional cultures that are responsible for their inferior status today. What would Prophet Muhammad do if he were alive today? He probably would grant equal rights to women.

Homosexuality

The story of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah in the Quran is similar to the Old Testament version. The supernatural punishment meted out to the people of Lot was in part due to their attempt to force sex and commit rape upon the angels visiting Lot.

There is still controversy about whether homosexuality is innate or a choice (nature versus nurture) or a combination of the two. Perhaps that is the reason the Quran condemned homosexuality as a sin but did not ordain any punishment for it. If homosexuality is inborn, then why should it be considered a sin? According to the Quranic doctrine of morality, sex is not a right but a privilege, which individuals attain to have family and children within the confines of marriage. There is no possibility of biological children

from a homosexual union. On the other hand, heterosexual sex outside marriage is punishable by one hundred stripes, for the reason that children born to single mothers, with some exceptions, are condemned to poverty. The penalty of stoning is not mentioned in the Quran for any offence. The draconian laws against homosexuality in some Islamic countries are man-made.

Part 7: Islamic History

21

The Mecca Period

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF the ancient history of Arabia is derived chiefly from the Quran, which contains much of the old folklore of the country. Arab historians of the eighth and the succeeding centuries collected these traditions with great care.

Geography

Arabia is a peninsula about twice the size of France, bounded in the north by the Syrian desert, on the east by the Persian Gulf, on the south by the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea, and on the west by the Red Sea. It includes the present-day countries of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.

The *Hijaz* proper, the seminal area for Islam, contains the famous cities of Medina and Mecca and the port of Jeddah. Eastward of the gaunt and arid Hijaz lies the oasis of Taif, covered with vegetation and shady trees, where all kinds of fruits grow. The natural isolation of the peninsula combined with its size serves as a barrier and protection against foreign invasions.

The Origin of Arabs

Old Testament genealogies rank Hebrews, Aramaeans, and Arabs among the descendants of Shem, from whose name we take the term Semitic. The Arabs descended from two bloodlines, one originating in the south (Sabaeans), while the second or northern group was descended from Ishmael, the older son of Abraham. Because the old Arabs recognized kinsman according to descent in the male line only and ignored the mother's ethnic origin, race is an obsolete element in the definition of Arab. Therefore, white Syrians and black Sudanese are among the heterogeneous Arabs.

The Sabaeans

The original Arabs or true Semites were descendants of Eber; their primary cradle was Babylon or Iraq, from the Euphrates River banks. In migration southward, eventually they concentrated in Yemen.

The Bedouins

Dwellers of the desert, Bedouins live in tents and, with their families and flocks, roam the desert in search of pasture. The social organization of Bedouin societies centered on an extended family. A grouping of related families comprised a clan. A cluster of several clans constituted a tribe. Tribes were led by a chief (sheikh) selected by a consensus of his peers, the heads of leading clans or families. These tribal elders formed an advisory council within which the sheikh exercised his leadership and authority, resembling a primitive parliamentary system. Bedouins looked down on settled societies. They considered farmers, merchants, tradesmen, and even kings as slaves to backbreaking toil, monotonous or devious trade, or a rigid legal code.

Gift of Language

In words as in action, Arabs tend to be somewhat reserved people, but eloquent, gifted when they speak. They held poetry contests before the time of Muhammad. In the south of Arabia, poets sang for prizes at yearly fairs.

Code of Conduct

The moral code of pre-Islamic Arabia has been aptly termed tribal humanism, a way of life whose origin was not ascribed to God but was the product of tribal experience and tradition. It was epitomized by its key virtue, manliness, which emphasized bravery in battle, loyalty to family and protection of its members, hospitality, patience, and persistence—in sum, the preservation of tribal and family honor. The libertarian code of the desert was life for life, eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. The manly business of the Arab was to raid the flocks of enemy tribes. Intertribal warfare was a long-held tradition whose goal was to weaken and eventually absorb other tribes by reducing them to dependency. The Arabs placed great emphasis on tribal ties and group loyalty as the source of power for a clan or a tribe. The

celebrated rugged individualism of the Bedouin Arab ethos was counterbalanced by subordination to tribal authority and customs. Tribal affiliation was the basis not only for identity but also for protection. The threat of family or group vendetta, the law of retaliation, was vital in a society lacking a central political authority or law.

Events Surrounding the Birth of Muhammad

In 570 CE, Muhammad was born in the prosperous metropolis of Mecca. Muhammad is the most common masculine name in the Islamic world. It means “highly praised.” The family name bestowed on him was Abulqasim Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim (*ibn* means son of). At the time of Muhammad’s birth, his grandfather Abd al Muttalib was the custodian of the Kabah. Abd al Muttalib had several sons, and those listed below played a significant role, either positive or negative, in the history of Islam.

Abu Talib ibn Abd al-Muttalib was the leader of Banu Hashim clan and a fatherly figure to Muhammad. While he was alive, he provided full protection when the new Prophet was very vulnerable. He was also father of Ali ibn Talib, one of the greatest fighters in the history of Islam.

Al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib was just three years older than his nephew Muhammad. During the early years of Islam, Al-Abbas, a wealthy merchant, protected Muhammad while he was in Mecca. He was also the progenitor of the Abbasid caliphs.

Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib was an uncle and a companion to Prophet Muhammad. Hamza was skilled in wrestling, archery, and warfare. Hamza and Ali were the two champions of the first battle of Badr, and their contribution in the survival of Islam was invaluable. Hamza was martyred in the second battle of Uhud.

Abu Lahab, uncle, is referred to in the Quran as a persecutor of Muslims. His real name was **Abd al-Uzza ibn Abd al-Muttalib**. He was one of the polytheist pagan Quraysh leaders and a great enemy of his nephew Muhammad.

Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib, father of the Prophet Muhammad, was the youngest son of Abd al Muttalib. Abdullah died before Muhammad was born. He was married to Aminah bint Wahb, and Muhammad was their only child.

The Tribe of Quraysh

The tribe of Quraysh, into which Muhammad was born, are direct descendants of Ishmael. Nearly all the Mecca inhabitants belonged to the tribe of Quraysh, which was subdivided into various clans.

Banu (sons of) Umayyah

The most powerful clan was the Umayyads, or Banu Umayyah, a clan of the larger Quraysh tribe, which dominated Meccan society. The Umayyad clan was custodian of the Kabah and the Zemzem, controllers of the caravan trade, and oligarchic masters of the city. Banu Umayyah dominated the trans-Arabian trade networks, organizing caravans to Syria in the north and Yemen in the south. They were the major source of opposition to the Prophet Muhammad, who belonged to the **Banu Hashim** (sons of Hashim), a poorer clan of the Quraysh.

Importance of Mecca

Thomas Carlyle in his essay “The Hero as Prophet” described the prevailing conditions of Mecca before Islam.

It had been from the sacredness attached to this Caabah Stone and Hagar’s Well, from the pilgrimings of all tribes of Arabs thither, that Mecca took its rise as a Town. A great town once, though much decayed now. It has no natural advantage for a town; stands in a sandy hollow amid bare barren hills, at a distance from the sea; its provisions, its very bread, have to be imported. But so many pilgrims needed lodgings: and then all places of pilgrimage do, from the first, become places of trade. The first day pilgrims meet, merchants have also met: where men see themselves assembled for one object, they find that they can accomplish other objects which depend on meeting together. Mecca became the Fair of all Arabia.

Larger Political Struggles

Mecca's external politics was dominated by the titanic struggle between the two superpowers of that time, the Byzantine and Persian empires. As well, in the southwestern part of Arabia, today approximately corresponding with Yemen, the local population converted to Judaism in the late fourth century. After five centuries of evangelization, Christianity had managed to gain a foothold in outlying areas. In the early sixth century, the king of Yemen systematically spread Judaism in the south, resulting in the famous massacre of the Christians of Najran. In A.D. 520, two decades before Muhammad's birth, an expedition of Ethiopian Christians, with the blessing of Byzantine Christians, destroyed the last king of Yemen.

An Ethiopian soldier of fortune by the name of Abraha successfully revolted and became Yemen's viceroy. He erected a great cathedral at Sana, now the capital of Yemen. He hoped to divert the annual Arabian pilgrimage from the Meccan Kabah to his new church. When this hope remained unfulfilled, he determined to destroy the Kabah. He set out against Mecca at the head of a large army, which included many war elephants, something hitherto unknown and utterly astounding to the Arabs, hence the designation of that year, by contemporaries as well as later historians, as "the Year of the Elephant." This event is recorded in the Quran in the hundred-fifth surah. That same year, Muhammad was born in Mecca.

Tragic Childhood

Muhammad's childhood was cradled in tragedy. Almost at his birth, he lost his father, Abdullah, who died at twenty-five. A few days after his death, Amina gave birth to Muhammad. When Muhammad was six years old, he lost his mother, a woman noted for her beauty, worth, and sense. He fell under the charge of his grandfather Abd al Muttalib, a hundred years old. Muhammad's father, Abdullah, was Abd's youngest and favorite son. He saw in Muhammad, with his old, life-worn eyes, the lost Abdullah come back again. He greatly loved the little orphan boy and used to say that they must take care of that beautiful little boy; nothing in their kindred was more precious than he.

Death of Grandfather

When Muhammad was nine years old, his grandfather died and left his young grandson under the charge of the eldest of the uncles, Abu Talib, a man of little means but many mouths to feed. Muhammad spent his early years in poverty as a shepherd boy in the mountainous uplands near Mecca and became accustomed to the rigors of a nomadic existence. His bereavements made him sensitive to human suffering, and he was always ready to help others, especially the poor and the weak. His difficult childhood as an orphan deeply affected Muhammad, and later even the Quran had to console the Prophet.

Thy Sustainer has not forsaken thee, nor does He scorn thee: for, indeed, the life to come will be better for thee than this earlier part [of your life]! And, indeed, in time will thy Sustainer grant thee [what thy heart desires], and thou shalt be well pleased. (93:1-11)

Journey to Foreign Lands

As a boy, he traveled twice to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib. Carlyle described Muhammad's journeys to the fairs of Syria in the following words:

The young man here first came in contact with a quite foreign world, —with one foreign element of endless moment to him: the Christian Religion. I know not what to make of that “Sergius, the Nestorian Monk,” whom Abu Thaleb and he are said to have lodged with; or how much any monk could have taught one still so young. Probably enough it is greatly exaggerated, this of the Nestorian Monk. Mahomet was only fourteen; had no language but his own: much in Syria must have been a strange unintelligible whirlpool to him. But the eyes of the lad were open; glimpses of many things would doubtless be taken in, and lie very enigmatic as yet, which were to ripen in a strange way into views, into beliefs and insights one day. These journeys to Syria were probably the beginning of much to Mahomet.

Education

Muhammad never had a formal education and did not know how to read or write. The art of writing was but just introduced into Arabia. Life in the desert, with its experiences, was all his education. He was very much familiar with Judaism and Christianity because of his travel with caravan business.

Al-Amin

From an early age, he had been remarked as a thoughtful man. His companions named him Al-Amin, the faithful. A man of truth and fidelity; true in what he did, in what he spoke and thought. They noted that he always meant something. Silent when there was nothing to be said, but pertinent, wise, and sincere when he did speak, always throwing light on the matter.

Rebuilding of the Kabah

During the rebuilding of the Kabah, which had been destroyed during a flood, a dispute broke out among various clans as to who would have the honor of placing the black stone in its place. Muhammad mediated the dispute successfully and averted bloodshed.

Love Marriage to Khadijah and Prosperous Adult Life

At twenty-five years of age, he took up the caravan business and entered the service of a wealthy widow named Khadijah. She was twice widowed and had turned down several Quraysh noblemen. Muhammad made a trip to Syria as an employee of Khadijah, and through his adeptness, loyalty, and hard work, he made a success of it. Khadijah was so impressed by Muhammad's prudence and integrity that she sent her sister to Muhammad with a marriage proposal. Khadijah was forty (in another tradition, her age is mentioned as twenty-seven), and Muhammad was only twenty-five years old. This truly was a love marriage for Muhammad, and he did not take another wife until after the death of his beloved Khadijah. The match proved happy in every respect. They had several children; all the sons died in infancy, but the daughters lived to see the great events of their father's life. The youngest, Fatima, later married Ali, son of Abu Talib.

Until middle age, Muhammad led a very private, peaceful, and prosperous life. However, he did not completely withdraw from the public

life of Mecca. He revived the league that had been formed many years earlier to protect widows, orphans, and helpless strangers. Yet, despite his concern for others, he remained removed from them in outlook and ways, isolated in the midst of an effete and chaotic society. During the long periods that lay ahead in which the world was to turn desolate before Muhammad's eyes and no one was to believe in him, not even himself, Khadijah remained steadfast at his side, consoling him and keeping alive a thin flame of hope.

Long afterward, Ayesha, his young favorite wife asked, "Now am not I better than Khadijah? She was a widow, old, and had lost her looks. You love me better than you did her?"

"No, by Allah," he said. "She believed in me when no one else would. In the whole world, I had but one friend, and she was that."

Quest for the Ultimate Truth

The following is Carlyle's words describing Muhammad's dilemmas and the quest for the ultimate truth:

Ah no: this deep-hearted Son of the Wilderness, with his beaming black eyes and open social deep soul, had other thoughts in him than ambition. A silent great soul; he was one of those who cannot *but* be in earnest; whom Nature herself has appointed to be sincere. While others walk in formulas and hearsays, contented enough to dwell there, this man could not screen himself in formulas; he was alone with his own soul and the reality of things. The great Mystery of Existence, as I said, glared in upon him, with its terrors, with its splendors; no hearsays could hide that unspeakable fact, "Here am I!" Such *sincerity*, as we named it, has in very truth something of divine. The word of such a man is a Voice direct from Nature's own Heart. Men do and must listen to that as to nothing else; —all else is wind in comparison. From of old, a thousand thoughts, in his pilgrimings and wanderings, had been in this man: What am I? What is this unfathomable Thing I live in, which men name Universe? What is Life; what is Death? What am I to believe? What am I to do? The grim rocks of Mount Hara, of Mount Sinai, the stern sandy solitudes answered not. The great Heaven rolling

silent overhead, with its blue-glancing stars, answered not. There was no answer. The man's own soul, and what of God's inspiration dwelt there, had to answer! It is the thing which all men have to ask themselves; which we too have to ask, and answer. This wild man felt it to be of *infinite* moment; all other things of no moment whatever in comparison. The jargon of argumentative Greek Sects, vague traditions of Jews, the stupid routine of Arab Idolatry: there was no answer in these. A Hero, as I repeat, has this first distinction, which indeed we may call first and last, the Alpha and Omega of his whole Heroism, That he looks through the shows of things into *things*. Use and wont, respectable hearsay, respectable formula: all these are good, or are not good. There is something behind and beyond all these, which all these must correspond with, be the image of, or they are—*Idolatries*; “bits of black wood pretending to be God;” to the earnest soul a mockery and abomination. Idolatries never so gilded, waited on by heads of the Koreish, will do nothing for this man.

[Chapter 1](#) of this book relates the upheaval to Muhammad's life at about the age of forty with the beginning of the ongoing revelation. He now had a calling, a responsibility to impart its message to Mecca, Arabia, and the world. And it would immediately put him at odds with centuries of Arab traditions and the rich and powerful elite of Mecca.

The Mission of The Prophet

Forbidden to Worship Idols

SAY [to the deniers of the truth]: “Behold, I have been forbidden to worship those [beings] whom you invoke instead of God.”

Say: “I do not follow your errant views—or else I should have gone astray, and should not be among those who have

found the right path.” Say: “He is my Sustainer. There is no deity save Him. In Him have I placed my trust, and unto Him is my recourse!” (6:56)

The uncompromising monotheism of Islam threatened the considerable revenue coming to Mecca from pilgrimages to the Kabah with its three hundred sixty shrines (one for every day of the lunar year). Acceptance of the new doctrine would eliminate all other deities and idols from the city, hence the pilgrims, trade, and money they brought in.

Rights of the Poor

The social content of the new message was dynamite to an effete and unjust economic order. In a society driven by class distinction, the new Prophet was preaching an intensely democratic message, insisting that in the sight of his Lord, all men are equal. At the core of his teaching was that the community must be responsible for those who were considered outcasts and could not take care of themselves. The concepts of the welfare state were developed and implemented later when the first-ever Islamic nation was established at Medina.

Immorality

The moral teachings of this new religion demanded an end to the licentiousness which citizens were disinclined to give up.

Muhammad Apostle for Community of Unbelievers

Thus have We raised thee [O Muhammad] as Our Apostle amidst a community [of unbelievers] before whose time [similar] communities have come and gone, so that thou might propound to them what We have revealed unto thee: for [in their ignorance] they deny the Most Gracious! Say: “He is my Sustainer. There is no deity save Him. In Him have I placed my trust, and unto Him is my recourse!” Yet even if [they should listen to] a [divine] discourse by which mountains could be moved, or the earth cleft asunder, or the

dead made to speak—[they who are bent on denying the truth would still refuse to believe in it]! Nay, but God alone has the power to decide what shall be. (13:30-32)

The term *quran* whenever it appears without the definite article *al* (the), denotes a solemn recital or, as above, “discourse” (just as the word *bible* originally meant “book”). Those who deliberately reject the messages now will have no excuse on resurrection day when they come to know the truth.

And yet, some people worship, instead of God, things that can neither benefit them nor harm them. Thus, he who denies the truth does indeed turn his back on his Sustainer! Yet [withal, O Prophet,] We have sent you only as a herald of glad tidings and a warner. Say: “For this, no reward do I ask of you [no reward] other than that he who so wills may unto his Sustainer find a way!” Hence, place thy trust in the Living One who dies not, and extol His limitless glory and praise: for none is as aware as His creatures’ sins as He. (25:55-58)

God and Angels Proffer Muhammad Apostle of God

However it be, God [Himself] bears witness to the truth of what He has bestowed from on high upon thee: out of His own wisdom has he bestowed it from on high, with the angels bearing witness thereto—although none can bear witness as God does. O mankind! The Apostle has now come unto you with the truth from your Sustainer: believe, then, for your own good! And if you deny the truth—behold, unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth, and God is indeed all-knowing, wise! (4:166 and 170)

If You Love God Follow Me

Say [O Prophet]: “If you love God, follow me, [and] God will love you and forgive you your sins; for God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.” Say: “Pay heed unto God and the Apostle.” And if they turn away, God does not love those who deny the truth. (3:31-32)

Say: “I invoke my Sustainer alone, for I do not ascribe divinity to anyone beside Him.” Say: “Verily, it is not in my power to cause you harm or to endow you with consciousness of what is right.” Say: “Verily, No one could ever protect me from God, nor could I ever find a place to hide from Him if I should fail to convey [to the world whatever illumination comes to me] from God and His messages. Now as for him who rebels against God and His Apostle—the fire of hell awaits him, therein to abide beyond the count of time. [Let them, then, wait] until the time when that [doom] of which they were forewarned: [The Day of Judgment.] for then they will come to understand which [kind of man] is more helpless and counts for less!” Say: “I do not know whether that [doom] of which you were forewarned is near, or whether my Sustainer has set for it a distant term. He [alone] knows what is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception, and to none does He disclose any of the mysteries of His Own unfathomable knowledge, unless it be to an apostle whom He has been pleased to elect [therefor]. And then He sends forth [the forces of heaven] to watch over him in whatever lies open before him and in what is beyond his ken—to make manifest that it is indeed [but] their Sustainer’s messages these [apostles] deliver. For it is He who encompasses [with His knowledge] all that they have [to say], just as He takes count, one by one, of everything [that exists]” (72:20-28).

Only God has exclusive knowledge of “that which is beyond the perception of any created being” (al-ghayb), and it is not God’s will to give you insight

into it. Instead, God elects whomever He wills from among His apostles. The fact of being graced by divine revelation protects every apostle spiritually whether these concerns are obvious to him or beyond his ken.

Early Converts

For the first three years, the prophet spoke only to a small, intimate group of family and friends who knew him best and were convinced of the truth of his mission. His wife Khadijah was the first convert. The first adult male who became a convert to the new faith was Zayd, adopted son of Muhammad.

Then, a leading member of the Quraysh, Abu Bakr, who afterward became famous as the first caliph, joined the group. He was a wealthy merchant, prudent, honest, and amiable, and enjoyed great consideration among his compatriots. He was only two years younger than the prophet, and his unhesitating adoption of new faith carried great moral effect. Five notables followed in his footsteps, among them Uthman ibn Affan, who later became the third caliph; Abd al Rahman; Sad ibn Abu Waqqas, afterward conqueror of Persia; and al Zubayr ibn al Awwam, nephew of Khadijah. When Muhammad's uncle Hamza, a skilled warrior, became a Muslim, the Quraysh recognized that the Prophet had found a protector and so they abandoned some of their ways of harassing him.

The new faith then gained another valuable adherent, who would later be the second caliph and perhaps one of the great administrators in the history of Islam. Umar ibn Al Khattab was an expert in Arabian poetry, and the first time he heard the words of the Quran he was overcome by its extraordinary eloquence. "When I heard the Quran my heart was softened, and I wept, and Islam entered into me."

Proselytization (Going Public)

Three years elapsed from the time the apostle initially spoke of his revelation only to a small group when God commanded him to publish His religion openly and to declare the truth to men, beginning with his tribe.

And warn [whomever thou canst reach, beginning with] thy kinsfolk, and spread the wings of your tenderness over all of the believers who may follow thee; but if they disobey thee,

say, “I am free of responsibility for aught that you may do!”—and place thy trust in the Almighty, the Dispenser of Grace, who sees thee when thou standest [alone], and [sees] your behavior, among those who prostrate themselves [before Him]: for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing! (26:214-220)

“All the believers who follow you” shows that the above passage is addressed to not only the Prophet but everyone who chooses to be guided by the Quran, who is herewith called upon to extend his loving kindness and care to all believers.

Hence, proclaim openly all that thou hast been bidden [to say], and leave alone all those who ascribe divinity to aught besides God. Verily, We shall suffice you against all who [now] deride [this message—all] who assert that there are, side by side with God, other divine powers as well: for in time they will come to know [the truth]. And well do We know that thy bosom is constricted by the [blasphemous] things that they say: but extol thou, thy Sustainer’s limitless glory and praise Him, and be of those who prostrate themselves [before Him] in adoration, and worship, thy Sustainer until death comes to thee. (15:94-99)

Warn the Foremost of All Cities and All Humankind

NOW AS FOR those who take aught beside Him for their protectors—God watches them, and thou are not responsible for their conduct. [Thou art but entrusted with Our message:] and so We have revealed unto thee a discourse in the Arabic tongue in order that thou mayest warn the foremost of all cities (Mecca) and all who dwell around it (all mankind)—to wit, warn [them] of the Day of the Gathering, [the coming of] which is beyond all doubt: [the

Day when] some shall find themselves in paradise, and some in the blazing flame. (42:6-7)

Gathering for Banquet

In order to proclaim the message of Islam publicly, the Prophet invited all the important men of Mecca, including forty of his chief kindred, to a banquet at his home, and there stood up and told them of his revelation. He told them that he must promulgate it abroad to all men, that it was the highest possible importance. And he asked which of them would second him in that. Amid the doubt and silence of all, young Ali, lad of sixteen, impatient of the silence, exclaimed in passionate fierce language that he would. The assembly, among whom was Abu Talib, Ali's father, could not be unfriendly to Muhammad. Yet at the sight of one unlettered elderly man and a lad of sixteen deciding on such an enterprise regarding all mankind, the assembly burst out laughing.

Contempt for Poor Muslim Converts

Some pagan Meccan chieftains expressed willingness to consider accepting Islam on the condition that the Prophet dissociate himself from the former slaves and other downtrodden persons among his followers, most of whom, including significant numbers of women, came from the poorest, lowliest strata of Meccan society. The Prophet rejected the demand.

But they who are bent on denying the truth speak thus of those who have attained to faith: "If this [message] were any good, these [people] would not have preceded us in accepting it!" And since they refuse to be guided by it, they will always say, "This is [but] an ancient falsehood!" (46:11)

Hence, repulse not [any of] those who at morn and evening invoke their Sustainer, seeking His countenance. Thou art in no wise accountable for them—just as they are in no wise responsible for thee—and thou hast therefore, no right to repulse them: for then thou wouldst be among the evildoers. (6:52)

This passage relates to people whose beliefs or actions do not coincide with the teachings of the Quran. While not being Muslims in the current sense of this word, they believe in God and are always at morn and evening seeking His countenance (i.e., His grace and acceptance). Followers of the Quran are enjoined not to repulse anyone who believes in God even if his beliefs may not fully answer to the demands of the Quran. Instead, try to help him by patient explanation of the Quranic teachings.

Frowned and Turned Away

HE FROWNED and turned away because the blind man approached him! Yet for all thou did know, [O Muhammad,] he might perhaps have grown in purity, or have been reminded [of the truth], and helped by this reminder. Now as for him who believes himself to be self-sufficient, to him, didst thou give thy whole attention, although thou art not accountable for his failure to attain to purity; but as for him who came unto thee full of eagerness and in awe [of God]—him didst thou disregard! (80:1-10)

Many times in the Quran, God admonished Muhammad for erring. Revealed at a very early stage of the Prophet's mission, the immediate cause of this revelation was an incident witnessed by a number of the Prophet's contemporaries. One day he was engrossed in conversation with some of the most influential chieftains of pagan Mecca, hoping to convince them—and, through them, the Meccan community at large—of the truth of his message. At that point, he was approached by one of his followers, the blind Abd Allah ibn Shurayh, with the request for a repetition or elucidation of some earlier passages of the Quran. Annoyed by this interruption of what he momentarily regarded as a more important endeavor, Muhammad “frowned and turned away” from the blind man—and was immediately, there and then, reproved by the revelation of the first ten verses of this surah. In later years, he often greeted Abd Allah with, “Welcome unto him on whose account my Sustainer has rebuked me.”

The sharp Quranic rebuke using the third-person form (“he,” “him”) in verses 1–2 implies that what would have been a minor act of discourtesy on

the part of an ordinary human being, when committed by a prophet, assumed the aspect of a major sin deserving a divine rebuke. Those who believe themselves not in need of divine guidance refers to the arrogant pagan chieftains with whom the Prophet was conversing.

Limits of Proselytization

The Prophet spoke of his doctrine to this man and that, and most treated it with ridicule or indifference. At first, the odds were so heavily against him that he made few converts; three long years of heart-breaking effort yielded less than forty. His resolve to go on was heroic. Slowly but steadily, men of energy, talent, and worth became convinced of the truth of his message, until by the end of a decade several hundred families were acclaiming him as God's authentic spokesman. Yet opposition to Muhammad was still formidable.

Failure to Convert Abu Talib

Once Abu Talib, the father of Ali, was surprised to find Muhammad, Khadijah, and Ali in attitudes of prayer, and he said to Muhammad, "O son of my brother, what is this religion you're following?"

"It is God's religion, of his angels, of his prophets, and of our ancestor Abraham. God has sent me to his servants to direct them towards the truth. And you, O my uncle, is the most worthy of all. I should thus call upon you to accept the truth and help in spreading it."

"I cannot abjure the religion of my fathers," Abu Talib said, "but by the Supreme God, while I am alive, none shall dare to injure you."

VERILY, thou canst not guide aright everyone whom thee love: but it is God who guides him that wills [to be guided]; and He is fully aware of all who would let themselves be guided. Now some say, "If we were to follow the guidance to which thou invitest us, we would be torn away from our very soil!" Why have We not established for them a sanctuary secure, to which, as a provision from Us, shall be gathered the fruits of all [good] things? But most of them are unaware [of this truth]. (28:56-57)

According to several well-authenticated Traditions, the above verse relates to the Prophet's inability to induce his dying Uncle Abu Talib to renounce the pagan beliefs of his ancestors and to profess faith in God's oneness. Abu Talib had loved and protected the Prophet throughout his life. Influenced by Abu Jahl and other Meccan chieftains, Abu Talib died professing, in his own words, "the creed of Abd al-Muttalib" or, according to another version, "the creed of my ancestors." Indeed, "You cannot guide aright everyone whom you love."

"Torn away from our soil" echoes an objection voiced by many pagan Meccans to Muhammad's preaching. "If we were to accept your call, most of the other tribes would regard it as a betrayal of our common ancestral beliefs and would drive us away from our land and cause a total breach between our community and us and thus cut the ground from under our feet." The Quranic answer to this fear is expressed in Abraham's prayer that the land around the Kabah be made secure for all times. The "sanctuary secure" is God's promise that all who have faith in Him and are conscious of their responsibility to Him shall be graced with a sense of inner peace in this world and with enduring bliss in the life to come.

Faith and Self-Accountability

And there are among them such as will in time come to believe in this [divine writ], just as there are among them such as will never believe in it; and thy Sustainer is fully aware as to who are the spreaders of corruption. And [so, O Prophet,] if they give you the lie, say: "To me [shall be accounted] my doings, and to you, your doings: you are not responsible for what I am doing, and I am not accountable for whatever you do." (10:40-41)

Deaf and Blind of Hearts

And there are among them such as [pretend to] listen to thee: but canst thou cause the deaf to hearken even though they will not use their reason? And there are among them

such as [pretend to] look towards thee: but canst thou show the right way to the blind even though they cannot see? Verily, God does not do the least wrong to men, but it is men who wrong themselves. (10:42-44)

Aversion to God's Message

Well do We know that what such people say grieves thee indeed: yet, behold, it is not thee to whom they give the lie, but God's messages do these evildoers deny. (6:33)

Nay, but it is My Own reminder that they distrust! Nay, they have not yet tasted the suffering, which I do impose! Or do they [think that they] own the treasures of thy Sustainer's grace [the grace] of the Almighty, the Giver of Gifts? Or [that] the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them is theirs? Why, then, let them try to ascend [to God-like power] by all [conceivable] means! (38:4-10)

It is not the personality of the Prophet that fills them with distrust, but, rather, the substance of the message proclaimed by him, the insistence on God's absolute oneness and uniqueness, which runs counter to their habits of thought and social traditions. Do they think that it is for them to decide as to who should and who should not be graced with divine revelation? Do they think that human beings are so highly endowed that they are bound to attain, someday, to mastery over the universe and all nature, and thus to godlike power?

Freedom of Religion

[SAY, O Muhammad:] "I have been bidden to worship the Sustainer of this City [Mecca]—Him who has made it sacred, and unto whom all things belong; and I have been

bidden to be of those who surrender themselves to Him, and to convey this Quran [to the world]. Whoever, therefore, chooses to follow the right path, follows it but for his own good; and if any wills to go astray, say [unto him]: “I am only a warner.” And say: “All praise is due to God! In time, He will make you see [the truth of] His messages, and then you shall know them [for what they are]. And thy Sustainer is not unmindful of whatever you all may do.” (27:91-93)

BUT IF they turn away [from you, O Prophet, know that] We have not sent thee to be their keeper: you are not bound to do more than deliver the message [entrusted to thee]. And behold, [such as turn away from Our messages are but impelled by the weakness and inconstancy of human nature: thus,] (42:48)

Behold, [O Muhammad], God can make hear whomever He wills, whereas you canst not make hear such as are [dead of heart like the dead] in their graves: thou art nothing but a warner. Verily, We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. (35:22-23)

Do Not Grieve if They Refuse to Heed You

So turn not thine eyes [longingly] towards the worldly benefits, which We have granted to some of those [that deny the truth]. And neither grieve over those [who refuse to heed thee] but spread the wings of your tenderness over the believers, and say: “Behold, I am indeed the plain warner [promised by God]!” (15:88-89)

In Carlyle’s words,

Out of all that rubbish of Arab idolatries, argumentative theologies, traditions, subtleties, rumors and hypotheses of Greeks and Jews, with their idle wire-drawings, this wild man of the Desert, with his wild sincere heart, earnest as death and life, with his great flashing natural eyesight, had seen into the kernel of the matter. Idolatry is nothing: these Wooden Idols of yours, “ye rub them with oil and wax, and the flies stick on them,”—these are wood, I tell you! They can do nothing for you; they are an impotent blasphemous presence; a horror and abomination, if ye knew them. God alone is; God alone has power; He made us, He can kill us and keep us alive: *Allah akbar*.

The polytheism of Arabia was on head-on collision with the pure monotheism of the Quran, and an epic struggle soon followed.

Verbal Abuse And Physical Persecution of Poor Muslims

Even with the limited success of the new message, the Meccan nobility was thoroughly alarmed. What had begun seemingly as a pretentious claim of being God’s prophet had turned into a serious revolutionary movement that was threatening their very existence. Abu Lahab and Abu Sufyan, leaders of Quraysh, began to feel the threat. They decided to begin by ridiculing Muhammad and belying his prophethood by instigating their poet friends to attack him in their poetry. He was possessed by jinn, said some; no, he was a false magician claimed others; a soothsayer made up other tales. They attacked the Prophet with mockery, sarcasm, and polemic. When these proved ineffective, their words took a fiercer turn into abuse, slander, vilification, and threat.

Attacking gods and idols of Mecca

The Prophet took the initiative of attacking the gods and idols of Mecca. Most Meccans naturally took great offense and resolved to treat the Prophet as an enemy and silence the fiery troublemaker forever. At last, the time came for the aristocracy of Mecca to engage in active persecution. The core of Muhammad’s opposition was his own uncle Abu Lahab, Abu Jahl, the Umayyad clan, and its chief Abu Sufyan.

The Meccans first turned to petty acts of harassment and covered Muhammad and his followers with dirt and filth while they were engaged in their devotions. The Meccan oligarchs could not persecute the Prophet because of protection provided by his uncle Abu Talib and the clan of Hashim.

Torture at the Hill of Ramdha and Batha

Because for now the Prophet was exempt from their attacks, the Quraysh decided upon an organized system of persecution of ordinary Muslims converts. In order not to violate their laws of vendetta, each family took upon itself the task of strangling the new religion within its own circle. Each household tortured its members, clients, and slaves who had converted to Islam. Many were thrown into prison, starved, beaten and some lost their lives.

A favorite form of torture was to expose them to the burning heat of the desert, where reduced by thirst they would be offered the alternative of adoring idols or death. The hill of Ramdha and a place called Batha became the scene of cruel torture. The case of Bilal, who was the first muezzin (one who calls the faithful to prayer from the mosque), is well documented. He was a black slave, and his master inflicted torture by exposure to the heat of sun when it was greatest. He was made to lie on his bare back with a large stone on his chest. He was given the choice between death or abjuring Islam. The slave refused to surrender. As he lay dying of thirst, his only word, which he kept repeating over and over, was “*ahadun, ahadun*” (“One [God], one”) until his master, seeing that he would never recant, sold him to Abu Bakr. His heroism was typical. Similarly, there were many other Muslims slaves both men and women who were rescued by Abu Bakr.

Abu Jahl, Oppressor of the Weak and Feeble

Abu Jahl was the member of the ruling Quraysh of Mecca and one of early Islam’s staunchest enemies. The name means “father of ignorance/savagery”; his real name was Amr ibn Hisham. He was killed in the Battle of Badr. Abu Jahl was a cousin of the Prophet’s father and therefore an indirect paternal uncle.

Abu Jahl played a major role in persecuting early Muslims, especially his slaves. Among them was Sumayya bint Khubbat. Abu Jahl tied her up in

the sun to force her to give up her faith in Islam. When she refused to comply, he killed her with a spear. Abu Jahl also tortured her husband and son to death. Abu Jahl beat Ḥarīthah bint al-Muammil, another one of his slaves who converted, to such an extent that she lost her eyesight.

Coercion in Religion by Abu Jahl

HAST THOU ever considered him who tries to prevent a servant [of God] from praying? Hast thou considered whether he is on the right way, or is concerned with God-consciousness? Hast thou considered whether he may [not] be giving the lie to the truth and turning his back [upon it]? Does he, then, not know that God sees [all]? Nay, if he desists not, We shall most surely drag him down upon his forehead—the lying, rebellious forehead! Let him summon [to his aid] the counsels of his own [spurious] wisdom, [the while] We shall summon the forces of heavenly chastisement! Nay, you pay no heed to him but prostrate thyself [before God] and draw close [unto Him]! (96:9-19)

The above passage is an allusion to Abu Jahl, the Prophet's bitterest opponent in Mecca, who persistently tried to prevent Muhammad and his followers from praying before the Kabah. Apart from its historical significance, the passage applies to all attempts, at all times, to deny freedom of religion (symbolized by the term "praying") its legitimate function in the shaping of social life. The phrase "Drag him by his forelock" is an ancient Arabian expression denoting a person's utter subjection and humiliation. "Counsels of his own [spurious] wisdom" may be a reference to the traditional council of elders in pagan Mecca but more probably to the arrogance that so often deludes man into regarding himself as self-sufficient.

Persecution of Believers

THEY DESTROY [but] themselves, they who would ready a pit of fire fiercely burning [for all who have attained to

faith]! Lo! [With glee do] they contemplate that [fire], fully conscious of what they are doing to the believers, whom they hate for no other reason than that they believe in God, the Almighty, the One to whom all praise is due, [and] to whom the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs. But God is witness unto everything! Verily, as for those who persecute believing men and believing women, and thereafter do not repent, hell's suffering awaits them: yea, suffering through fire awaits them! (85:4-10)

The anonymity of the evildoers in the above passage shows that it's a parable rather than a reference to historical or legendary events. The persecutors are faithless people who hate to see faith in others; the "pit of fire" is a metaphor for persecution, a phenomenon not restricted to any particular time or people but recurring in many forms throughout recorded history.

Overwhelming with a Crowd

And [know] that all worship is due to God [alone]: hence, do not invoke anyone side by side with God! Yet [thus it is] that whenever a servant of God stands up in prayer to Him, they [who are bent on denying the truth] would gladly overwhelm him with their crowds. (72:18-19)

"Would gladly overwhelm him with their crowds" refers to the Prophet Muhammad and the hostility shown to him by his pagan contemporaries, who used to surround him while he was praying in the Kabah in order to intimidate and overwhelm him. The passage also alludes to the hostility shown by the majority of people, at all times and in all societies, to a minority or an individual who stands up for a self-evident but unpopular moral truth.

Plan to Silence Muhammad Forever

Urging Abu Talib to Relinquish His Protection

Some of the leading men of Mecca met Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle, and urged him to stop his nephew from attacking their religion, blaspheming their gods, and condemning their forefathers for unbelief. They urged Abu Talib to either prevent Muhammad from preaching or relinquish his protection of him. They met Abu Talib three times and finally gave the ultimatum that either he stops his nephew, or they would fight them both. In Carlyle's words:

Mahomet naturally gave offence to the Koreish, Keepers of the Caabah, superintendents of the Idols. One or two men of influence had joined him: the thing spread slowly, but it was spreading. Naturally he gave offence to everybody: Who is this that pretends to be wiser than we all; that rebukes us all, as mere fools and worshippers of wood! Abu Thaleb the good Uncle spoke with him: Could he not be silent about all that; believe it all for himself, and not trouble others, anger the chief men, endanger himself and them all, talking of it? Mahomet answered: If the Sun stood on his right hand and the Moon on his left, ordering him to hold his peace, he could not obey! No: there was something in this Truth he had got which was of Nature herself; equal in rank to Sun, or Moon, or whatsoever thing Nature had made. It would speak itself there, so long as the Almighty allowed it, in spite of Sun and Moon, and all Koreish and all men and things. It must do that, and could do no other. Mahomet answered so; and, they say, "burst into tears." Burst into tears: he felt that Abu Thaleb was good to him; that the task he had got was no soft, but a stern and great one.

Abu Talib, Banu Hashim and Banu al Muttalib, they all pledged to protect Muhammad except for Abu Lahab. The tribal bond they shared with Muhammad and their traditional rivalry with Banu Umayyah (to which Abu Sufyan belonged) influenced their decision to stand by the Prophet.

Offer of Compromise

The pagan Quraysh offered a compromise. They demanded the Prophet give some sort of recognition to their tribal deities and attribute this recognition to God; in return, they promised to recognize him as a prophet and to make him

their leader. The Prophet rejected this offer, which would have meant going astray and leading his followers astray as well.

AND, behold, they [who have gone astray] endeavor to tempt you away from all [the truth] with which We have inspired thee, [O Prophet,] with a view to making thee invent something else in Our name—in which case they would surely have made you their friend! And had We not made thee firm [in faith], thou might have inclined to them a little—in which case, We would indeed have made thee taste double [chastisement] in life and double [chastisement] after death, and you would have found none to succor thee against Us! (17:73-75)

The passage goes beyond historical events and expresses the idea that any conscious offense against a fundamental truth is an unforgivable sin.

Temptation from Utbah ibn Rabiah

One day while Muhammad was sitting by himself in the Kabah, he was approached by Utbah ibn Rabiah, the father-in-law of Abu Sufyan and one of the leaders of the Quraysh. Utbah made several proposals to Muhammad. “You enjoy among us great eminence and noble lineage, and you have brought about important issues and divided our people. Listen to me, for I am about to make many proposals to you and certainly one of them will prove satisfactory to you. If by bringing up this conflict, you have sought to increase your wealth, know that we are prepared to give you of our wealth until you become the richest man among us. If on the other hand you desire power and honor, we would make you our chief and endow you with such power that nothing could be done without your consent. Finally, if you are unable to cure yourself of the visions that you have been seeing, we shall be happy to seek for you at our expense all the medical service possible until your health is restored.”

When he finished, the Prophet recited to him chapter 41 from the Quran from the beginning through the following verse:

Now among His signs are the night and the day, as well as the sun and the moon: [hence,] adore not the sun or the moon, but prostrate yourselves in adoration before God, who has created them—if it is Him whom you [really] worship. (41:37)

At this point, the Prophet prostrated himself as commanded. Then he raised his head and said, “This is my reply, and now you may act as you please.” Utbah returned to Quraysh spellbound by the beauty of what he had heard and gave his opinion to leave Muhammad alone.

The Quraysh, however, rejected his advice, intensified their attacks, and inflicted all sorts of injuries upon the companions of Prophet. What could all Arabia do for this man; with the crown of Greek Heraclius, of Persian Chosroes, and all crowns in the earth, what could they all do for him? It was not of the earth he wanted to hear; it was of Heaven above. All crowns and sovereignties, where would they in a few brief years be? To be sheikh of Mecca or Arabia and have a bit of gilt wood put into your hand, will that be one’s salvation?

Negotiation between the Prophet and the leaders of Quraysh

Islam began to spread in Mecca though the Quraysh were imprisoning and seducing as many of the Muslims as they could. The leader of every Quraysh clan, about twenty men, gathered together after sunset outside the Kabah. They decided to send for Muhammad and to negotiate and argue with him. When the Prophet came and sat down with them, they repeated the tempting offer. The Prophet replied that he didn’t seek money, honor, nor sovereignty, but God had sent him to be a warner and a preacher. He had brought them the messages of his Lord and gave them good advice. If they took it then they would have a portion in this world and the next. If they rejected it, he could only patiently wait until God decided between them. When the Meccan leaders failed to entice the Prophet away from Islam, they challenged him. How can an apostle be a man like us? They demanded he perform miracles, make God and angels appear, or bring God’s chastisement down upon them.

Economic and Social Boycott (616 CE)

Now both Hamza and Umar had joined the Prophet, some of the Prophet's companions had settled under the safety of Negus in Ethiopia, and Islam begun to spread among the tribes. The Quraysh came together and decided to boycott the Hashemites and the Muttalibites. This meant that nobody could sell them any food. They wrote it as an edict, which they hung in the middle of the Kabah.

Fearful that this might be the prelude to some other attack, the beleaguered families of Hashim and Muttalib abandoned their homes and joined Abu Talib. They gathered around the Prophet and protected him from attack by the Quraysh, who, when they saw that they could not get at him, mocked and laughed at him.

In their isolation, however, the Muslims suffered all kinds of privations; often they could not find enough food to satisfy their hunger. The provisions they carried with them were soon exhausted, and the cries of the starving children could be heard outside. Hisham ibn Amr was the most compassionate to the Muslims in their tragedy. He would load his camel with food and other supplies, at night pass by the entrance to the Muslim quarter, and let the camel go free, whipping it so that it entered the quarter to be unloaded by the Muslims. The food shortages may have been responsible for the death of Khadijah, the Prophet's wife. Probably they all would have perished if not for the occasional help they received surreptitiously from their compassionate compatriots.

The Prophet set the pattern of fidelity by standing with his band in the lion's mouth, his heart never flinching or wavering. On the contrary, persecution only caused him to throw his soul more fervently into his preaching. He urged his listeners to turn from their false gods, abandon their evil ways, and prepare for the day of reckoning when the earth would be folded up and none would be near but God.

Despite the sacrifice of their worldly interests and hopes and repeated risks of death, his followers adhered to the new prophet with loyalty and devotion. "Never since the days when primitive Christianity startled the world from its sleep, and waged a mortal conflict with heathenism, had men seen the like arousing of spiritual life, the like faith that suffered sacrifice and took joyfully the spoiling of goods for the conscience sake." So wrote William Muir, whose words assume an added weight because he was on the whole a severe critic of Islam.

The pact into which the clans of Quraysh had entered for boycotting Muhammad and blockading the Muslims continued for three years. During this time Muhammad and his family and companions fortified themselves against attack on one of the hills within Mecca. It was not possible for Muhammad or the Muslims to mix with other people except during the holy months, when Arabs would come to Mecca on pilgrimage and all hostilities would cease.

Muhammad used to approach the visiting Arabs and call them unto the religion of God and warn them of His imminent punishment as well as announce to them the blessings of paradise. Many pilgrims knew what Muhammad had suffered in the cause of his mission, and this stirred their sympathy and compassion for him as well as their sensitivity to his call. Indeed, the boycott imposed by Quraysh, and Muhammad's patient bearing of it for the sake of his cause, won many hearts for him and Islam. Not all men were as hard of feeling as Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab. Because of the blockade's long duration and the great sufferings the Quraysh inflicted upon the Muslims, a number of Meccans came to realize the injustice to which their brethren had been subjected. Unable to withhold his compassion, Hisham ibn Amr went to Zuhayr ibn Abu Umayyah, and together the two men agreed to revoke the pact of the boycott. They also, secretly, sought to convince others to do likewise.

One day Zuhayr addressed the Meccans in the Kabah: "O People of Makkah, would you that we eat food and enjoy ourselves while the Banu Hashim are dying one after another unable to buy or acquire anything? By God, I shall not sit still until this unjust pact of the boycott is revoked." Upon hearing this, Abu Jahl immediately rose and said to Zuhayr, "You are a liar. The pact is sacred and inviolable." Many other men, including Hisham ibn Amr, then rose from their places to argue against Abu Jahl and to confirm Zuhayr's request. At this show of strength, Abu Jahl realized that direct opposition to them might not prove advantageous. He therefore withdrew, and the boycott was lifted. The antagonism and hostility remained, and each party continued to look forward to a day when it could overcome the other.

The Year of Mourning (619 CE)

After the repudiation of the boycott, the Prophet and his companions emerged from their quarters. Muhammad resumed his call to the Quraysh and the

tribes who came to Mecca during holy months. Shortly thereafter, Abu Talib and then Khadijah, the Prophet's wife, passed away. With Abu Talib's death, Muhammad lost the guardian of his youth, who stood between him and his enemies. One of the great disappointments of the Prophet's life was his failure to convert Abu Talib to Islam. The death of Khadijah was a deep emotional blow. When none believed in Muhammad, and his own heart was full of doubt, Khadijah's love and faith had stood by him.

Agony over Spiritual Fate of Nonbelievers

*But wouldst thou perhaps torment thyself to death with grief
over them, if they are not willing to believe in this message?
(18:6)*

This question is addressed, in the first instance, to the Prophet, who was deeply distressed by the hostility his message aroused among the pagan Meccans, and he suffered agonies of apprehension regarding their spiritual fate. Beyond that, however, it applies to everyone who, having become convinced of the truth of an ethical proposition, is dismayed at the indifference with which his social environment reacts to it.

Persecution in Taif

After the death of Abu Talib, Abu Lahab, another of Muhammad's uncles and his great adversary, succeeded him as chief of the clan. Fearing lack of support from his clan, Muhammad made approaches to various nomadic tribes and then visited the town of Taif in the hope of finding a base there. Accompanied by Zayd, he arrived among the tribe of Thaqif. He called them to worship one God, and his words caused a storm of indignation. They drove him from the city by pelting him with stones until the evening. Wounded and bleeding, footsore and weary, he prayed under the shade of a tree, complaining to God but not cursing his tormentors. Raising his hands towards heaven, he cried:

“O Lord! I make my complaint unto Thee, out of my feebleness,
and the vanity of my wishes. I am insignificant in the sight of

men. O Thou most merciful! Lord of the weak! Thou art my Lord! Do not forsake me. Leave me not a prey to strangers, nor to mine enemies. If Thou art not offended, I am safe. I seek refuge in the light of Thy countenance, by which all darkness is dispersed, and peace comes here and hereafter. Let not thy anger descend on me; solve my difficulties as it please Thee. There is no power, no help, but in Thee.”

On his return, Muhammad was unable to enter Mecca until he found the chief of another clan willing to give him protection. The outlook for the Prophet and the Muslims was at its bleakest. He had to hide in caverns, escape in disguise, and flee from place to place, homeless, in continual peril of his life. More than once it seemed all over with him, more than once it turned on a straw, whether Muhammad and his doctrine would end there as if not heard at all. He retired from his people, preaching occasionally, but confining his efforts mainly to strangers who congregated in Mecca during the season of the annual pilgrimage, hoping to find among them some who would believe in him and carry the truth to their people. He was facing the severest crisis of his career.

The Pledges of Al-Aqabah

During the annual pilgrimage in the summer of 620, he met a delegation of leading citizens from Medina (Yathrib), a city some two hundred miles north of Mecca. These men, who represented the most important clans of Yathrib, were so impressed by Muhammad that they proclaimed their readiness to accept Islam. The pledge they took was as follows: “We will not associate anything with God; we will not steal, nor commit adultery, nor fornication; we will not kill our children; we will abstain from calumny and slander; we will obey the Prophet in everything that is right.” This is known as the Pledge of al-Aqabah, from the name of the hill on which the conference was held. At the pilgrimage of June 622, seventy-five people came to Mecca from Yathrib and not merely repeated the former pledge but also offered an invitation and a guarantee of security and protection for the guest and his followers.

Why Did the Men of Yathrib Invite Muhammad?

There had been ongoing fighting in Yathrib for a hundred years between two Arabs tribes, and in a great battle at a spot called Buath, nearly all the clans of the oasis had been involved. This battle was a substantial slaughter, and though fighting had ceased, there had been no agreement about the resulting claims for compensation. They were looking for one man with authority to adjudicate disputed cases. Muhammad was invited by a delegation from Yathrib to serve as a chief arbitrator or judge in the bitter feud. They chose him for two reasons. Muhammad had a well-known reputation for mediation and resolving disputes, as during the rebuilding of the Kabah recounted earlier. A neutral outsider to Yathrib like Muhammad, with authority based upon religious principles, would be in a better position to act as an impartial judge than would any of their inhabitants.

When the persecution became intolerable, the Prophet encouraged his followers to emigrate to Yathrib in small numbers, unnoticed by the leaders of Quraysh, the oligarch, and master of Mecca. While most of his disciples left, Prophet Muhammad, Ali ibn Abu Talib (Muhammad's cousin), and Abu Bakr, a close confidant of the Prophet, remained behind.

Escape from Mecca (Hijrah)

Plot to Kill Muhammad

AND [remember, O Prophet,] how those who were bent on denying the truth were scheming against thee, in order to restrain thee [from preaching], or to slay thee, or to drive thee away. Thus have they [always] schemed: but God brought their scheming to naught—for God is above all schemers. (8:30)

Fearing Muhammad's escape, an assembly of the Quraysh chiefs decided to assassinate him. The men chosen from different families were to attack Muhammad simultaneously. The responsibility of the deed would rest upon all, and the clan of Muhammad would be unable to avenge it.

The assassins were posted around Muhammad's dwelling. They watched all night through a hole in the door, waiting to murder him when he left his

house in the early dawn. Muhammad confided his plan to Ali ibn Abu Talib and asked him to cover himself with the Prophet's green mantle and sleep in his bed. The killers, who were waiting outside, felt reassured whenever they looked through the hole and saw somebody in the bed.

The Prophet and Abu Bakr's Flight to Medina

Just before dawn, the Prophet slipped away without being noticed, picked up Abu Bakr at his house, and traveled southward towards the cave of Thawr, where they hid. They were expected to go northward towards Yathrib, and the southerly direction of their flight fooled his enemies.

If you do not succor the Apostle, [Muhammad] then [know that God will do so—just as] God succored him at the time when those who were bent on denying the truth drove him away, [and he was but] one of two. When these two were [hiding] in the cave, [and], the Apostle said to his companion, “Grieve not, verily, God is with us.” And thereupon God bestowed upon him from on high His [gift of] inner peace and aided him with forces that you could not see and brought utterly low the cause of those who were bent on denying the truth, whereas God’s purpose remained supreme: for God is almighty, wise. (9:40)

Manhunt

When the Meccan leaders got wind of the exodus, they started a large-scale manhunt. When horsemen scouring the countryside came close to discovering them, Abu Bakr was moved to despair and said, “We are but two.” The Prophet answered, “No, we are three, for God is with us.” After three days, when the search had slackened, they managed to procure two camels and made their hazardous journey on unfrequented paths to the city of their destination.

The Medina Period

Islamic Calendar

AFTER APPROXIMATELY NINE days of traveling, the Prophet and Abu Bakr reached the outskirts of the oasis of Yathrib on September 24, 622. This date is the day of the Hijrah (exodus), which is the basis of Islamic chronology. Muslims chose to date their history from neither the Prophet's birth nor his reception of the first revelation in 610, but from the creation of the Islamic community (Ummah). With this migration, the Meccan period ended and another—the Medinese—began with the advent of a new revolution in the history of the world.

The Significance of Hijrah (exodus)

O YOU servants of Mine who have attained to faith! Behold, wide is Mine earth: worship Me, then, Me alone! (29:56) O, you who have attained faith! Remember the blessings, which God bestowed upon you when [hostile] people were about to lay hands on you, and He stayed their hands from you. Remain, then, conscious of God: and in God let the believers place their trust. (5:11)

Whenever or wherever the freedom of religion is denied, the believer is obliged to forsake the domain of evil. Thus, they should “migrate unto God” to a place where it is possible to live in accordance with one's faith, which is the spiritual connotation of Hijrah.

Isolation and Loneliness

And he who forsakes the domain of evil for the sake of God shall find on earth many a lonely road, as well as life abundant. (4:100)

“A lonely road” awaits anyone who sets forth on an exodus from evil to God.

Rewards for Remaining Steadfast During Persecution

NOW as for those who forsake the domain of evil in the cause of God, after having suffered wrong [on account of their faith]—We shall most certainly grant them a station of good fortune in this world: but their reward in the life to come will be far greater yet. (16:41-42)

City of Medina

The inhabitants of Medina warmly welcomed Muhammad. The city was not a commercial center like Mecca; its main source of livelihood was agriculture, and farmers lived by cultivating date palms. Yathrib changed its ancient name and was henceforth styled Medinat an-Nabi, “city of the prophet,” or in short, Medina. Its population was a composite of two powerful tribes, the Al Aws and Al Khazraj, as well as three minor Jewish tribes (Qurayzah, Nadir, and Qaynuqa) and another twenty-two smaller groups of Jews.

Transformation of the Prophet

The migration to Medina marked a turning point in the Prophet’s fortunes and a new stage of the Islamic movement. From the moment of his arrival, Muhammad assumed a different role. The despised preacher became a masterful politician and a statesman. We see him now as the leader, not merely of the hearts of a handful of devotees but of the collective life of a city, as well as its judge, general, and teacher. Even Muhammad’s enemies conceded that he managed his new role brilliantly. Faced with problems of extraordinary complexity, he turned out to be extraordinarily endowed as a statesman. Islam took on a political form with the establishment of an Islamic community-state at Medina as the vehicle for realizing God’s will on earth.

The Prophet had the opportunity to implement God's governance and message, for he was now the prophet-head of a religio-political community.

The Constitution of Medina

The primary task that lay ahead for the Prophet was to bring some form of harmony among various diverse groups in this divided city. The Prophet dictated the Constitution of Medina to bring unity among the heterogenous population. The community of Medina served as the nucleus of the rising Arab nation, and its government developed into a prototype for a Muslim empire. The Islam of Medina was the base upon which the Islam of the world grew. The constitution of Medina establishes a kind of alliance or federation among nine different groups, eight clans from Medina and the tribe of emigrants from the Quraysh of Mecca. The following is the summary of this historic document.

Unity against Injustices

All pious believers shall rise as one man against whosoever rebels or seeks to commit injustice, aggression, sin, or spread mutual enmity between the believers, even though he may be one of their sons. The believers shall leave none of their members in destitution. Any Jew who follows us is entitled to our assistance and the same rights as anyone of us, without injustice or partisanship.

War and Peace

No believer shall enter into a separate peace without all other believers whenever there is fighting in the cause of God but will do so only on the basis of equality and justice to all others. Every clan shall ransom its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

In other words, the decision of war and peace rests with the government, and an individual cannot enter into a peace agreement on his own.

Unjust Killings

Whoever is convicted of killing a believer deliberately but without a righteous cause shall be liable to the relatives of the killed. Until the latter is satisfied, the killer shall be subject to retaliation by every believer. The

killer shall have no rights whatsoever until the right of the injured believers is satisfied. Any object of contention among you may be referred to God and Muhammad for judgment.

The Constitution of Medina established a preliminary rule of law. Thus, Medina and all the territories surrounding it became inviolate to their people, who were now bound together in its defense and protection. They could not attack one another and vowed to give protection to one another. An old anarchic custom was discarded, which obliged the aggrieved and the injured to rely upon his own or his kinsmen's power to exact vengeance or satisfy the requirement of justice.

Equal Rights for Jews

The Jews who attach themselves to our commonwealth shall be protected from all insults and vexations. They shall have an equal right with our people to our assistance and good offices. The Jews of various branches and all other domiciled in Yathrib shall form with the Muslims one composite nation. They shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims, and the clients and allies of the Jews shall enjoy the same security and freedom.

The Prophet incorporated the principle of religious freedom, which became at once the first charter of freedom of conscience in human history. It was a breakthrough in the political and civil life of the time against exploitation, tyranny, and corruption.

Joint Defense of Medina

The covenant constituted Muhammad as the chief magistrate. He had no special power or authority except that disputes endangering the peace of the oasis are to be referred to him. Tradition depicts his administration as a balanced blend of justice and mercy. As chief of state and trustee of the life and liberty of his people, he exercised the judgment necessary for order, unflinchingly meting out punishment to those who were guilty. When the injury was toward him, on the other hand, he was gentle and merciful, even to his enemies. In all, the Medinese found him to be a master who was as difficult not to love as not to obey, for he had, as one biographer wrote, the gift of influencing men, and he had the nobility only to influence them for good.

Mosque in Medina as a Center of Community Life

When Muhammad arrived in Medina, one of his first goals was to build a mosque. He assisted in the building process with his own hands. A simple building, the mosque expressed the austerity of early Islamic ideals. A portion of the mosque was set aside as habitation for the homeless, and Muslims could meet in the courtyard of the mosque to discuss all the concerns of the ummah—social, political, military, and religious. Muhammad and his wives lived in small huts around the edge of the courtyard. In the Quranic vision, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. The aim was the integration of the whole of life in a unified community, which would give Muslims intimations of the unity which is God.

Formation of a Super Tribe

For the remaining ten years of his life, his personal history merged with that of the Medinese commonwealth, of which he was the center. Exercising superb statecraft, he welded the heterogeneous and conflicting tribes of the city, three of which were Jewish, into an orderly confederation. Now he had become the head of a super tribe, bound not by blood, but by a shared ideology—an astonishing innovation in any society.

The task was not an easy one; however, in the end, he succeeded in awakening in the citizens a spirit of union unknown in the city's history. From then on, his reputation spread, and people flocked from every part of Arabia to see the man who had wrought this achievement. The example of the Prophet offers a paradigm and the basis for an ideology for the fusion of religion and the state in the Muslim experience. Islam became the religion and the state in one. The super tribe consisted of the Muslims (the true believers), the nominal Muslims (the so-called hypocrites), and the Jews. There were no Christian residents of Medina, although any would have been accepted.

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The Three Great Battles and Conflict with the Jews

THE HIJRAH WAS no mere change of address. In pre-Islamic Arabia, the tribe was of sacred value. Turning one's back on one's blood group to join another was unheard of. Additionally, abandoning your tribe was inherently blasphemous. Muhammad had become the head of a collection of tribal groups bound together not by blood but by a shared ideology—an astonishing innovation in Arabian society. The Quraysh were outraged by this defection and vowed to exterminate the Muslims in Yathrib. The Meccans declared war on the Muslims and Muhammad and offered a prize of one hundred camels for his capture.

Three important battles ensued—the Battle of Badr, the Battle of Uhud, and the Battle of the Trench. As well, conflict with the Jews of Medina became a chronic situation.

Matter of Honor

In Carlyle's words:

Hitherto Mahomet had professed to publish his Religion by the way of preaching and persuasion alone. But now, driven foully out of his native country, since unjust men had not only given no ear to his earnest Heaven's-message, the deep cry of his heart, but would not even let him live if he kept speaking it, —the wild Son of the Desert resolved to defend himself, like a man and Arab. If the Koreish will have it so, they shall have it.

There will be ten years of all of the fighting, of breathless impetuous toil and struggle.

Reconnoitering Expeditions

After six to eight months in Medina, the Prophet began sending out reconnoitering parties to gather intelligence on the movements of the Meccans. The two primary sources of Meccan wealth were the caravan trade and the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and the Kabah, so Medina's early expeditions were also meant to convey the potential threat to Mecca's trade and to press home to the Quraysh that their interests demanded that they come to some kind of understanding with the Muslims and allow them freedom of worship. Yet at the same time, the Muslims were in no position to fight their militarily superior enemy.

Spying Mission

In January 624, the Prophet sent out an expedition of a dozen men on a spying mission with sealed orders to prevent their destination from being disclosed to the enemy. They set off eastwards and only opened their orders after a day's march. They were instructed to "Go on to Nakhlah between Mecca and Taif, observe the Quraysh, and let us know the news." On the last day of the month of Rajab—one of the holy months when fighting was not permitted—a donkey caravan approached Mecca from Yemen carrying trade goods for the Quraysh. Despite the holy obligation, the Muslim party leader decided to act on his own by quickly overpowering the guards, killing one and taking two as prisoners, and reached Medina with the captured goods and men. When the Prophet saw them, he said, "I have not instructed you to fight during the holy months," and castigated the leader of the expedition and his companions.

They will ask thee about fighting in the sacred month. Say: "Fighting in it is an awesome thing but turning men away from the path of God and denying Him, and [turning them away from] the Inviolable House of Worship and expelling its people therefrom—[all this] is yet more awesome in the sight of God. Since oppression is more awesome than killing." [Your enemies] will not cease to fight against you till they have turned you away from your faith if they can. But if any of you should turn away from his faith and die as a denier of the truth, these it is whose works will go for

naught in this world and in the life to come, and these it is who are destined for the fire, therein to abide. (2:217)

The four sacred months during which warfare was considered blasphemous in pre-Islamic Arabia—a view which was later confirmed by Islam—are Muharram, Rajab, Dhu l-Qadah, and Dhu l-Hijjah.

The Battle of Badr (624 CE)

A state of war already existed between the Quraysh of Mecca and the Muslim community in Medina. However, up to this point, no decisive encounter had taken place, and the Muslims were living under the constant threat of a Quraysh invasion.

During the month of Shaban, 624, the Muslims of Medina learned that a Meccan trade caravan, which had traveled to Syria some months earlier under the leadership of Umayyad chief, Abu Sufyan, had started back on its journey southwards and would be passing through nearby. The caravan consisted of about one thousand camels laden with valuable merchandise and was accompanied only by roughly forty armed men. Weeks ahead of time, the Prophet informed his followers that he intended to attack the caravan as soon as it approached Medina. The Quraysh already had a network of spies in all of Arabia mainly to protect the caravan trade. Accordingly, the rumors of this plan reached Abu Sufyan while he and the caravan were still in Syria and gave him time to alert his compatriots in Mecca. He sent a courier to Mecca with an urgent request for help and ordered them to dispatch a strong army towards Medina.

Contrary to his custom, the Prophet had, on this occasion, made his plans known far in advance, which suggests that the purported attack on the caravan was a strategy to lure the Meccan army into armed combat. Had he intended to attack Abu Sufyan's caravan, he could have done so by quietly waiting until it reached the vicinity of Medina, with Abu Sufyan having no time to summon help from Mecca.

EVEN AS thy Sustainer brought thee forth from thy home [to fight] in the cause of the truth, although some of the believers were averse to it, [so, too,] they would argue with

thee about the truth [itself] after it had become manifest—just as if they were being driven towards death and beheld it with their very eyes. And, lo, God gave you the promise that one of the two [enemy] hosts would fall to you. And you would have liked to seize the less powerful one. (8:5-7)

The two hosts refer to the Quraysh army and “the less powerful” caravan coming from Syria. A few of the Prophet’s followers disliked the idea of giving battle to the main army of the Quraysh instead of attacking the caravan and acquiring easy booty. They were opposed to the idea and dismayed at the prospect of facing the powerful Quraysh army. They were afraid the enemy was too strong and suggested they withdraw to Medina.

War Council

News came to the Prophet that the Quraysh had set out to protect their caravan. Like the Quraysh, the Prophet also had a network of spies and sympathizers. Therefore, he held a council of war to decide the course of action. Al-Miqdad bin Amr stood up and voiced the feelings and thoughts of most of the emigrants. “O Messenger of God, do what God has commanded you to do. We are with you now and always. We shall not tell you what the Israelites told Moses: ‘You and your Lord should go and fight against the enemy.’ We shall follow you and obey your orders.”

The Prophet was anxious to know what the Ansars, Muslims from Medina, would do. Sensing his anxiety, Saad ibn Muadh, one of the Ansar leaders, rose and said,

“We have borne witness that you are the Messenger of God. We have given you our pledge to obey you. Wherever you go, we shall go with you. If there is a showdown with the polytheists, we shall be steadfast in our support of you. In war and in peace, we shall be consistently faithful to you. If you ask us to cross this sea and you plunged into it, we will have plunged into it with you; not a man will stay behind. We do not dislike meeting your enemy tomorrow. We are experienced in war, trustworthy in combat. It may well be that God will let us show you something which will bring you joy, so take us along with God’s blessing.”

The Prophet was delighted at this answer.

The overwhelming majority were in favor of an immediate advance, and their enthusiasm carried the others along with them. Most declared they would follow God's Apostle wherever he might lead them.

And pay heed unto God and His Apostle, and do not [allow yourselves to] be at variance with one another, lest you lose heart and your moral strength desert you. And be patient in adversity: for, verily, God is with those who are patient in adversity. (8:46)

The Valley of Badr

The Prophet marched out of Medina at the head of about three hundred Muslims, all poorly armed, with seventy camels and two horses. Just over a quarter were Muslim emigrants from Mecca, and nearly three-quarters were Ansars. Their destination was the valley of Badr, which consists of a plain with steep hills surrounding the north and east sides. A rivulet from the inland mountains runs through the valley, producing several springs. At the nearest of these springs, the Muslim army halted. However, an Ansar named al-Hubab said to the Prophet: "Is this a place God has ordered to occupy, so that we can neither advance nor withdraw from it, or is it a matter of opinion and military tactics?" When the Prophet replied that it was the latter, Hubab suggested they travel to the last spring nearest the enemy and take possession of all the wells in Badr, to deprive the enemy of water. His suggestion was instantly accepted, giving the Muslims a strategic advantage.

[Remember how it was] when He caused inner calm to enfold you, as an assurance from Him, and sent down upon you water from the skies, so that He might purify you thereby and free you from Satan's unclean whisperings and strengthen your hearts and thus make firm your steps. (8:11)

Inner calm refers to the spiritual peace and self-confidence of the believers in the face of over whelming odds before the battle of Badr. As the night drew on, the Prophet's companions hastily constructed, from the branches of

palm, an observation booth in which the Prophet and Abu Bakr slept, and Saad ibn Muadh kept watch by the entrance with his sword drawn. It rained during the night, and the Muslim army, exhausted from their long march, enjoyed sound and refreshing sleep. The rain was an unexpected blessing and helped to purify them both physically and spiritually from the unclean whisperings of uncertainty, fear, and self-doubt.

The Quraysh assembled a powerful army and set out northwards to the rescue of the caravan. Their army consisted of about one thousand warriors clad in chain mail, with seven hundred camels and over one hundred horses. They started their journey to reach the valley of Badr, one hundred miles southwest of Medina, expecting to meet Abu Sufyan there.

The Change of the Caravan's Route

In the meantime, Abu Sufyan had changed the traditional route of the caravan and veered towards the coastal lowlands to put as much distance as possible between it and Medina. When the caravan was out of the Muslim army's reach, Abu Sufyan sent word to the Quraysh saying, "Since you came out to save your caravan, your men and your property, and God has delivered them, go back."

The Meccan commander, Abu Jahl, rejected Abu Sufyan's advice and was set on teaching a lesson to the impudent upstarts in Medina. "By God we will not go back until we have reached Badr. We will spend three days there, slaughter camels and feast and drink wine, and girls shall play for us."

Voices of Peace and Dissension Among the Quraysh

Some in the army of the Quraysh were struggling with whether the use of force was justified against their kinsmen since the caravan was safe. Many rational voices among them sought peace. Utbah b. Rabiah, one of the chiefs and a lord of the Quraysh, strongly urged the attack be abandoned and instead suggested all the Arabs deal with Muhammad together. If Muhammad's ideological movement succeeded, all of Arabia would reap a harvest of pride. If he failed, the Quraysh would enjoy an effortless victory—a win-win situation. In other words, leave Muhammad to his own devices. But arrogance and reliance on superior power won. Abu Jahl said, "No, by God, we will not turn back until God decides between Muhammad and us."

[Remember that day] when you were at the near end of the valley [of Badr], and they were at its farthest end, while the caravan was below you. (8:42) And be not like those [unbelievers] who went forth from their homelands full of self-conceit and a desire to be seen and praised by men. For they were trying to turn others away from the path of God—the while God encompassed all their doings [with His might]. (8:47)

These words also imply a warning to believers past and present never to go to war boastfully or for the sake of empty glory. On the seventeenth of Ramadan, the Muslim army came face-to-face with a powerful Quraysh force more than thrice their number. Early in the morning with the sun rising before them, the army of Quraysh drew up in lines and moved slowly over the intervening sand hills. When the Prophet saw them descending from the hill into the valley, he cried, “O God, here come the Quraysh in their vanity and pride, contending with Thee and calling thy apostle a liar.”

The Prophet looked at his followers of few more than three hundred men, then at those who were ascribing divinity to beings other than God, more than one thousand. The fate of Islam hung in the approaching battle. Followed by Abu Bakr, the Prophet entered the observation booth and turned towards the Qiblah (Mecca), raised his hands, and implored his Sustainer. “O God! Fulfill what Thou hast promised me! O, God! If this little band who have surrendered themselves unto Thee is destroyed, Thou wilt not be worshiped on earth.”

Lo! You were praying unto your Sustainer for aid, whereupon He thus responded to you: “I shall, verily, aid you with a thousand angels following one upon another!” And God ordained this only as a glad tiding, and that your hearts should thereby be set at rest—since no succor can come from any save God: for, verily, God is almighty, wise! (8:9-10)

Lo! Thy Sustainer inspired the angels [to convey this His message to the believers]: “I am with you!” [And He

commanded the angels:] “And give firmness unto those who have attained to faith [with these words from Me]: ‘I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the truth; strike then, their necks, [O believers,] and strike off ever one of their fingertips.’” (8:12)

The promise of aid through thousands of angels have been uttered by the Prophet, and thus, by implication, confirmed by God. The spiritual nature of this angelic aid is expressed by “And God ordained this only as a glad tiding.” The phrase “I am with you” is addressed through the angels to the believers only to allay fear. The aid of the angels was purely spiritual; there is no evidence in the Quran that they were meant to participate in the battle in any physical sense. Most modern commentators emphatically reject the legendary notion that angels literally fought in this or any other of the Prophet’s battles.

Death of a Warrior

The time of action had arrived. One desperate Quraysh warrior, Aswad, swore to drink water from the well occupied by Muslims, or to destroy it, or perish in the attempt. He advanced to the spring with signal gallantry, when a blow from Hamza’s sword nearly severed his leg. He crawled onwards and made good his vow before Hamza’s sword put an end to his life.

At the beginning of the battle, the Prophet cast a handful of pebbles or dust in the direction of the enemy, symbolically heralding defeat for the enemy. Following an honored Arabian custom, a few single combats were held. Two brothers named Utbah b. Rabiah and Shayba and al-Walid son of Utba, stung by the charge of cowardice by Abu Jahl, challenged the Muslims to a duel. A youth from Medina went out to meet their challenge, but the Meccans refused to fight him and insisted upon fighting their own tribesmen.

The Quraysh crier called out, “O Muhammad, send out our own peers of our tribe to fight us.”

The Prophet turned to his kinsmen and said, “You sons of Hashim! Arise and fight, according to your right.” Then Hamza Bin Abdul Muttalib, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and Ubaydah ibn Al-Harith, an uncle and cousins of the Prophet went forth.

Then Utba called to his son Walid, “Arise and fight.” So, Walid stepped forward, and Ali came out against him. They were the youngest of the six. The combat was short. Walid died by the sword of Ali.

Eager to avenge his son’s death, Utba hastened forward and Hamza advanced to meet him. The outcome was the same, and Utba was slain by Hamza, the lion of God. Shayba alone remained one of the champions of Mecca, and Ubaydah now drew nearer to fight with him. They both were advanced in years. Shayba dealt a blow to Ubaydah’s leg, bringing him to the ground. Seeing this, Hamza and Ali attacked Shayba and dispatched him. Later, Ubaydah also died of injuries and became the first martyr in the battle of Badr.

[Hence,] O you who have attained to faith, when you meet a host in battle, be firm, and remember God often, so that you might attain to a happy state! (8:45) Strike, then, their necks, [O believers,] and strike off every one of their fingertips! [Or destroy them utterly] This, because they have cut themselves off from God and His Apostle: and as for him who cuts himself off from God and His Apostle, verily, God is severe in retribution. This [for you, O enemies of God]! Taste it, then, [and know] that suffering through fire awaits those who deny the truth! (8:12-14)

The fighting became general, and the Meccans fought in old Arab style—with careless bravado, each chief leading his own men. The Muslim troops, however, were disciplined and fought under the unified command of the Prophet who was amid the battlefield encouraging his soldiers to fight with courage. There were many examples of individual bravery and valor exhibited on both sides, but the army of the faithful was borne forward by an enthusiasm that the Quraysh were unable to withstand. In the end, the Meccan forces were completely routed.

The Muslims only had fourteen martyred. Some fifty or more Meccans were killed including several of the most prominent chieftains of Mecca, whose administrative and commercial skills could hardly be replaced. Some of the Prophet’s bitterest opponents were slain, chief among these Abu Jahl. Muadz ibn Amr brought Abu Jahl to ground by a blow that cut his leg in two.

Muadz in turn was attacked by Ikrima, the son of Abu Jahl, and his arm nearly severed from his shoulders. As the mutilated arm hanging by the skin impeded his actions, Muadz put his foot upon it and pulled it off and went on fighting with one arm. Such were the heroes of Badr.

And yet, [O believers,] it was not you who slew the enemy, but it was God who slew them; and it was not thou who cast [terror into them, O Prophet], when thou didst cast it, but it was God who cast it: and [He did all this] in order that He might test the believers by a goodly test of His Own ordaining. Verily, God is all-hearing, all-knowing! This [was God's purpose] and also [to show] that God renders vain the artful schemes of those who deny the truth. (8:17-18)

Taste then, [O unbelievers,] this chastisement as an outcome of your persistent denial of the truth! Behold, those who are bent on denying the truth are spending their riches in order to turn others away from the path of God, and they will go on spending them until they become [a source of] intense regret for them, and then they will be overcome! (8:35-36) Whereas it was God's will to prove the truth to be true in accordance with His words, and to wipe out the last remnant of those who denied the truth. (8:7)

The verse states that the Muslims' victory over the bigger much better-equipped army of the Quraysh was due to God's grace alone. It is a reminder to the faithful not to indulge in undue pride in their achievements, which is the meaning of the "test."

Torments after Death

AND IF thou couldst but see [how it will be] when He causes those who are bent on denying the truth to die. The angels will strike their faces, and their backs, and [will say]: "Taste suffering through fire in return for what your own hands

have wrought—for, never does God do the least wrong to His creatures!” (8:50-51) And those who [until their death] have denied the truth shall be gathered unto hell, so that God might separate the bad from the good, and join the bad with one another, and link them all together [within His condemnation], and then place them in hell. They, they are the lost! Tell those who are bent on denying the truth that if they desist, all that is past shall be forgiven them; but if they revert [to their wrongdoing], let them remember what happened to the likes of them in times gone by. (8:36-38)

Although this passage refers specifically to the pagan Quraysh who fell in the battle of Badr, its import is not restricted to this historical event—especially in view of the subsequent passages, which refer to all who are “bent on denying the truth.”

Martyrs or Victors

[The battle was brought about nonetheless] so that God might accomplish a thing [which He willed] to be done, (and) that he who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth. And, behold, God is indeed all-hearing, all-knowing. (8:42) This [was God’s purpose]—and also [to show] that God renders vain the artful schemes of those who deny the truth. (8:18)

Believers who fell in the battle died knowing they were martyrs of God’s cause, and those who survived could now clearly discern God’s hand in their victory. While the dead among the deniers of the truth had given their lives for nothing, those who survived must now realize that their crushing defeat was due to something infinitely greater than the valor of the Muslims.

Treatment of Prisoners of War

William Muir writes in *The Life of Mahomet*:

In pursuance of Mahomet's commands, the citizens of Medina, and such of the refugees as possessed houses, received the prisoners and treated them with much consideration. "Blessings be on the men of Medina!" said one of these prisoners in later days; "they made us ride, while they themselves walked: they gave us wheaten bread to eat when there was little of it, contenting themselves with dates." It is not surprising that when their friends came to ransom them, several of the prisoners who had been thus received, declared themselves adherents of Islam...Their kindly treatment was thus prolonged and left a favorable impression on the minds even of those who did not at once go over to Islam.

Political Ramifications of the Battle of Badr

The first encounter between Islam and polytheism ended in victory. The chief reason was undoubtedly the greater confidence of the Muslims because of their religious faith. They also had higher stakes than the Meccans. Badr is the most important battle in the history of Islam. Victory guaranteed the existence of Islam and the physical survival of the Muslim community of Medina.

The outcome made the Quraysh realize that the movement inaugurated by Muhammad was not an ephemeral dream, but the beginning of a new political power and a new era different from anything that Arabia had known. The Meccans' apprehensions, which had already been aroused by the exodus of the Prophet and his companions to Medina, found a shattering confirmation on the day of Badr. It may safely be assumed that, until then, only a very few of the Prophet's companions had fully understood the political implications of the new order of Islam. To most of them in those early days, their exodus to Medina had meant no more than a refuge from persecution. After the battle of Badr, even the most simple-minded among them became aware that they were on their way towards a new social order.

Divine Aid Contingent upon True Faith

If you have been praying for victory, [O believers]—victory has now indeed come unto you. And if you abstain [from

sinning], it will be for your good; but if you revert to it, We shall revoke [Our promise of aid]—and never will your community be of any avail to you, however great its numbers: for, behold, God is [only] with those who believe! (8:19)

The Battle of Uhud (625 CE)

The political significance of the battle of Badr was that Muhammad became a serious threat to Mecca. Meccan prestige was greatly diminished by the defeat, even though the number of their dead was small compared to their population. The potential threat to Meccan commerce was also considerable. However, the Meccans were supported by several tribes hostile to the Muslims. After the death of Abu Jahl in the battle of Badr, leadership of the Meccans passed onto Abu Sufyan, chief of the Banu Umayyad clan. The following year, commanding an army of three thousand men, Abu Sufyan marched against Medina.

The Democratic Decision by the Council of War

On hearing of their approach, the Prophet held a council of war at which the tactics to be adopted were discussed. In view of the overwhelming cavalry forces at the disposal of the enemy, the Prophet himself believed the Muslims should fight from behind the fortifications of Medina, and if need be, in its narrow streets and lanes. His plan was supported by some of the most outstanding among his companions. However, most Muslim leaders strongly insisted on going forth and meeting the enemy in the open field. In obedience to Quranic principle, all public affairs must be transacted by mutually agreed decisions. Against his better judgment, the Prophet sorrowfully gave way to the will of the majority and set out with one thousand of his followers towards the plain below the mountain of Uhud, a little over three miles from Medina. On the way to Mount Uhud, some three hundred men defected. They forsook the Prophet on the specious plea that he did not intend to fight.

Positioning of Archers and Muslim Forces

Having less than seven hundred men with him, the Prophet arrayed the bulk of his forces with their backs to the mountain and posted his fifty archers on a nearby hill to provide cover against an outflanking maneuver by the enemy

cavalry. These archers were ordered not to leave their post under any circumstances.

Combat between Talha and Ali

The battle began on a March morning of 625. Talha ibn Abu Talha, the standard-bearer of the Meccan army, advanced and challenged the Muslims to single combat. Ali stepped forth, and the two men met in the middle of no-man's-land. Without words or preliminary flourishes, the duel began. Talha never stood a chance. Ali's scimitar flashed in the morning sun, and the head of the standard-bearer leaped from his shoulder and rolled away on the sand. When Ali returned to his lines, Talha's brother, Uthman ibn Abu Talha, attempted to retrieve the Meccan banner, but Hamza came out of the Muslim line and killed him.

It appeared at the commencement that events were going as the Prophet had imagined. The champions of Badr, Ali, and Hamza, dealt out death as unsparingly as before. The Prophet gave his sword to Abu Dujana, an Ansari, who justified the confidence the Prophet had placed in him.

Meccan Women

Accompanying the Meccan army was a band of warlike women whose duty was to wage psychological warfare against the Muslims. The women knew that nothing held such terror for the Arab male ego as the jibes of women for cowardice and that nothing was so efficacious in turning them into reckless fighters as the promise of physical love. So, while squatting atop their camels and watching the swift action, they read poetry and sang seductive songs to the Meccan army, inciting their warriors to kill the Muslims. The songs were full of invitation and scorn—an invitation to the heroes and scorn for the cowards. With their music and highly suggestive poetry, they whipped up the impetuous sons of the desert into fighting maniacs.

“Daughters of the Shining Morning Star, Watching you from silken beds we are,

Thrash them! In our arms we'll fold you; Run, and nevermore we'll hold you.”

Nevertheless, the charge of Ali, Hamza, and Abu Dujana spread panic and consternation across the ranks of the Meccans, and they began to waver.

The Muslims pressed their advantage. Ali had broken the ranks of the Quraysh and was already deep inside their lines. Unable to resist his attack, they began to yield ground. Not far from him, his uncle, Hamza, was busy hacking his way through the dense mass of the enemy. Between them, they were grinding up the army of Quraysh. In their death-defying assault upon the greatly superior forces of the pagan Quraysh, the Muslims gained a decisive advantage over the former and almost routed them.

AND, INDEED, God made good His promise unto you when, by His leave, you were about to destroy your foes—until the moment when you lost heart and acted contrary to the [Prophet’s] command and disobeyed after He had brought you within view of that [victory] for which you were longing. (3:152)

The archers who had been posted by the Prophet at the strategic pass imagined that the enemy had already been beaten and was in retreat. It occurred to them that if their comrades in the battlefield captured the rest of the enemy, then the archers would lose their share of the booty. This fear prompted them to descend into the plain below against the explicit orders of the Prophet. They abandoned their posts. Their captain, Abdullah ibn Jubayr, adjured them not to abandon the pass, but they paid no heed and swept into the valley.

There were among you such as cared for this world [alone], just as there were among you such as cared for the life to come. (3:152)

Those who “cared for this world alone” abandoned their posts for booty. Out of the fifty Muslim archers, less than ten “cared for the life to come” and remained at their posts.

A Meccan general, Khalid bin al-Walid, noticed that the strategic pass to the left of the army of Medina was unguarded. He immediately seized the opportunity to attack the ten archers still at the pass with his cavalry. The remaining archers fought bravely but all of them, including Abdullah ibn

Jubayr, were overpowered and killed. Once Khalid captured the pass, he attacked the army of Medina from the rear. The army of Medina was meanwhile busy gathering booty, utterly oblivious to everything else. Suddenly, it was startled by the charge of the Meccan cavalry in its rear.

Frontal Charge by the Meccan Cavalry

Abu Sufyan also noticed the maneuver of Khalid and the bewilderment of the Muslims. He rallied his troops, returned to the scene of action, and launched a frontal attack upon them. Deprived of the cover of the archers, and trapped between two fires, the Muslims now found themselves caught in a pincer movement. It was now their turn to be routed, and they panicked. They ran every which way with many of their men dead.

Hamza

Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, had brought with her an Ethiopian slave to whom she had promised not only his freedom but also much gold, silver, and silk to kill Hamza. The Ethiopian was noted for his skill in the use of his national weapon, the javelin. He hid behind a rock waiting for an opportune moment, and it soon came. Just when Hamza killed an enemy soldier and lunged after another, the Ethiopian slave stood up, took deadly aim, and hurled the missile against which there was no defense. The javelin caught Hamza, and he fell to the ground, dying instantly. Death of Hamza was a terrible blow to the morale of the Muslims.

Shame

[Remember the time] when you fled, paying no heed to anyone, while at your rear the Apostle was calling out to you. Wherefore He requited you with woe in return for [the Apostle's] woe, so that you should not grieve [merely] over what had escaped you, nor over what had befallen you: for God is aware of all that you do. (3:153) Whereupon, in order that He might put you to the test, He prevented you from defeating your foes. But now He has effaced your sin: for God is limitless in His bounty unto the believers. (3:152)

As the Muslims ran past the Prophet, he tried to stop them, but no one seemed to listen. In a short time, the tables were turned on them and victory was wrenched from their hands. The realization of how shamefully they had behaved at Uhud would be, in the end, more painful for them than the loss of victory and the death of so many of their comrades; the meaning of “the test” mentioned in the verse 152.

Rumor of the Death of the Prophet

The Prophet, with a handful of his most stalwart companions, defended himself. Led by Abu Dujana, a group mainly of Ansars surrounded the Prophet, doing their best to shield him from the arrows, spears, and other weapons of the enemy. In the melee, the Prophet was seriously injured and fell to the ground, his head and face bleeding. The cry immediately arose, “The Apostle of God has been killed!” Many of the Muslims began to flee; some among them were even prepared to throw themselves upon the mercy of the enemy.

Admonition to the Prophet

The Prophet, lying on the ground severely injured, exclaimed, “How could those people prosper after having done this to their Prophet, who but invites them to acknowledge their Sustainer?” The Prophet was later admonished for invoking God’s curse upon the leaders of the pagan Quraysh.

[And] it is in no wise for thee [O Prophet] to decide whether He shall accept their repentance or chastise them—for, behold, they are but wrongdoers. Whereas unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. He forgives whom He wills, and He chastises whom He wills; and God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (3:128-129)

Ali Attempts Rescue

Ali was carrying the banner of Islam in one hand, a sword in the other. He heard the cry, “Muhammad is dead!” The battle cries of Muhammad’s little group of defenders led by Abu Dujana caught Ali’s attention. He tore his way through the enemy lines to his comrades-in-arms. Meanwhile, the Meccans

had renewed their attacks, and now it was Ali who had to beat them back. They charged repeatedly, but he repulsed them each time.

Counterattack

A few of the companions—among them Umar ibn al-Khattab and Talhah ibn Ubaydullah—called out, “What good are your lives without him, O believers? Let us die as he has died!” They threw themselves with the strength of despair against the Meccans. Their example at once found an echo among the rest of the Muslims, who in the meantime had learned that the Prophet was alive. They rallied and counterattacked the enemy, and thus saved the day. But the Muslims were now too exhausted to exploit their chances of victory, and the battle ended in a draw, with the enemy retreating in the direction of Mecca.

Warrior Muslim Woman

In the battle of Uhud, many of the companions who were touted to be very brave and faithful turned their backs and ran for cover. But there were a few who did not run. One of them was Umm Ammarra Ansariyya, a woman from Medina, noted for her skills as a nurse, who assisted the army of Medina in Uhud. At the beginning of the battle, Umm Ammarra brought water for the soldiers and tended to them if they were wounded. But when the Muslims were defeated and fled from the battlefield, her role changed from nurse to warrior. At one point, the enemy brought archers to shower arrows upon the Prophet. Umm Ammarra seized an enormous shield and held it before the Prophet to protect him. Shortly later, the Meccans charged with swords and spears. Here, Umm Ammarra threw the shield away and attacked them with a sword. When one enemy soldier came dangerously close to the Prophet, she blocked him and was shot with an arrow in the shoulder. Though she was wounded, she resolutely stood between the Prophet and his enemies, defying them and defying death. During the battle, she was wounded thirteen times and was treated for her shoulder wound for a year.

Martyrdom of Rabbi Mukhayriq in the Cause of Islam

Ibn Ishaq, the earliest biographer of Prophet Muhammad, relates an amazing story about Rabbi Mukhayriq, a wealthy and learned leader of the Thalabah, a Jewish tribe allied with one of the three major Jewish tribes that had lived

in Medina for centuries. Rabbi Mukhayriq fought alongside Prophet Muhammad in the battle of Uhud and died. As it happened, Rabbi Mukhayriq had addressed the people of his tribe and urged them to go with him to fight for Muhammad. The tribe's men protested, saying it was the day of Sabbath. "We're not supposed to go to war on the Sabbath unless we're directly under attack. The pagan Arabs from Mecca won't attack us; they only want to persecute the Muslims in Medina—as they did for so many years in Mecca." Rabbi Mukhayriq chastised the men of his congregation for not understanding the deeper meaning of what was happening. Mukhayriq died that day in the battle against the Meccans. When Muhammad, who was seriously injured during the battle, was informed about the death of Rabbi Mukhayriq, the Prophet said, "He was the best of men." Perhaps Rabbi Mukhayriq's supreme sacrifice and example of brotherhood in the name of monotheism can inspire Islamic and Jewish religious leaders today to heal past wounds and make Jerusalem and the Middle East an exemplary land of peace in the world.

Mutilation and Cannibalism

The women from Mecca mutilated the dead companions of the Prophet. They cut off their ears and noses, Hind made them into anklets and collars, and gave her own pendants to the Ethiopian slave. Hamza, the Prophet's uncle, had killed Hind's father in the Battle of Badr, and she now cut the liver from Hamza's dead body and chewed it. The cold-blooded cruelties and desecrations in the battle of Uhud illustrate once more the extraordinary contrast between the easygoing and often chivalrous warfare of the Arabs and the brutalities of their blood feuds.

Martyrdom

Aside from Hamza, three other Meccan Muslims were martyred in the battle of Uhud. The losses of the Ansar were heavy. They left seventy-one dead on the field and many more wounded.

And no human being can die save by God's leave, at a term preordained. (3:145) They who, having themselves held back [from fighting, later] said of their [slain] brethren, "Had they but paid heed to us, they would not have been slain."

Say: “Avert, then, death from yourselves, if what you say is true!” (3:168)

Days of Fortune and Misfortune to mark out Righteous and Evildoers

If misfortune touches you, [know that] similar misfortune has touched [other] people as well. For it is by turns that We apportion unto men such days [of fortune and misfortune]. And [this] to the end that God might mark out those who have attained to faith and choose from among you such as [with their lives] bear witness to the truth—since God does not love evildoers and that God might render pure of all dross those who have attained to faith and bring to naught those who deny the truth. (3:140-141)

You Have to Strive Hard to Enter Paradise

Do you think that you could enter paradise unless God takes cognizance of your having striven hard [in His cause], and takes cognizance of your having been patient in adversity? For, indeed, you did long for death [in God’s cause] before you came face to face with it; and now you have seen it with your own eyes! (3:142-143)

His decision to let some die as martyrs in His cause and thus bear witness to the truth is not due to love of the sinful enemies who oppose you, but to His love for you.

And if one desires the rewards of this world, We shall grant him thereof; and if one desires the rewards of the life to come, We shall grant him thereof. We shall requite those who are grateful [to Us]. (3:145)

The warriors (mujahidin) may be rewarded in this life with victory. Those who fall in battle will be rewarded with eternal life as martyrs (shahid or witness) for the faith.

Evil Abode for Evildoers

O YOU who have attained faith! If you pay heed to those who are bent on denying the truth, they will cause you to turn back on your heels, and you will be the losers. Nay, but God alone is your Lord Supreme, and He is the best succor. Into the hearts of those who are bent on denying the truth We shall cast dread in return for their ascribing divinity, side by side with God, to other beings—[something] for which He has never bestowed any warrant from on high; and their goal is the fire—and how evil that abode of evildoers! (3:149-151)

Pardon and Pray for Forgiveness

And it was by God's grace that thou [O Prophet] did deal gently with thy followers: for if you hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee. Pardon them, then, and pray that they be forgiven.

If God succors you, none can ever overcome you; but if He should forsake you, who could succor you thereafter? In God, then, let the believers place their trust! (3:159-160)

By all available accounts, the Prophet did not reproach those of his followers who had failed in their duty before and during the disaster at Uhud.

The battle of Uhud was no doubt a setback for the Muslims but not a complete defeat. It is true that seventy-five Muslims had been killed as compared to twenty-seven Meccans, but the Meccan army had failed in their strategic aim of destroying Muhammad.

Lesson Learned from the Battle of Uhud

AND DO YOU now that a calamity has befallen you after you had inflicted twice as much [on your foes], ask yourselves, “How has this come about?” Say: “It has come from your own selves.” Verily, God has the power to will anything: and all that befell you on the day when the two hosts met in battle happened by God’s leave so that He might mark out the [true] believers and mark out those who were tainted with hypocrisy and, when they were told, “Come, fight in God’s cause”—or, “Defend yourselves”—answered, “If we but knew [that it would come to a] fight, we would indeed follow you.” Unto apostasy were they nearer on that day than unto faith, uttering with their mouths something which was not in their hearts, the while God knew fully well what they were trying to conceal.” (3:165-167)

At the battle of Badr, in the year 2 AH the Muslim army inflicted heavy casualties, and many of the followers of the Prophet had been convinced that, whatever the circumstances, God would grant them victory because their faith alone. The bitter experience at Uhud came as a shock to them, and so the Quran reminds them that this calamity was a consequence of their own doings.

Deeds Falling Short of Assertions in Faith

O YOU who have attained to faith! Why do you say one thing and do another? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do! (61:2-3)

This refers to the Prophet’s companions who, on account of their insistence and against the Prophet’s advice, battled the enemy on the open field and thereby unnecessarily courted deadly danger. They failed to live up to their faith during the earlier part of the battle and retreated in disorder from their battle stations at Uhud, despite their previous assertions that they were ready

to lay down their lives for God and His Apostle. In other words, their deeds did not correspond to their assertions of faith.

Mortality of Muhammad

AND MUHAMMAD is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? But he that turns about on his heels can in no wise harm God—whereas God will requite all who are grateful [to Him]. (3:144)

And how many a prophet has had to fight [in God's cause], followed by many God-devoted men. They did not become faint of heart for all that they had to suffer in God's cause, and neither did they weaken, nor did they abase themselves [before the enemy], since God loves those who are patient in adversity All that they said was this: "O our Sustainer! Forgive us our sins and the lack of moderation in our doings! And make firm our steps, and succor us against people who deny the truth!" Whereupon God granted them the rewards of this world, as well as the goodliest rewards of the life to come: for God loves the doers of good. (3:146-148)

The rumor of the death of the Prophet caused many Muslims to abandon the fight and even brought some of them close to apostasy. Verse 3:144 is addressed to those Muslims who lost heart and thought that Islam was also dead. The expression "turning about on one's heel," denotes, according to circumstances, either actual apostasy or a deliberate withdrawal from efforts in the cause of God. Even if Muhammad were dead, the message of the Quran, the word of God, would live forever.

The emphasis on the Prophet's mortality and that of all the other prophets who preceded him restates the fundamental Islamic doctrine that adoration is due God alone and that no human being, not even a prophet, may have any share in it. It was this very passage of the Quran which Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, recited immediately after the Prophet's death, when many faint-

hearted Muslims thought that Islam itself had come to an end. But as soon as Abu Bakr added, “Whoever has worshiped Muhammad may know that Muhammad has died; but whoever worships God may know that God is ever-living, and never dies,” all confusion was dispelled.

The Battle of the Trench (627)

Jewish Leaders Fomenting War of Revenge

The Battle of the Trench (Al-Khandaq) relates to the War of the Confederates (Al-Ahzab). A group of Jewish leaders whom the Prophet had expelled from Medina for plotting against the Muslim regime went to Mecca and met with the Quraysh leaders. After securing a definite date from Meccans for the attack against Muhammad, the same leaders went to all those tribes who fought against Muslims for general mobilization in a war of revenge. A group comprising some of the most powerful Arabian tribes formed a confederacy to overcome the threat Islam posed to the beliefs and customs of pagan Arabia. The Jewish leaders procured mercenaries from the tribe of Ghatafan by promising a whole year’s crop of the orchard of Khaybar as a prize. An army of approximately 10,000 men descended on Medina.

The Meccans had spent these two years in preparation to annihilate the Muslims once and for all. The Meccans traveled from the south (along the coast) towards Medina. At the same time, the horsemen of the Khuza tribe, allied with the Prophet, left to warn Medina of the invading army and reached Medina in four days.

The Trench

The Prophet accepted the advice of Salman the Persian, a convert, to dig a trench across the open part of the north side, as the rest of Medina was surrounded by rocky hills, lava flows, and trees, which were impenetrable to large armies, especially cavalry. The trench—about two kilometers long, thirteen feet wide, and seven to eight-feet deep—was designed to prevent riders from jumping across it. All able-bodied men worked day and night, including the Prophet, under extremely difficult conditions. The temperature was close to freezing, and famine-like conditions prevailed due to a lack of food. To curb the pangs of hunger, the men attached stones to their abdomen, including the Prophet.

Laying Siege to Medina

The women and children were moved to the interior and placed within fortified walls while three thousand men amassed along the trench to defend the city. The people of Medina harvested all their crops early so the Confederate armies would have to rely on their own food reserves.

The Quraysh and their allies arrived at Medina only to find an impassable ditch surrounding the city—a defensive measure unknown in pre-Islamic Arabia—which brought the assault of the Confederates to a halt, thus forcing Abu Sufyan to lay siege to the city.

Dual between Amr and Ali

The siege continued without much actual fighting, though some Quraysh horsemen managed to find a narrow part of the trench. They beat their horses and jumped over the trench to the other side. Among them was a man called Amr ibn Abd Wudd. He fought at Badr against the Muslims until he was wounded but had not been present during the battle of Uhud. He was one of the most feared warriors in the whole of Arabia, so much so that even the Prophet was reluctant to send anyone to challenge him. When Amr issued his challenge to fight one-on-one, Ali got up and asked the Prophet's permission to fight him, but was told to sit down, for it was Amr. Then, Amr repeated his challenge, taunting them and saying, "Where is your garden of which you say that those who lose in battle will enter it? Can't you send a man to fight me?" Ali asked the prophet two more times, and after the third request, the Prophet let Ali go. Since Ali's father used to be a friend of Amr, Amr told Ali, "O son of my brother, I do not want to kill you."

"But I want to kill you," was Ali's response.

This so enraged Amr that he got off his horse, hamstrung it, and beat its face. Then, he advanced on Ali and they fought each other, one circling the other. The dust arose, blocking the vision of spectators, and then the cry of Allah Akbar (God is great) was heard, and everybody knew that Ali, the sword of God, was victorious. The death of Amr ibn Abd Wudd was another blow to the Meccans, morale.

Treason by the Tribe of Qurayzah

The Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayzah, who lived on the outskirts of Medina and, until then, had been allied with the Muslims, broke the treaty of alliance and openly joined the Confederates. They were expecting defeat of the Muslim army against heavy odds and extermination of Muslims and Islam once and for all.

Counterintelligence

The encounter between the Muslims and the Meccans was a match of both numbers and wits. Muslim leadership was not only more intelligent but also had a better intelligence agency. Nuayam ibn Masud, a new convert to Islam, played a significant role in sowing discord among enemy forces. His conversion to Islam was not yet openly known, and Nuayam approached Banu Qurayzah to counsel them on not joining the ranks of the Meccans unless the latter would give them a guarantee that they would not be left at the mercy of Muhammad should the tide of battle turn against them.

He then proceeded to the Quraysh camp and intimated to their leaders that the Banu Qurayzah had repented their violation of the covenant with Muhammad and were seeking to befriend him. He also counseled them not to send their leaders to the Banu Qurayzah out of the fear that the latter might seize them and give them up to Muhammad. Nuayam then proceeded to Ghatafan and repeated the same warning.

This planting of false information created doubts in the minds of the leaders of the Quraysh. Abu Sufyan sent a message to the leaders of the Banu Qurayzah, asking them to attack the Muslims the next morning and promising to follow up their attack. However, his messenger was turned back with the reply that tomorrow was a Saturday, and the Jews would not fight on the Sabbath. Angry at their refusal, Abu Sufyan believed the words of Nuayam. In the end, the dissensions, based on mutual distrust, gradually undermined the much-vaunted alliance between the Jewish and pagan Arab tribes.

Cowardice of Hypocrite Muslims

During the critical days and weeks of the War of the Trench, some half-hearted Muslims, who openly professed Islam but were not convinced of its message's authenticity, played a double game and adopted a wait-and-see strategy to pick the winner of this conflict.

Shaken with a Severe Shock

[Remember what you felt] when they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when [your] eyes became dim and [your] hearts came up to [your] throats, and [when] most conflicting thoughts about God passed through your minds. [For] there and then were the believers tried and shaken with a shock severe. (33:10-11) And when some of them said, “O you people of Yathrib! You cannot withstand [the enemy] here: hence, go back [to your homes]!” Whereupon a party from among them asked leave of the Prophet, saying, “Behold, our houses are exposed [to attack]!” The while they were not [really] exposed: they wanted nothing but to flee. (33:13)

The Ghatafan group tried to take the trench by an assault from the upper, eastern part of the Medina plain (“came upon you from above”), while the Quraysh and their allies launched an attack from its lower, western part (“came upon you from below”). This agreed with their original lines of approach, the Ghatafan having come from the highlands (Najd), and the Quraysh from the coastal lowlands (the Tihamah).

Commit Apostasy

Now if their town had been stormed, and they had been asked [by the enemy] to commit apostasy, [the hypocrites] would have done so without much delay. Although ere that they had vowed before God that they would never turn their backs [on His message]: and a vow made to God must surely be answered for! Say: “Whether you flee from [natural] death or from being slain [in battle], flight will not profit you. For, however you fare, you are not [allowed] to enjoy life for more than a little while!” Say: “Who is there that could keep you away from God if it be His will to harm you, or if it be His will to show you mercy?” For, [do they not

know that] beside God they can find none to protect them, and none to bring them succor? (33:14-17)

Discouraging Others From Fighting for God's Cause

God is indeed aware of those of you who would divert others [from fighting in His cause], as well as of those who say to their brethren, "Come hither to us [and face the enemy]!" The while they [themselves] join battle but seldom, begrudging you all help. But then, when danger threatens, thou canst see them looking to thee [for help, O Prophet], their eyes rolling [in terror] like [the eyes of] one who is overshadowed by death. Yet as soon as the danger has passed, they will assail you [believers] with sharp tongues, begrudging you all that is good! [People like] these have never known faith—and therefore God will cause all their works to come to naught: for this is indeed easy for God. (33:17-19)

Emulate the Prophet's Courage and Steadfastness

Verily, in the Apostle of God, you have a good example for everyone who looks forward [with hope and awe] to God and the Last Day and remembers God unceasingly. And [so,] when the believers saw the Confederates [advancing against them], they said, "This is what God and His Apostle have promised us!" And, "Truly spoke God and His Apostle!" And all this but increased their faith and their readiness to surrender themselves unto God. Among the believers are men who have [always] been true to what they have vowed before God; and among them are such as have [already] redeemed their pledge by death, and such as yet await [its fulfillment] without having changed [their resolve] in the least. (33:21-23)

Verse 21 exhorts the defenders of Medina to emulate the Prophet's faith, courage, and steadfastness. But it also has timeless import for all situations and conditions. "What God and His Apostle have promised us" is a reference to 29:2 and 2:155. "Among the believers are men" refers specifically to certain of the Companions who vowed, at the time of the early campaigns, that they would fight until death at the Prophet's side; in its wider sense, however, it relates to all efforts involving a supreme sacrifice in God's cause.

Reward and Suffering

[Such trials are imposed upon man] so that God may reward the truthful for having been true to their word and cause the hypocrites to suffer—if that be His will—or [if they repent,] accept their repentance: for, verily, God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! Thus, for all their fury, God repulsed those who were bent on denying the truth; no advantage did they gain since God was enough to [protect] the believers in battle—seeing that God is most powerful, almighty. (33:24-25)

Storm Wind and Heavenly Hosts

O YOU who have attained to faith! Call to mind the blessings which God bestowed on you [at the time] when [enemy] hosts came down upon you, whereupon We let loose against them a storm wind and [heavenly] hosts that you could not see: yet God saw all that you did. (33:9)

Cold Weather

It was winter, and the cold was unbearable, while the wind and storm continually threatened rain. The army of confederates, having expected an easy victory, was not prepared for a long siege. It was now amply clear that any victory would be extremely difficult as long as there was a ditch defended fiercely by Muslims.

Finally, the confederates' frustration became overpowering owing to divine intervention in the form of a bitterly cold storm, which raged for several days, thus making life unbearable for even the toughest warriors. Violent winds blew out the campfires, denying the Confederate army its only source of heat. The enemy's tents were torn up, allowing sand and rain to pound their faces. The Muslim camp, however, was sheltered from such winds. Meanwhile, the provisions of the Confederate army were running out, and horses and camels were dying from their wounds and lack of food. Terrified by the litany of ominous events against them, the Confederate armies withdrew during the night, and by morning the ground was cleared of all enemy forces.

And so, finally, the siege was raised, and the Confederates dispersed, thus ending the last attempt of the pagans and the Jews to destroy the Prophet and his community. The Confederates left behind their dead and never again challenged Islam. The Meccans had committed all their resources to destroy Muhammad, and there was no more they could do—their prestige was gone and their trade with Syria virtually ruined.

Fear of Confederates Coming Back

They [hypocrites] think that the Confederates have not [really] withdrawn. [Or but would come back and resume the siege]. Should the Confederates return, these [hypocrites] would prefer to be in the desert, among the Bedouin, asking for news about you, [O believers, from far away]. And even were they to find themselves in your midst, they would but make a pretense at fighting [by your side]. (33:20)

Muhammad and Jews of Medina

Judaism was already well established in Medina two centuries before Muhammad's birth. Although influential, the Jews did not rule the oasis. Rather, they were clients of two large Arab tribes there, the Khazraj and the Aws, who protected them in return for feudal loyalty. Medina's Jews were expert jewelers and weapons and armor makers. There were many Jewish

clans—some records indicate more than twenty, of which three were prominent—the Banu Nadir, the Banu Qaynaqa, and the Banu Qurayza.

Various traditions uphold different views, and it is unclear whether Medina's Jewish clans were Arabized Jews or Arabs who practiced Jewish monotheism. Certainly they were Arabic speakers with Arab names. They followed the fundamental precepts of the Torah, though scholars question their familiarity with the Talmud and Jewish scholarship, and there is a suggestion in the Quran that they may have embraced unorthodox beliefs, such as considering the Prophet Ezra the son of God.

Some Medina rabbis appear in Muslim sources soon after Muhammad proclaimed himself a prophet. At that time, quizzical Meccans, knowing little about monotheism, are said to have consulted the Medinan rabbis in an attempt to put Muhammad to the test. The rabbis posed three theological questions for the Meccans to ask Muhammad, asserting that they would know, by his answers, whether or not he spoke the truth. The first question concerned an ancient parable, and the second was a historical riddle. The third question, though, stumped him. It concerned the nature of the spirit. The Prophet told them to return the following day and he would have the answers for them. However, he failed to add, "*insha Allah*,"—"if Allah wills." By the next day, he had not received any revelation to help him answer the questions, and he had to ask the messengers to return the following day. This was repeated for fifteen days, while the people of Mecca laughed at Muhammad's inability to answer the three questions. Finally, Gabriel appeared to the Prophet and told him the three answers. The answer to the third question was that mankind does not have the knowledge to fully understand the spirit. According to later reports, the rabbis were satisfied with all three answers, but still the Meccans remained unconvinced.

When Muhammad arrived in Medina in 622, the Jewish tribes there were uneasy with the presence of Muslims. This was probably largely a matter of local politics. Medina was not so much a city as a fractious agricultural settlement dotted by fortresses and strongholds, and all relations in the oasis were uneasy. In fact, Muhammad had been invited there to arbitrate a bloody civil war between the Khazraj and the Aws, in which the Jewish clans, being their clients, were embroiled on opposite sides.

Some pagans and wavering recent Medinan converts to Islam (hypocrites) tried to thwart the new social order in various ways, and some

of the Jewish clans were uneasy with the threatened demise of the old alliances. At least three times in five years, Jewish leaders, uncomfortable with the changing political situation in Medina, went against Muhammad, hoping to restore the tense, sometimes bloody, but predictable balance of power among the tribes.

According to most sources, individuals from among these clans plotted to take Muhammad's life at least twice, and once they almost succeeded in poisoning him. Two of the tribes—the Banu Nadir and the Banu Qaynuqa—were eventually exiled for falling short on their agreed upon commitments and for the consequent danger they posed to the nascent Muslim community. The danger was great, as this all occurred during the same period the Meccans were trying to dislodge Muhammad militarily.

Sedition by Banu Qurayza

During the Battle of the Trench, the Banu Qurayza allied themselves with the Meccans, who, to the horror of the Banu Qurayza, gave up and marched home. The Muslims now commenced a twenty-five siege against the Banu Qurayza's fortress. Finally, both sides agreed to arbitration. A former ally of the Banu Qurayza, an Arab chief named Sad ibn Muadh, now a Muslim, was chosen as judge. One of the few casualties of battle, Sad would soon die of his wounds. If earlier tribal relations had been in force, he would have certainly spared the Banu Qurayza. His fellow chiefs urged him to pardon these former allies, but he refused. In his view, besides openly committing sedition, the Banu Qurayza had attacked the new social order and failed to honor their agreement to protect the town. He ruled that all the men should be killed. Muhammad accepted his judgment, and the next day, four hundred to seven hundred men of the Banu Qurayza were executed. Although Sad judged according to his own views, his ruling coincides with Deuteronomy 20:12-14:

¹² And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: ¹³ And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: ¹⁴ But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat

the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.

—King James version

The story of the massacre of Banu Qurayza as cited above is the accepted version of events in Islamic history.

The Quranic Basis for Rejecting the Story

And He brought down from their strongholds those of the followers of earlier revelation who had aided the aggressors and cast terror into their hearts. Some you slew, and some you made captive, and He made you heirs to their lands, and their houses and their goods and [promised you] lands on which you had never yet set foot: for God has indeed the power to will anything. (33:26-27)

After the rout of the Meccans, the Banu Qurayzah, anticipating the vengeance of the community they had betrayed, withdrew to their fortresses around Medina. They surrendered to the Muslims, forfeiting all that they possessed. “The lands on which you have never yet set foot,” can be seen as a prediction that the Muslims were to conquer and hold more land in more prosperous times to come.

The words “Some you slew, and some you made captive,” does not translate into the total destruction of the tribe of Banu Qurayzah. “Some you slew,” points to the leaders of the tribe executed for the crime of treason. The captives would have been men of fighting age who did not participate in actual fighting, and their execution would directly violate the Quranic principle of one being held responsible for his actions. Woman and children would be noncombatants and protected under the Quranic principle of use of discernment during war.

The reference to the story in the Quran is extremely brief, and there is no indication of killing a large number. One would think that if 600 or 900 people were killed in this manner, the event’s significance would have been

greater. There would have been a clearer reference in the Quran, a conclusion drawn, and a lesson to be learned. But when only the guilty leaders were executed, it would be normal to expect only a brief reference. To kill such a large number is opposed to the Islamic sense of justice and to the basic principles laid down in the Quran, particularly the verse, “No soul shall bear another’s a burden.” It is also against the Quranic rule regarding prisoners of war; either they are to be granted freedom or be allowed to be ransomed.

The new order brought by Muhammad was viewed by many as a threat to the age-old system of tribal alliances, as it certainly proved to be. For the Banu Qurayza, the end of this system seemed to bring with it many risks. At the same time, the Muslims faced the threat of total extermination and needed to send a message to all those groups in Medina that might try to betray their society in the future.

Yet Muhammad did not confuse the contentiousness of clan relations with the religious message of Judaism. Passages in the Quran that warn Muslims not to make pacts with the Jews of Arabia emerge from these specific wartime situations. A larger spirit of respect, acceptance, and comradeship prevailed, as recorded in a late chapter of the Quran:

Verily, it is We who bestowed from on high the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light. On its strength did the prophets, who had surrendered themselves unto God, deliver judgment unto those who followed the Jewish faith; and so did the [early] men of God and the rabbis, in as much as some of God’s writ had been entrusted to their care; and they [all] bore witness to its truth. (5:44)

Some individual Medinan Jews, including at least one rabbi, became Muslims. But generally, the Jews of Medina remained true to their faith. Theologically, they could not accept Muhammad as a messenger of God, since, in keeping with Jewish belief, they were waiting for a prophet to emerge from among their own people.

The exiled Banu Nadir moved to the prosperous northern oasis of Khaybar and later pledged political loyalty to Muhammad. Other Jewish

clans honored the pact they had signed and continued to live in peace in Medina long after it became the Muslim capital of Arabia.

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Jihad

Definition

JIHAD IS PERHAPS the subject most misunderstood by both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is worth repeating that to understand the Quranic message, one must not draw impulsive conclusions from isolated verses or sentences taken out of context: extremists on both sides do that all the time. One would be hard-pressed to find a better example of the deliberate distortion of crucial terms and concepts than the word *jihad*.

Since the Quran is the Word of God, all its parts—phrases, sentences, verses, and surahs—form an integral, coordinated whole. Keeping this central idea in mind, I will present all the verses related to war and peace in this chapter for the reader to decide the meaning of jihad according to the Quran.

And [knowing this,] do not approach the Quran in haste, ere it has been revealed unto thee in full, but [always] say: “O my Sustainer, cause me to grow in knowledge!” (20:114) We have so arranged its components that they form one consistent whole. (25:32)

The Arabic word mujahid is derived from the verb jahada, which means “he struggled” or “strove hard” in a good cause and against evil. It applies not merely to physical warfare but also to any righteous struggle in the moral sense. For instance, the Prophet described man’s struggle against his passions and weaknesses (*jihad an-nafs*) as the “greatest jihad.”

Islam Is a Religion of Peace—with One Exception

The Quran does not counsel turning the other cheek but teaches forgiveness and the return of good for evil when the circumstances warrant. However, these are very different from not resisting evil. Far from requiring the Muslim to turn himself into a doormat for the ruthless, the Quran allows punishment of wanton wrongdoers to the full extent of the injury they do. In the refusal to permit such penalties, morality evaporates into impractical idealism or sheer sentimentality. Islam is a religion of peace, with a notable exception. When aggression is committed against its adherents, it becomes mandatory for Muslims to fight in self-defense, and that is the true meaning of jihad in the context of armed struggle. Waging a war of aggression is a mortal sin in Islam. To Quote from John Renard's book, *101 Questions and Answers on Islam*:

Islamic criteria governing the call for jihad against an outward enemy are as stringent as Christianity's terms for waging a just war. According to Muslim tradition, no action can be justified as authentic jihad if any of the following occurs: killing noncombatants, prisoners of war, or diplomatic personnel; use of poisons or weapons of mass destruction; inhumane means to kill; atrocities in conquered lands, mutilation of persons and animals, wanton despoliation of natural resources, and the sexual abuse of captive women. All of that, however, has not prevented horrors from being perpetrated in the very name of Islam, to the great sorrow of Muslims. Nothing can excuse those who engage in such atrocities, whatever their expressed motivation or avowed religious affiliation.

Fight in God's Cause

The term "fight in God's cause" in the Quran implies two distinct reasons to invoke jihad: (1) For self-defense, and (2) Defense of religious freedom. Launching a preemptive strike is allowed based upon reliable intelligence that enemy forces are preparing for war and are about to attack. Aggression, therefore, is a grave sin in Islam. Force may only be used to correct a grave public evil of aggression.

PERMISSION [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged—and verily, God has indeed the power to succor them, those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying “Our Sustainer is God!” (22:39-40) And defend themselves [only] after having been wronged, and [trust in God’s promise that] those who are bent on wrongdoing will in time come to know how evil a turn their destinies are bound to take! (26:227)

For the first time, Muslims were allowed to use force to defend the new Islamic state in Medina since the primary duty of any government is to protect its citizens against aggression. During the Mecca period, no such nation/state existed. The verses above (22:39-40) enunciate the permission granted to fight physically in self-defense. All relevant Traditions show that this is the earliest Quranic reference to the problem of war, as revealed after the Prophet left Mecca for Medina. The above verses constitute one of the fundamental Quranic references to the question of jihad, or just war. The principle of self-defense as the only possible justification of war has been maintained throughout the Quran.

Sanctity of Life

Because of this did We ordain unto the children of Israel that if anyone slays a human being—unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth—it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind. (5:32)

As in all major religions, the sanctity of human life is a basic precept of the Islamic faith. Therefore, the taking of human life is a mortal sin under normal circumstances, with the only exceptions being self-defense and the protection of religious freedom.

There shall be no coercion in matters of faith. (2:256)

On the strength of the above categorical prohibition of coercion in religion, all Islamic jurists, without exception, hold that forcible conversion is, under all circumstances, null and void and that any attempt to coerce a nonbeliever to accept the faith of Islam is a grievous sin. This verdict should dispose of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before unbelievers the alternative “conversion or the sword.” This broad statement of freedom of religion confers fundamental right to the followers of all faiths to practice their religion according to their conscious.

Prohibition of Aggression

AND FIGHT in God’s cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression—for, verily, God does not love aggressors. (2:190) And as for him who responds to aggression only to the extent of the attack leveled against him and is thereupon [again] treacherously attacked—God will most certainly succor him: for, behold, God is indeed an absolver of sins, much-forgiving. (22:60)

Response to aggression should be limited to no more than what the enemy has done to him. This verse stresses the principle of self-defense as the only justification for war, with the proviso that retaliation must not exceed the injury initially suffered. The concluding part of the verse implies that in repeated unprovoked aggression, believers are allowed to wage an all-out war to annihilate the enemy’s military power. Such an all-out war is an exception to the rule, and the Quran states that God absolves the believers of what otherwise might have been a sin since it is they “against whom war is being wrongfully waged” by repeated acts of aggression.

Prohibition of Aggression against Aggressors

And never let your hatred of people who would bar you from the Inviolable House of Worship lead you into the sin of

aggression. But rather help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness. (5:2)

Violation of the Peace Treaty

The covenant referred to in the verses below are agreements between the Muslim community and non-Muslim political groups. The reference to the covenant with nonbelievers has two implications: firstly, establishing covenants of peaceful relations with non-Muslims is not only permissible but desirable. Secondly, Muslims may resort to war only if and when the other party is openly hostile. The breaking of the other party's covenant must be based on clear, objective evidence and not mere speculation.

AS FOR THOSE with whom thou hast made a covenant, and who thereupon break their covenant on every occasion, not being conscious of God, if thou find them at war [with you], make of them a fearsome example for those who follow them, so that they might take it to heart. If thou hast reason to fear treachery from people [with whom thou hast made a covenant], cast it back at them in an equitable manner: for, verily, God does not love the treacherous! (8:56-58)

DISAVOWAL by God and His Apostle [is herewith announced] unto those who ascribe divinity to aught besides God, [and] with whom you [O believers] have made a covenant. [Announce unto them:] “Go, then, [freely] about the earth for four months—but know that you can never elude God and that, verily, God shall bring disgrace upon all who refuse to acknowledge the truth!” (9:1-2) But excepted shall be—from among those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God—[people] with whom you [O believers] have made a covenant and who thereafter have in no wise failed to fulfill their obligations towards you. And neither have they aided anyone against you: observe, then, your covenant with them until the end of the term agreed with them. Verily, God loves those who are conscious of Him. (9:4) And so when the sacred months are over, slay those who ascribe divinity to

aught beside God wherever you may come upon them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place! Yet if they repent, and take to prayer, and render the purifying dues, let them go their way: for, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (9:5) And fight against those who ascribe divinity to aught besides God, all together—just as they fight against you, [O believers,] all together—and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him. (9:36)

Just as all of them are united against you in their rejection of the truth, be united against them in your readiness for self-sacrifice.

This relates to unbelievers who have *deliberately broken the peace treaty*, according to many eminent scholars, such as Tabari, Baghawi, Zamakhshari, and Razi. All treaty obligations are canceled, and after a four-month grace period, hostilities will resume. But exempted shall be those unbelievers from the cancellation of the treaties who had fulfilled their obligations, as the next verse indicates.

The injunction—“slay them wherever you may come upon them”—is valid only within the context of hostilities already in progress, on the understanding that “those who wage war against you” are the aggressors or oppressors, and that a war of liberation is a war “in God’s cause.”

“If they repent and take to prayer and render the purifying dues (zakah)” speaks of a possible conversion to Islam on the part of “those who ascribe divinity to others besides God,” with whom the believers are at war. Conversion to Islam has to be accepted, even if it is merely a deception to save one’s skin because only God knows the secrets of men’s hearts.

The verse 9:5 above is routinely distorted and often quoted out of context, as it ought to be read as a continuum with the preceding verses. Every verse of the Quran must be interpreted against the background of the Quran as a whole. The prohibition of forcible conversion precludes Muslims demanding or expecting a defeated enemy to embrace Islam as the price of immunity.

War against Hypocrites

At the beginning, in Mecca, Muslims were a small, persecuted minority and there was no social advantage to joining their ranks. But in Medina, Prophet Muhammad was a statesman, arbitrator, and military commander with resources and power. Being a Muslim in Medina had certain advantages. There was a distinct group of so-called Muslims who openly professed Islam while their actions proved otherwise. Out of political expediency, some of the residents of Medina converted to Islam. They were playing a double game and waiting on the sidelines to pick the winner between the Muslims and polytheists. Their sympathies were with the polytheists as the most powerful group in Arabia. It was only the lack of power rather than goodwill that dissuaded them from making war on the believers.

Application of the restricted term of “hypocrite” to present-day sectarian divisions in Islam would be a gross misunderstanding and distortion of historical facts. Only fanatics on either side call the other side hypocrites and kafirs. Both Shias and Sunnis are Muslims since they recite the same Shahada: “There is no God but Allah and Muhammad His messenger.” There are genuine differences of opinion between these two sects, but they pray to the same God and believe in the same Quran. It’s somewhat analogous to conflicts between Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians.

They would love to see you deny the truth even as they have denied it, so that you should be like them. Do not, therefore, take them for your allies until they forsake the domain of evil for the sake of God; and if they revert to [open] enmity, seize them and slay them wherever you may find them. And do not take any of them for your ally or giver of succor, unless it be such [of them] as have ties with people to whom you yourselves are bound by a covenant, or such as come unto you because their hearts shrink from [the thought of] making war either on you or on their own folk—although, if God had willed to make them stronger than you, they would certainly have made war on you. Thus, if they let you be, and do not make war on you, and offer you peace, God does not allow you to harm them. You will find [that there are] others who would like to be safe from you as well as safe from their own folk, [but who,] whenever they are faced anew with

temptation to evil, plunge into it headlong. Hence, if they do not let you be, and do not offer you peace, and do not stay their hands, seize them and slay them whenever you come upon them: for it is against these that We have clearly empowered you [to make war]. (4:89-91)

Religious Persecution and Peace Treaty

But as for those who have come to believe without having migrated [to your country]—you are in no wise responsible for their protection until such a time as they migrate [to you]. Yet, if they ask you for succor against religious persecution, it is your duty to give [them] this succor—except against a people between whom and yourselves there is a covenant: for God sees all that you do. (8:72)

There are 1.5 billion Muslims around the globe, and not all of them are expected to be involved in an armed struggle for persecuted Muslims in some other corner of the globe. You are not responsible for the protection of those Muslims who live outside the political jurisdiction of the Islamic state. Only the persecuted community has a legitimate right to use force in self-defense. However, if they are persecuted on account of their religious beliefs and request your help, it is your duty to help them. The exception will be if you have a treaty of alliance or of non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

Jihad in Defense of Religious Freedom

The doctrine of religious liberty asserts that each person has the right to profess and practice the religion that to him seems fit according to the dictates of his conscience. The free practice of religion is a fundamental liberty. There cannot be religious freedom without secure private property, because one needs a safe place to practice that religion without interference. Similarly, there cannot be religious liberty without freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of movement. The Constitution of

Medina enshrined a true spirit of freedom of religion by endorsing equal rights for Jews and according their religion equal status to Islam.

Defense of Monasteries, Churches, Synagogues, and Mosques

For if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled—would surely have been destroyed [ere now]. And God will most certainly succor him who succors His cause. (22:40) If God has not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, corruption would surely overwhelm the earth. (2:251)

Fight to End the Persecution of Believers

Fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is [freely] devoted to God alone. And if they desist, behold, God sees all that they do; and if they turn away [from righteousness], know that God is your Lord Supreme: [and] how excellent is this Lord Supreme, and how excellent this Giver of Succor! (8:39-40)

Hence, fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted [freely] to God alone; but if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who [willfully] do wrong. (2:193)

The true essence of words is often lost in the translation from Arabic to English. The above verses certainly do not suggest fighting your oppressors and then compelling them to believe in God alone. If they stop oppressing the believers, then all hostilities shall cease. This is an excellent example of how translation alone is not enough to understand the Quran because it is almost impossible to convey the nuances of Arabic into English in the

restricted format of translation. Both these passages stress self-defense—in the widest sense of the word—as the only justification of war.

Severe Suffering in the Hereafter

AS FOR THOSE who are bent on denying the truth and on barring [others] from the path of God—all their [good] deeds will He let go to waste. (47:1)

Liberation of the Kabah

Owing to their descent from Abraham, the Quraysh considered they were entitled to the guardianship of the Kabah (the Inviolable House of Worship) built by Abraham as the first temple ever dedicated to the One God.

However, the Quraysh had entirely forsaken the unitarian faith of Abraham, thus forfeiting any moral claim to the guardianship of the Temple (*al-bayt*) built by him. Idol worshipers of Mecca illegitimately occupied the Kabah. They defiled its monotheistic sacredness by placing idols and offering human sacrifice. Muslims were prevented from entering the Kabah in violation of freedom of religion.

BEHOLD, those who are bent on denying the truth and bar [others] from the path of God and from the Inviolable House of Worship, which We have set up for all people alike—[both] those who dwell there and those who come from abroad.

All who seek to profane it by [deliberate] evildoing: [all] such shall We cause to taste grievous suffering [in the life to come.] (22:25) But what they have [now] in their favor that God should not chastise them when they bar [the believers] from the Inviolable House of Worship—although they are not its [rightful] guardians? None but the God-conscious can be its guardians: but of this, most of these [evildoers] are

unaware, and their prayers before the Temple are nothing but whistling and clapping of hands. (8:34-35)

“All who seek to profane it” refers to deviation from religious tenets whether through malice or ignorance. Dancing around the Kabah accompanied by whistling and handclapping was a ritual practiced by pre-Islamic Arabs. It denotes the spiritual emptiness of the religious rituals of those who attribute a quasi-divine efficacy to all circumstantial forces, such as wealth, power, social status, luck, etc.

Military Readiness

Being a brilliant and shrewd general, Muhammad planned his battles very carefully and scored victory after victory against his enemies. As an outstandingly military genius and a warrior, the Prophet left many traditions regarding decent conduct of war. Agreements are to be fulfilled, treachery avoided, and neither the wounded nor the dead are to be mutilated or disfigured. Women, children, and the old are not to be slain, and orchards, crops, and sacred objects are to be spared.

O YOU who have attained faith! Be fully prepared against danger, whether you go to war in small groups or all together. (4:71) And let them not think—those who are bent on denying the truth—that they shall escape [God]: behold, they can never frustrate [His purpose]. Hence, make ready against them whatever force and war mounts you are able to muster, so that you might deter thereby the enemies of God, who are your enemies as well, and others besides them of whom you may be unaware, [but] of whom God is aware. Whatever you may expend [resources, efforts, and sacrifice of life.] in God’s cause shall be repaid to you in full, and you shall not be wronged. (8:59-60)

“War mounts” signifies mounted troops. Since Muslims are expected to organize their communal life within the framework of a state based on the ideological premises laid down in the Quran, they must be prepared for

hostility from groups or nations opposed to Islam's world-view and social system and, conceivably, bent on their destruction.

Conquering the Fear of Death

Fight thou, then, in God's cause—since thou art but responsible for your own self—and inspire the believers to overcome all fear of death. God may well curb the might of those who are bent on denying the truth. God is stronger in might, and stronger in the ability to deter. Whoever rallies to a good cause shall have a share in its blessings; and whoever rallies to an evil cause shall be answerable for his part in it: for, indeed, God watches over everything. (4:84-85)

Jihad Compulsory for All Able-Bodied Muslim Men

Who Has the Authority to Declare Jihad?

Jihad is intimately bound up with the concept of the Islamic state as an ideological organization. Every able-bodied Muslim is obliged to defend the freedom of his faith or the safety of his community. According to the Constitution of Medina, the state of peace and war shall be common to all Muslims in that community; no one among them shall have the right to conclude peace with or declare war against the enemy. An individual cannot commit acts of violence under the pretense of jihad. Only the duly constituted public authorities may authorize deadly force or wage war. Lone-wolf acts of violence and vigilantism do not fall under the definition of jihad.

FIGHTING is ordained for you, even though it be hateful to you; but it may well be that you hate a thing the while it is good for you, and it may well be that you love a thing the while it is bad for you: and God knows, whereas you do not know. (2:216)

When Jihad is declared, all able-bodied men from the Muslim community suffering persecution are under obligation to pick up arms in self-defense.

Participation of Women in Jihad

It was common for Muslim women to voluntarily participate in jihad along with men. Women would provide water, treat the injured, and retrieve the dead from the battlefields. The Prophet's wives also participated in battles by carrying water skins on their backs and pouring the water in the mouths of men who were injured.

In the battle of Uhud, Umm Ammarra Ansariyya, from Medina, was actively involved in combat to defend the Prophet who was seriously injured and lying on the ground.

Readiness to Undergo Sacrifice

And most certainly, We shall try you all, so that We might mark out those of you who strive hard [in Our cause] and are patient in adversity: for We shall put to the test [the truth of] all your assertions. Verily, they are bent on denying the truth and on barring [others] from the path of God, and [who thus] cut themselves off from the Apostle after guidance has been vouchsafed to them, can in no wise harm God; but He will cause all their deeds to come to naught. (47:31-34)

The “test” consists of one's readiness to undergo any sacrifice, even the sacrifice of one's life.

Exemptions from Participation in Jihad

Scholars (see the previous chapter, “[God-consciousness](#)”)

Disabled

No blame attaches to the blind, nor does blame attach to the lame, nor does blame attach to the sick [for staying away

from a war in God's cause]; but whoever heeds [the call of] God and His Apostle [in deed or in heart], him will He admit into gardens through which running waters flow; whereas him who turns away will He chastise with a grievous chastisement. (48:17)

The three categories (blind, lame, sick) includes all kinds of infirmities or disabilities that may prevent a person from actively participating in a war in God's cause. In other words, those who are unable to participate in the fighting physically but still support those who fight with their hearts will have their rewards with God.

Truly Helpless

But excepted shall be the truly helpless—be they men or women or children—who cannot bring forth any strength and have not been shown the right way: as for them, God may well efface their sin—for God is indeed an absolver of sins, much-forgiving. (4:98)

Or cannot find the right way—implying that they are helplessly confused and cannot, therefore, grasp this basic demand of Islam, or, alternatively, that the message relating to this demand has not been adequately conveyed and explained to them.

Non-Muslims

They [the non-Muslims agree to] pay the exemption tax with a willing hand, after having been humbled [in war]. (9:29)

Under Islamic law, conquered nations are to be permitted freedom of worship contingent only on the payment of a special tax in lieu of the Poor Due (zakah) from which they are exempt. Thereafter, every interference with

their liberty of conscience is regarded as a direct contravention of Islamic law. These people were, therefore called the “protected ones” (dhimmi).

The meaning and purpose of the *jizyah*, rendered as “exemption tax,” have been fully explained by many authentic Traditions. Since compulsory military service is a religious obligation, non-Muslim citizens who do not subscribe to Islam’s ideology cannot, in fairness, be expected to assume a similar burden. On the other hand, they must be accorded full protection and security of all their civic rights. Thus, *jizyah* is no more and no less than an exemption tax in lieu of military service and in compensation for the “covenant of protection and security” accorded to such citizens by the Islamic state.

Exemption from Jizyah

The expression “with a willing hand,” means without reluctance and to the financial ability of the person liable to the payment of *jizyah*. Non-Muslim citizens are liable to the payment of *jizyah* provided that they can easily afford it. On the basis of clear-cut ordinances promulgated by the Prophet, the following are exempted from the payment of *jizyah*: poor non-Muslims, all women, males who have not yet reached full maturity, old men, all sick or disabled men, priest and monks, all non-Muslim citizens who volunteer for military service.

Rate of Exemption Tax

No fixed rate has been set for this tax, either by the Quran or by the Prophet. However, from all available Traditions, it is evident that it is to be considerably lower than *zakah*, “the purifying dues,” to which Muslims are liable and which—because it is a specifically Islamic religious duty—is naturally not to be levied on non-Muslims. Thus, the non-Muslims citizens may end up paying less in taxes than the Muslim citizens.

Conduct during Battle

Muslims were commanded to fight with valor and utterly destroy their enemies during battle. For the Muslim community, each battle was a life-or-death situation. Defeat would have meant the extinction of the Muslim

community. On the other hand, for their nonbeliever Meccan enemies, defeat in battle meant a loss of prestige and some loss of life.

Fight with Valor

And be not faint of heart when you seek out the [enemy] host. If you happen to suffer pain, behold, they suffer pain even as you suffer it: but you are hoping [to receive] from God what they cannot hope for. (4:104)

Slay Them and Drive Them Away

And slay them wherever you may come upon them and drive them away from wherever they drove you away—for oppression is even worse than killing. And fight not against them near the Inviolable House of Worship unless they fight against you there first; but if they fight against you, slay them: such shall be the recompense of those who deny the truth. But if they desist—God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (2:191-192)

Retreat Not Permissible

O YOU who have attained faith! When you meet in battle, those who are bent on denying the truth, advancing in great force, do not turn your backs on them. For, whoever on that day turns his back on them—unless it be in a battle maneuver or in an endeavor to join another troop [of the believers]—shall indeed have earned the burden of God's condemnation, and his goal shall be hell: and how vile a journey's end! (8:15-16)

Never Surrender or Beg for Peace

AND SO, [when you fight in a just cause,] do not lose heart and [never] beg for peace: for, seeing that God is with you, you are bound to rise high [in the end]; and never will He let your [good] deeds go to waste. The life of this world is but a play and a passing delight: but if you believe [in God] and are conscious of Him, He will grant you your deserts. (47:35-36)

The Principle of Discernment

The principle of discernment should govern just war conduct. Therefore, acts of war should be directed towards the inflictors of the wrong, not towards civilians caught in circumstances they did not create. This rule forbids the use of weapons of mass destruction of any kind. Just war conduct should be governed by the principle of proportionality, with the force used proportional to the wrong endured.

Do Not Kill or Plunder Noncombatants

[Hence,] O you who have attained to faith, when you go forth [to war] in God's cause, use your discernment, and do not—out of a desire for the fleeting gains of this worldly life—say unto anyone who offers you the greeting of peace, “Thou art not a believer,” for with God there are gains abundant. You, too, were once in the same condition—but God has been gracious unto you. Use, therefore, your discernment: verily, God is always aware of what you do. (4:94)

This verse prohibits treating noncombatants as enemies and using their supposed non-belief as a pretext for plundering them. The injunction “use your discernment” imposes on believers the duty of making sure, in every case, whether the persons concerned are actively engaged in hostilities or not.

In one battle, the Muslims killed the children of the enemy. When the Prophet found out, he became extremely irate and said, “What has happened to the people to make them transgress their limits and go as far to even kill

children?” A man said, “Sir, were they not the children of the pagans?” The Prophet replied, “Even the best of your people are the children of the pagans.” Before the founding of Islam, Mecca was at the heart of paganism. The best of people refers to converted Muslims, many of whose parents died as pagans.

Refrain from Cruelty

*And will you [always], whenever you lay a hand [on others],
lay a hand [on them] cruelly, without any restraint? (26:130)*

The above is a reference from the story of Tribe of Ad and Prophet Hud. There is an emphasis on the tyrannical behavior of the tribe of Ad, owing to its warlike conflicts with other people. The term *jabbar*, when applied to a man, denotes one who is haughty, overbearing, exorbitant, cruel, and does not submit to any moral restraints in his dealings with those who are weaker. It expresses a Quranic prohibition, valid for all times, against cruelty in warfare, coupled with the positive, clearly-implied injunction to subject every act of war—as well as the decision to wage war as such—to moral considerations and restraint.

Martyrdom

Muslim warriors (*mujahideen*) will be rewarded in this life with a victory. Those who fall in battle will be rewarded with eternal life as martyrs (*shahid* or witness) for the faith. Shahid is a witness for confession or profession of faith, indicating the willingness to sacrifice all, even life itself, which is the ultimate profession or eternal witness of faith. There is no mention of seventy virgins or any other enticement to martyrdom in the Quran, another perversion added by Muslim demagogues to sell fantasy and play with the base emotions of naive young men. The unfriendly critics of Islam exploit such perversions in their attacks.

Suicide and Martyrdom

There is no direct mention of suicide in the Quran; however, it is clear from the Prophet’s Traditions that sin of suicide is no less than murder, and suicide

is not allowed under any circumstances. A man was wounded in the battle and his pain was unbearable, so he took a knife, cut off his hand, and bled to death. According to the Prophetic Tradition, in response to the man's suicide, God said, "My servant hastened himself to me, so I made paradise unlawful for him." Similarly, there are many other Prophetic Traditions describing the damnation of the souls of suicide victims.

Bartering Temporary Life for Eternal Life

Hence, let them fight in God's cause—all who are willing to barter the life of this world for the life to come: for unto him who fights in God's cause, whether he be slain or be victorious, We shall in time grant a mighty reward. (4:74)

Do Not Regret Martyrdom

O you who have attained to faith! Be not like those who are bent on denying the truth and say of their brethren [who die] after having set out on a journey to faraway places or gone forth to war, "Had they but remained with us, they would not have died," or, "they would not have been slain." God will cause such thoughts to become a source of bitter regret in their hearts since it is God who grants life and deals death. And God sees all that you do. (3:156)

Forgiveness from God Better than Amassing All the Wealth

And if indeed you are slain or die in God's cause, then surely forgiveness from God and His grace are better than all that one could amass [in this world]: for, indeed, if you die or are slain, it will surely be unto God that you shall be gathered. (3:157-158)

Eternal Life of Bliss

AND AS FOR those who forsake the domain of evil [and strive] in God's cause, and then are slain or die—God will most certainly provide for them goodly sustenance [in the life to come]. Verily, God—He alone—is the best of providers; [and] He will most certainly cause them to enter upon a state [of being] that shall please them well: for, verily, God is all-knowing, most forbearing. (22:58-59)

Martyrs Are Alive

But do not think of those that have been slain in God's cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Sustainer they have their sustenance, exulting in that [martyrdom] which God has bestowed upon them out of His bounty. (3:169-170)

Ruthless Killings by Jews, Christians, and Muslims

And, indeed, there came unto them [Christians and Jews] Our apostles with all evidence of the truth. Yet, behold, notwithstanding all this, many of them go on committing all manner of excesses on earth. It is but a just recompense for those who make war on God and His apostle, and endeavor to spread corruption on earth; they are being slain in great numbers, or crucified in great numbers, or have, in result of their perverseness, their hands and feet cut off in great numbers, or are being [entirely] banished from [the face of] the earth. Such is their ignominy in this world. (5:32-33)

“Apostles” is used here in its generic sense and applies to all the prophets on whose teachings the beliefs of Jews, Christians, and Muslims are based. The “excesses” refer to crimes of aggression and, in particular, to the ruthless killing of human beings. “Make war on God and His apostle” means a war of aggression and a hostile opposition to and willful disregard of the ethical precepts ordained by God and explained by all His apostles.

In the classical Arabic idiom, the “cutting off of one’s hands and feet” is often synonymous with destroying one’s power, and it is in this sense that the expression has been used here. Alternatively, it might denote being mutilated, both physically and metaphorically—similar to the use of the expression “being crucified” in the sense of being tortured.

A convincing interpretation suggests itself as we read the above verse—as it ought to be read—in the present tense: for, when read in this way, the verse reveals itself immediately as a declaration of the retribution that those who make “war on God” bring upon themselves. Their hostility to ethical imperatives causes them to lose sight of all moral values and their consequent mutual discord and perverseness gives rise to unending strife among themselves for the sake of worldly gain and power. They kill one another in great numbers, and torture and mutilate one another in great numbers, with the result that whole communities are wiped out or, as the Quran puts it, “banished from the face of the earth.” It is this interpretation alone that takes full account of all the expressions occurring in this verse.

Iraq War

Let us take an example from the Iraq war and review it in light of the above verses. In 2003, the president of the United States and prime minister of England decided to launch a war of aggression against Iraq based on bogus intelligence. The fatalities suffered by the American troops exceeded four thousand. Over 30,000 U.S. troops were wounded, with 20 percent suffering serious brain or spinal injuries. In addition, over 30 percent of U.S. troops developed serious mental health problems. The number of army veterans who committed suicide exceeded the fatalities suffered in actual combat. More than one thousand American troops suffered amputations of their limbs.

The Massacre by the Muslims

Although the verses 5:32-37 relate to excesses committed by the Jews and the Christians, it also applies to anyone who wages a war of aggression, including Muslims. Continuing with the example of Iraq War, the Iraqi Muslims, instead of uniting against aggressors, split along sectarian lines, and Shiah and Sunni slaughtered each other in large number, although Muslims killing Muslims is a war against God and His apostle. Iraqis

suffered casualties in excess of one million, and those displaced exceeded more than four million—“banished,” as in the Quran passage above.

Jihad against Muslims

Hence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them; but then, if one of the two [groups] goes on acting wrongfully towards the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to God's commandment; and if they revert, make peace between them with justice, and deal equitably [with them]: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably! All believers are but brethren. Hence, [whenever they are at odds,] make peace between your two brethren, and remain conscious of God, so that you might be graced with His mercy. (49:9-10)

The verses above reveal the justification of use of force against Muslims who are in the wrong. In this context, the expression “fighting” comprises all modes of discord and contention, both in word and deed. Here, the term “brethren” or “brotherhood” has a purely ideological connotation, comprising men and women alike; the same applies to the subsequent mention of “your two brethren.”

The Chargers

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace. Oh, the chargers run panting, sparks of fire striking, rushing to assault at morn, thereby raising clouds of dust, thereby storming [blindly] into any host! Verily, towards his Sustainer man is most ungrateful and to this, behold, he [himself] bears witness indeed. For the love of wealth, he is most ardently devoted. But does he not know that [on the Last Day,] when all that is in the graves is raised and brought out, and all that is [hidden] in men's hearts is bared

—that on Day their Sustainer [will show that He] has always been fully aware of them? (100:1-11)

These verses are relevant to our times, in which small groups of extremist Muslims are killing innocents and even fellow Muslims. The term “charger” denotes the warhorses employed by the Arabs from time immemorial down to the Middle Ages. They preferred mares to stallions.

The hundredth surah (“The Chargers”) refers to an imaginary situation. “The chargers” symbolize the erring human soul or self—a soul devoid of all spiritual direction, obsessed and ridden by all manner of wrong, selfish desires, madly, unseeingly rushing onwards, unchecked by conscience or reason, blinded by the dust-clouds of confused and confusing appetites, storming into insoluble situations and, thus, into his own spiritual destruction. Whenever he surrenders to his appetites, he forgets God and his own responsibility to Him. He is blinded by clouds of dust, not knowing whether their assault is aimed at friend or foe.

Making Peace with Enemies

More than six hundred years before the advent of Islam, Jesus of Nazareth uttered these revolutionary and counterintuitive words: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless anyone who curses you, do good to anyone who hates you and pray for those who carry you away by force and persecute you.” (Matt. 5:44).

Prophet Muhammad was just as familiar with the radical notion of reconciliation through forgiveness and would pray for the forgiveness of his enemies. Forgiving your neighbors or best friends is easy; however, forgiving your enemies requires a radical transformation from hate to compassion.

Make Peace Even if They Are Deceiving

***But when you are greeted with a greeting [of peace] answer with an even better greeting or [at least] with the like thereof. Verily, God keeps count indeed of all things. (4:86)
But if they incline to peace, incline thou to it as well, and***

place thy trust in God: verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing! And should they seek but to deceive thee [by their show of peace]—God is enough for thee! (8:61-62)

Even if they offer peace intending to deceive you, the offer must be accepted, since all judgment of their intentions must be based on outward evidence alone. In other words, mere suspicion cannot be made an excuse for rejecting an offer of peace.

Pardon Your Enemies

And who, whenever tyranny afflicts them, defend themselves. But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil: hence, whoever pardons [his foe] and makes peace, his reward rests with God—for, verily, He does not love evildoers. Yet indeed, as for any who defend themselves after having been wronged—no blame whatever attaches to them. (42:39-41)

Defense is one thing, revenge another. Successful struggles against tyranny often degenerate into a similarly tyrannical attitude toward one's erstwhile oppressors including undue acts of revenge. The above verses stress the prohibition of going beyond what is right when defending oneself against tyranny and oppression.

Treat Peaceful Nonbelievers with Kindness and Full Equity

[But] it may well be that God will bring about [mutual] affection between you [O believers] and some of those whom you [now] face as enemies: for, God is all-powerful—and God is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace. As for such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness

and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably. (60:7-8)

Believers are expressly allowed to form friendships with nonbelievers who are not hostile to them and to their faith. There are many exhortations in the Quran to be good to one's parents and kinsfolk who may not be believers, and, more explicitly, where believers are reminded that friendly relations with nonbelievers who are not hostile to the Muslim community are permissible and even desirable.

How Islam Spread in Persia and the Byzantine Empire

The Prophecy of Conquest

The spread of Islam in the Arabian peninsula and the defeat of the Byzantine and Persian armies at the hands of Muslims was foretold to the Prophet in 627 during the Battle of the Trench. While the Prophet was digging the trench, he had a vision of future Muslim conquests. The Prophet announced this vision right away in light of the impending attack on Medina.

And [remember how it was] when the hypocrites and those with hearts diseased said [to one another], “God and His Apostle have promised us nothing but delusions!” (33:12)

Muslim hypocrites, never convinced about the authenticity of Islam, nevertheless participated half-heartedly in the Battle of the Trench and dismissed this prophecy as “delusional” considering the dire straits the Muslims were in.

The authors of *The Cambridge History of Islam* described the local population's conversion:

Nevertheless, despite the indifference of the government to the propagation of Islam, large numbers of non-Muslims embraced the faith of their conquerors. A truly surprising phenomenon was the light-hearted abandonment of the old beliefs in territories coming under Muslim rule. How can this be explained? One

reason was certainly eagerness to come nearer to the new masters, and to share the advantages latter enjoyed, not least among which was that of being far less heavily taxed. After such a lapse of time, it is difficult to estimate the part played by Muslims fired with missionary zeal; or by the ingenious belief among the vanquished that the conquerors must have had divine aid in achieving their successes; and, in certain circles, by the idea that Islam was a syncretist faith, which, thanks to its simplicity and tolerance, excluded all disputes—unlike their own religions in which too many schisms had developed, invariably followed by persecution and strife.

When the Muslims first surged into Persia and Syria, they did not proselytize. Indeed, for a century after Muhammad's death, conversion was not encouraged, and in about 700, was actually forbidden by law. The Muslims believed that Islam was for the Arabs as Judaism was for the sons of Jacob. When the Abbasid caliphs began to encourage conversion, many of the Semitic and Aryan peoples in their empire were eager to accept the new religion.

No credible authority has documented any instance of forced conversion to Islam during the life of Muhammad and the first four rightly guided Caliphs. No incidents recorded in historical literature show that Muslim armies forced the conquered people to accept Islam. Islam spread far more thoroughly by proselytizing, and a growing number of Western historians, including H. G. Wells and Arnold Toynbee, support this view. Muslims were the rulers of Arabia for more than a thousand years, and yet, today, there are many millions of Arabs who are Coptic Christians. Muslims ruled India for about a thousand years, while today, more than 80 percent of India's population is Hindu. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population today, yet a foreign Muslim army never ruled Indonesia. Muslims ruled Spain for about 800 years. In Islamic Spain, known as Al-Andalus, from the eighth through tenth centuries, Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together in a sophisticated civilization notable for advances in medicine, astronomy, mathematics, agriculture, and architecture. Later, in the fifteenth century, Christian crusaders conquered Spain, wiped out the Muslims, and expelled the Jews. Today, there are hardly any significant Muslim communities in Spain, and all mosques have either been converted to churches or museums.

The Islamic Empire at one time extended from Spain to India, and for centuries Christians, Jews, and Hindus lived quietly and in relative freedom under Muslim rule.

The great lie that Islam was spread by the sword and upheld by the sword has been repeated so many times over the past millennium that it is now considered a fact. According to Joseph Goebbels, a notorious Nazi propagandist, “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.” The myth of “convert or die” is still being widely repeated in the Western press and is unfortunately practiced by a fringe extremist group of so-called Muslims profaning the sanctity of Islam.

Cure for Terrorism

The preponderance of the evidence in the Quran is that jihad can only be instituted for self-defense or religious liberty. The cure for terrorism is the true Quranic teachings abandoned by some Muslims. The Quran is the primary religious document for Islam and a source of unimpeachable and final authority for all matters of doctrine, practice, and law. No one, including Prophet Muhammad, can supersede the Quran.

Throughout Islamic history, except for Prophet Muhammad and a few other caliphs, Islamic rulers have rarely followed the strict Quranic criteria of just war. The same can be said practically of any civilization. For example, before the rise of Islam, Christian Byzantium and Zoroastrian Persia were contesting supremacy and dominance of the region. Both Christian Byzantine and Persian empires were exhausted from prolonged wars (almost thirty years), and the Arabs fulfilled the power vacuum thus created and became the superpower of the day. In our time, the just war principles are crucial for humanity’s survival, when any armed conflict can easily escalate into a nuclear holocaust, endangering the entire human race’s survival.

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