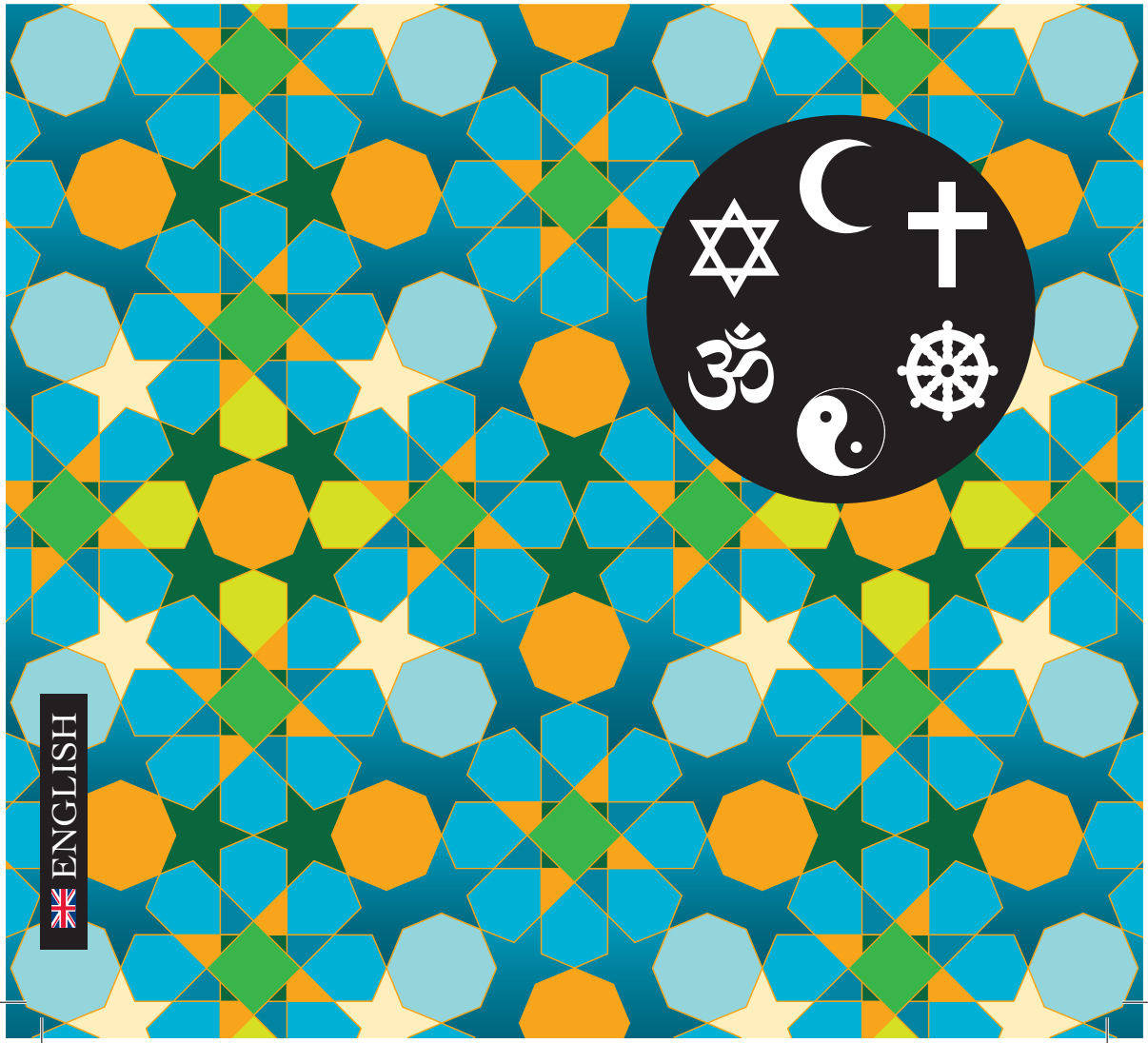
WHY MANY PATHS? WHEN THERE IS

ONE GOD, ONE RELIGION

MANY PRECEDING PROPHETS



ENGLISH

WHY MANY PATHS? WHEN THERE IS

ONE GOD, ONE RELIGION

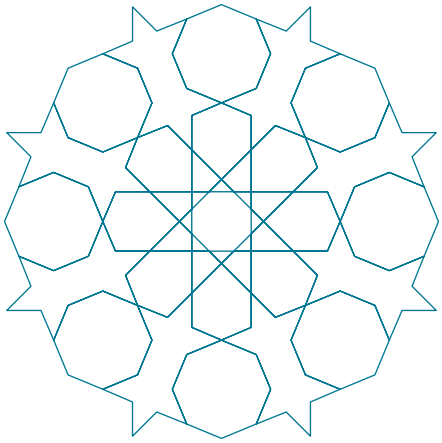
MANY PRECEDING PROPHETS

Compiled & Produced by

Islamic Information Center
Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Telefax: +968 24505170
Email: info@iicoman.om
Website: www.iicoman.om

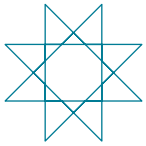
GOD SAYS IN THE QUR'AN:

"In matters of faith, He has laid down for you the same commandment that He gave to Noah, which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus…" **[Qur'an 42:13]**



WHY THEN ARE THERE SO MANY PATHS TO HIM?

Islam, Christianity, Judaism,
Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism,
Taoism, Shintoism…

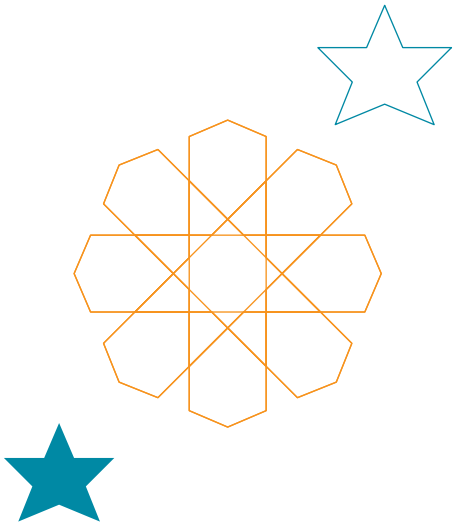


CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3
ONE PERFECT HARMONY
The Unity of God 6
The Unity of Mankind 10
The Unity of Religion 14
The Unity of Revelation 18
THE UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF ISLAM
What Allah says in the Qur'an 24
ISLAM
The Religion of All Prophets 26
WHY SO MANY DIFFERENT RELIGIONS?
Division and Deviations 27
Distortions and Doubts 27
MUHAMMAD'S VERSION OF ISLAM
Renewed, Complete, Perfected, Universal 28
THE ONENESS 30
Prophets and Messengers in Islam 31
ONE HUMAN COMMUNITY, ONE DIRECTION
Equality and Unity in Diversity 32
FUNDAMENTALS OF BELIEFS IN ISLAM
The Six Pillars of Faith 35
PROPHET MUHAMMAD IN THE BIBLE 36
HOW MUSLIMS PRACTICE ISLAM
Love God, Do Good to All 38
WHY RELIGION IN THE FIRST PLACE? 39
THE MORAL FOUNDATION OF ISLAM 46

INTRODUCTION

At the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, there were already many religious groups each one claiming to be the only one on the true Path to God and that Salvation could be attained solely for its followers.



Each group's criterion of Truth was based on the character of the rituals, ceremonies, customs and manners it observed - which resulted in each group condemning the other, thinking that they alone were on the right path bearing the truth, and the rest were deluded from the right path and truth. Thus, such an attitude results in hatred and enmity among them which in turn leads to warfare and bloodshed in the name of God.

The Qur'an was delivered over 14 hundred years ago by the Creator to mankind through His last Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him), presenting to the world at large the principles of Unity in God, Unity in Mankind, Unity in Religion, and Unity in Revelation.

Religion in the Qur'anic language is



referred as *"Deen,"* which translates as a "way of life," in compliance with God's guidance. It is submitting to the will of God in obedience to His beneficial laws. Islam is not a religion to be paid lip service only; rather it is all encompassing way of life that must be practiced continuously. It is a complete way of life where everything related to human existence is covered from birth to death, and living in complete submission to the will of the One who created man in the first place. God says in the Qur'an, *"The only way of life* (or Deen) *accepted to Him is a total submission to His way (that is Islam)"* [Qur'an 3:19]. "No compulsion in religion" as the Qur'an insists, is a bedrock principle of Islam, and therefore, this total submission to God's way should be done willingly, not coerced in any way.

Once we humble ourselves, rid ourselves of our egoism and submit totally to the Creator and to Him exclusively in faith and in action, we will surely experience peace in our hearts that in turn bring peace to our external conduct.

According to the Qur'an, Allah had revealed the "code of law" and the "way to God" to all His messengers from time to time over the ages. The "way to God" (which underlies and defines the religion) was fundamentally one and the same, particularly in the articles of faith such as: The Oneness of God, the belief in the Day of Judgment, and the divine will of God, the belief in the personal accountability on the Day of Judgment, and the link between faith and righteous deeds for Salvation. But they differed in the details of the "code of law" (which underlies and defines devotional

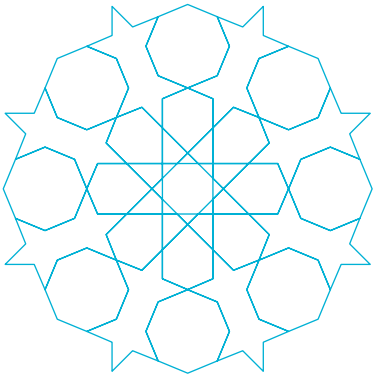
practices) depending upon the stage of human social development and life circumstances [Qur'an 5:48]. People of all the prophets were required to submit to the "code of law" and "way to God" as revealed to their prophets. In other words, they were required to be Muslims, following Islam as defined above. The Qur'an is the final revelation to mankind, and defines the final, divine "code of law" and "way to God" - the final religion that is Islam.

The Qur'an wants to emphasize this truth, and at the same time to bring light to man's negligence of internal devotion to God, and living a righteous life. Instead, variations in the "code of law" or outward form of observance had been idealized and made the basis of differences among mankind. The Qur'an proclaims in clear terms that all prevailing religions, as originally delivered, upheld one same truth of monotheism: recognizing One God, submitting to His Will, and living a righteous life.

It seems that when the world opened before man in the first stage of his history, man was compelled by his very nature, and the situation in which he found himself, to believe in the existence of an almighty being who must have created all that he beheld around him. It was only in subsequent stages that man began to assign qualities or attributes on the analogy of his own to the almighty being. It was thus a retrogressive turn from his initial belief in God. To put it in simple terms, Adam was created with light within, but his progeny deviated from the path losing the gift of light that had been given to their ancestor and let in darkness instead. The Qur'an refers to this: *"Mankind were at first of one religion only, and then they fell to variance"* [Qur'an 10:19]. In another verse: *"Mankind were first of one religion, and God sent prophets as comforters and warner and He sent down with them the word of Truth that it might decide the disputes of men"* [Qur'an 2:13].

ONE PERFECT HARMONY
The Unity of God

The differences that have marked the course of religion mostly have been about the attributes of God, and not in respect to His existence.





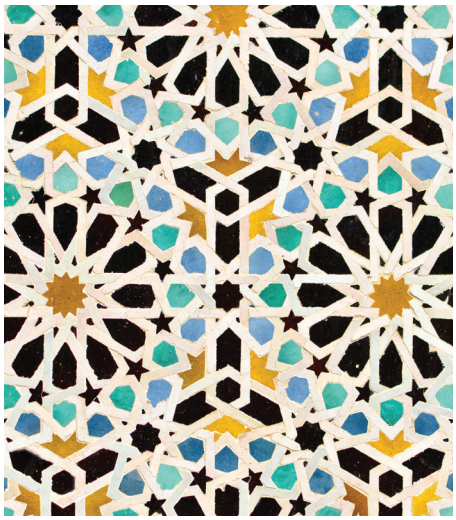
The intellect of man is bound by his senses, and man's perception ordinarily does not cross the frontiers of his senses. Therefore, man cannot comprehend the Absolute. Whenever he tries to visualize a thing unseen, he invariably conjures up for it qualities of which he is aware in his own person.

Prior to the advent of the Qur'an, two approaches had been followed to catch the glimpse of Reality. One approach was to endow the Absolute with attributes, and this led to anthropomorphism (in this instance, the representation of God as having human form or traits). Christianity and Judaism both suffer from this. For example, Jesus Christ is supposed to have used the anthropomorphic similitude

of the father-son relationship in the Gospels when he desired to speak of the universal mercy of God. Unfortunately, through an inept approach to the meaning and illustrative purpose of Christ, these concepts eventually prompted the urge to elevate Christ into the position of a begotten Son of God, and indeed of God Himself among his followers. The Qur'an categorically denies that Jesus is a Son of God or God Himself, as well as the concept of the divine Trinity of God. *"People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word directed to Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God, and His messengers and do not speak of a 'Trinity' – stop [this], that is better for you – God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heaven and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust"* [Qur'an 4:171].

The other approach was to consider God as something supernatural and beyond human experience, and that leaned towards transcendentalism. The current practice of Hinduism and Buddhism in using images to represent God in worshipping is a good example, but eventually followers ended up worshipping idols and demigods, though they do recognize the existence of the One Almighty God.

The peculiarity of the Qur'an is that it pursues a path along which we are allowed to get a transcendental concept of God, but also feel competent to dispel any anthropomorphic atmosphere that may attempt to close around it. The Qur'an says, *"No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision. He is the All Subtle, the All Aware"* [Qur'an 6:103]. It also says,



"No one is comparable to Him" [Qur'an 112:4]. It affirms individual attributes of God, one by one, but it prevents each attribute from developing any anthropomorphic touch.

He is the Living, the Almighty, the Creator, the Merciful, the All Seeing, the All Hearing, the All Knowing, and so forth. However, the Qur'an makes it clear that nothing may be compared to God. His living is not like our living; His seeing or hearing or knowing is not like ours. The metaphor of the eye is used to denote His knowledge and protection, light denotes His justice, the face of God means God Himself, the soul ascribed to God means His knowledge, and the coming of God and His angels means the coming of His orders. God's hand denotes His power and forgiveness, His Throne denotes His Majesty and His all-embracing control of the Universe, and sitting on the Throne signifies His rule over the Universe. While other religions personified God Himself throwing the door open to demigods and image worship, the Qur'an personifies only the attributes of God, allowing no chance for image representation or human divination.

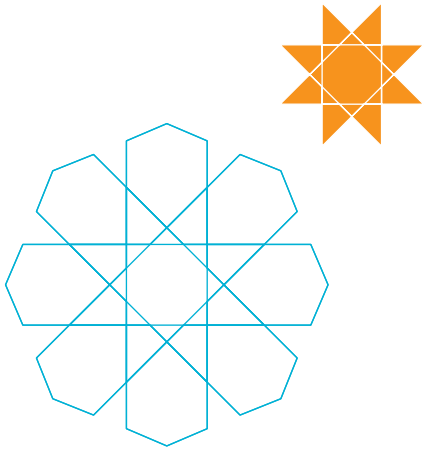
The Qur'anic concept of the Unity of God has both affirmation and negation. The affirmation is that God is One and One Only (this is referred as uniqueness in His essence). The negation is that there is none like Him, and when there is none like Him, it follows that whatever attributes assigned to God cannot be assigned at the same time to any other being (this is referred as uniqueness in His attributes). Prior to the advent of the Qur'an, stress was laid more on the uniqueness of God in His essence than on the uniqueness of God in His attributes. That is why, as a part of deviation from the original message of monotheism, in every earlier version of religion the belief in the Unity of God expressed itself side by side with images and demigod worship. The Qur'an asserts that God alone is worthy of worship. If you turn to any other devotion, you cease to be a believer in the Unity of God. The Qur'an says that it is only He who answers the cry of man and fulfills his prayers. Therefore, if you associate any other object or being with Him in your prayers, you simply associate that other object or being in the divinity or attributes of God. Indeed, your belief itself in the Unity of God becomes diluted.

Islam considers that Christians diluted the Unity of God by taking Jesus as the Son of God and by associating Jesus and the Holy Spirit with the Divinity of God, forming a union they termed, "Trinity." The Jews diluted the Unity of God by taking Uzair (Ezra) as a Son of God. The Hindus also diluted the Unity of God by allowing representation of God using images and idols. Buddhists have diluted the Unity of God by completely removing the concept of God in their spiritual journey.



The Unity of Mankind

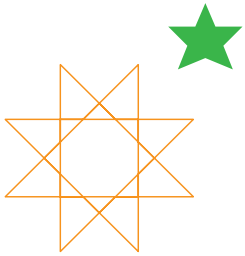
The essential mission of the Qur'an was to unite the Jews, Christians, and people of other faiths in a common bond once again after they had divided themselves into these exclusive religious groups, and then pave the way to a wider unity of mankind.



Belief in the One Almighty God, if entertained in sincerity, must, in the field of action, express itself in the unity of mankind. The Qur'an proclaims that mankind was at first one community believing in one God, the God of all mankind. Therefore, mankind must pursue a way of life *(Religion)* that is one and the same for all in accordance with . *"All people were originally one single community, but later they differed. If it had not been for a word (postponing) from your Lord, the judgment would already have been passed between them regarding their difference"* [Qur'an 10:19]. *"Mankind was a single community, then God sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreement. Yet it was only those (same people) to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry*

between them…" [Qur'an 2:213].

The Qur'an put forward a strong argument to be considered by the Jews and Christians, using the example of Abraham, who is revered by both. If the exclusiveness of each group was identical to the Truth, the Qur'an asks, to what group or religion did this common ancestor (Abraham) belong? As in his time, there prevailed neither Judaism nor Christianity, what religion did he follow, exactly? *"People of the Book (Jews and Christians), why do you dispute about Abraham when the Torah and Gospel were not revealed until after him? Do you not understand?"* [Qur'an 3:65]. *"Who but a fool would forsake the religion of Abraham? We have chosen him in this world and he will rank among the righteous in the Hereafter"* [Qur'an 2:130]. *"Were you (Jews and Christians) there to see when death came upon Jacob? When he said to his sons, 'What will you worship after I am gone?' They replied, 'We shall worship your God and God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, one single God: we devote ourselves to Him'"* [Qur'an 2:133]. *"They say, 'Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.' Say, 'No, (ours is) the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God'"* [Qur'an 2:135].



The attempt here was to point out to the Jews, Christians, and the rest of humanity that all believers in the time of Abraham followed a religion that neither was Judaism, nor Christianity, nor any other group. Judaism and Christianity arose centuries after Abraham was gone, and in the name of Moses and Jesus. The path of Salvation, which Abraham followed, was not meant for any exclusive group, as claimed by other faiths, but for all mankind, and that is, the path of devotion to one God and of righteous living. The Qur'an states that the message, which Abraham and every other prophet delivered, was that mankind was really one community, and that there was only one God for all of them; on that account, they

should worship Him together and live as members of one family. *"This is your community, one community – and I am your Lord: be mindful of Me – but they have split their community into sects, each rejoicing in their own"* [Qur'an 23:52,53]. *"Those who divide their religion into sects, with each party rejoicing in their own"* [Qur'an 30:32].

The Qur'an repeatedly makes it clear that it does not favor any exclusive religious group. On the contrary, it asserts that it has come to put an end to every form of grouping, and bring all mankind to one path of life, the path of Truth, and by its very nature, has had to remain the same throughout course of time, the path to which all prophets have invited. *"In matter of faith, He has laid down for you the same commandment that He gave Noah, which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus: Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it…"* [Qur'an 42:13]. *"But those of them who are well grounded in knowledge and have faith do believe in what has been revealed to you [Muhammad], and in what was revealed before you – those who perform the prayers, pay the prescribed alms, and believe in God*



and the Last Day – to them We shall give a great reward" [Qur'an 4:162]. *"We have sent revelation to you [Muhammad] as We did to Noah and the prophets after him, to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon – to David We gave the book [Psalms] – to other messengers We have already mentioned to you, and also to some We have not. To Moses God spoke directly. They were messengers bearing good news and warning, so that mankind would have no excuse before God, after receiving the messengers: God is almighty and all wise. But God Himself bears witness to what He has sent down to you – He sent it down with His full knowledge – the angels too bear witness, though God is sufficient witness. Those who have disbelieved and*

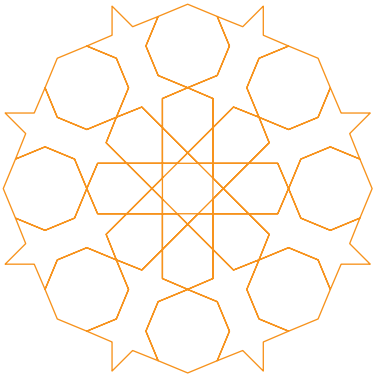
barred others from God's path have gone astray; God will not forgive those who have disbelieved…" [Qur'an 4:162-168].

As part of the plan to bring the followers of all religions on a single platform, the Qur'an recognized the founders of all religions as divinely inspired and endorsed their teachings. *"Say [Muhammad], 'We [Muslims] believe in God and in what has been sent down to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes. We believe in what has been given to Moses, Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction between any of them. It is to Him that we devote ourselves. If anyone seeks a religion other than complete devotion to God [Islam], it will not be accepted from him: he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter'"* [Qur'an 3:84-85]. The Qur'an also calls upon everyone who cares to follow the way laid down by God, and to accept without discrimination all the prophets and all the scriptures revealed to them as the basic truth, which they all contain, and to accept it wherever found and in whatever language expressed. The Qur'an disapproves of the tendency of regarding one prophet as superior to another, or of accepting one prophet and rejecting another as the bearer of truth. In fact, the Qur'an considers that discrimination between prophets or denial of any of them is tantamount to disbelief. *"As those who ignore God and His messengers and want to make a distinction between them, saying 'We believe is some but not in others,' seeking a middle way, they are really disbelievers…"* [Qur'an 4:150-151].

The Qur'an insists that the divine truth is a universal gift from God to all mankind. It is not exclusive to any race or any people or religious group, and it is not exclusively delivered in any particular language. Men may create for themselves geographical and racial boundaries, but they cannot divide the divine truth. The truth bears no national stamp, and recognizes no racial or geographical loyalties or group affiliations. Like the Sun created by God, it shines in every corner of the globe, and shines equally well on everyone. It is noticeable everywhere and has found expression in every age. The Truth of God, wherever found and in whatever form, is man's treasure, and man is heir to it.

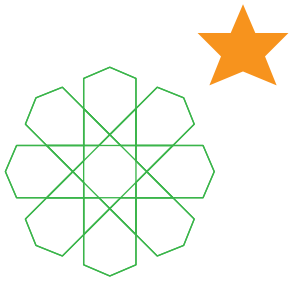
The Unity of Religion

The Qur'an prescribes the line of conduct as a law of life for mankind, just like every other law of nature, and one has to conform to it if he cares to profit by it.



That is the way to God, the right religion, and the law that does not alter for any one, and in its fundamentals is the religion that all the prophets followed and preached. It is this very religion, which the Qur'an styles as Islam, also known as the path of surrender to the Will of God or conformity to the laws of life fixed by God. *"So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition God instilled in mankind – there is no altering God's creation – and this the right religion, though most people do not realize it. Turn to Him alone, all of you. Be mindful of Him; keep up the prayer; do not join those who ascribe partners to God, those who divide their religion into sects, with each party rejoicing in their own"* [Qur'an 30:30-32].

It is this Islam so continuously delivered throughout the ages that is the true religion or way of life as fixed by God, the straight path, which by following, the individuals and communities achieve goodness or success in this life and hereafter and win the approval of God. In contrast, by neglecting it, they will perish or receive in recompense the disapproval of God. The Qur'an calls on the different religious groups into which mankind has divided itself to resolve and return to the path of devotion to God and of righteous living – the religion once vouchsafed for, to one and all – by discarding all the sectarian touches given to it in the course of history. *"True Religion in God's eyes, is Islam [devotion to Him alone]. Nor did the People of the Book dissent there from except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if anyone denies God's revelations, God is swift to take account – if they argue with you [Prophet], say, 'I have devoted myself to God alone and so have my followers.' Ask those who were given the Scripture, as well as those without one, 'Do you too devote yourselves to Him alone?' If they do, they will be guided, but if they turn away, your only duty is to convey the message. God is aware of His servants"* [Qur'an 3:19-20].



Islam is a universal religion or way of life, and the Qur'an is a universal guidance, a confirmation, correction, and completion of all previous revelations. Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon all of them) have trodden the same path, and the scope of Islam encompasses all the revealed religions, regardless of their times and places. There could be neither contradictions nor differences in the basic tenets and principles of divine faith, nor in what was revealed to Muhammad and to his earlier brothers in the line of prophets and messengers, Moses and Jesus. Contradictions only can exist between God's revelation and the false notions and philosophies that people

put forward later. The belief system and religious practice as presented in the Qur'an and prophetic teachings are commanded to those who have accepted Islam as well as to those who have not. Those who have not accepted Islam have the opportunity to return to the straight path. Islam is a religion and a way of life that is addressed to all human societies without coercion or discrimination. Whoever responds positively is taken into the fold of Islam, while those who turn away are left alone in PEACE. Their final accountability and judgment is with their Creator, Allah.

Islam as a way of life embraces most decisively all the manifold aspects or activities of human existence: spiritual and material, moral and physical, emotional and intellectual, and personal and social. Islam provides the confluence of the essence of this existence and the next, the meeting point of the body, the mind, and the spirit, where all the three unite to form a single reality, the basis of which is a real living consciousness of the One Almighty God. It also shows the practical way of realizing and living this reality.

Why is Islam the fastest growing religion in the world?



Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. There are many reasons for its attraction. The **first** reason is its appeal to logic and rationality, and its total absence of any kind of dogma in its structure of belief and practice. For example, there is no original sin, no misdeeds of a past life standing in between man and his destiny, no mortification of the flesh, no reincarnation of God, no vicarious atonement, no renunciation of the world, no life of celibacy and monasticism, and no living spiritual head. There is no priesthood, no confession of one's sins to another human being, no moral authority of one human being over another, no worshipping of saints, no middle man standing between a believer and God, no inequality in the sight of God except for righteousness, no association of partners with God, no representation of God by images, and



no worship of idols and demigods.

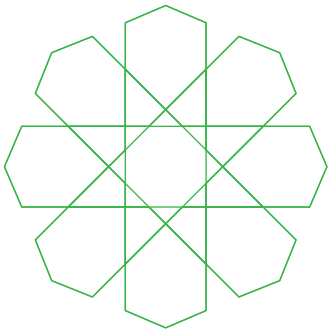
The **second** reason is the uncomplicated and direct nature of the Islamic message. Islam offers a religion of breathtaking simplicity. It has no complicated philosophy, no recognized hierarchy to mediate between God and believers, and no priesthood. Each Muslim has access directly to God, to the Book, and to the Prophet's teachings. Each non-Muslim who reverts to Islam – like every other Muslim – feels Islam belongs to him or to her. Conversion to Islam is simple: It is just the sincere recitation of the testimony of faith, "There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah; Muhammad is His messenger." It is this simplicity that perhaps explains Islam's success in the past, as it continues to appeal into the present day.

The **third** reason for Islam's popularity undoubtedly resides in its emphasis on equality of people, irrespective of races and tribes. The only criterion of merit is goodness and piety – color, birth, rank, wealth, education, and nationality do not matter.

The **fourth** reason is that Islam provides a healthy balance between affairs of this life and the hereafter. The choice between this life and the hereafter is not either this or that, as in some religions, but both, expressed in the Qur'an as pursuance of your "Dunya" (this life) and your "Akhera" (the hereafter).

The Unity of Revelation

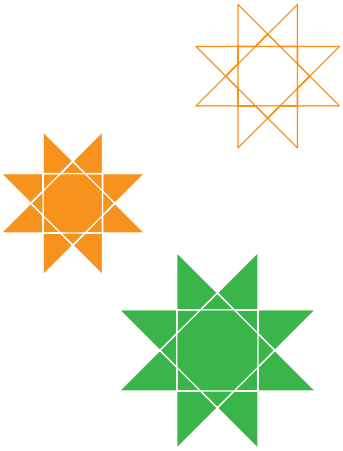
The fundamental basis of the Qur'an is that the message of the divine revelations always has remained one and the same throughout the history of prophethood, from Adam, the first prophet, to Muhammad, the seal (final) of all the prophets.





The Qur'anic contention is that mankind was at first one people and lived one common, natural life. It was only at subsequent stages that when they multiplied, economic pressure gave rise among them to conflicts of interest. They came to be divided into groups, each abhorring the other, so much so, that the situation demanded the delivery of a message of truth such as might reunite them once again. It was thus that the door of prophethood and revelation was opened, and a series of prophets and revelations followed in succession to bring home to mankind the message of unity. The message of these prophets and their revelations was essentially one and the same. The Qur'an states that there is no corner of the world occupied by man to which this universal message was not delivered.

"Every community is sent a messenger..." [Qur'an 10:47]. *"We have sent many a prophet to earlier people and they mock every one of them"* [Qur'an 43:6]. *"We have sent other messengers before you – some We have mentioned to you and some We have not..."* [Qur'an 40:78].



The way of God is the same in every age. It cannot differ from itself in any circumstance. Therefore, the way of God has addressed itself to humanity in the same fashion. The message has been and continues to be simple: One should believe in one God and act righteously in consonance with . This is the religion offered to mankind through the ages; this is the religion that is Islam. *"We sent a messenger to every community, saying, 'Worship God and shun false gods'"* [Qur'an 16:36]. The Qur'an asserts that every messenger who was sent to establish a religion on earth enjoined the same principle of life: Worship one God and live righteous life.

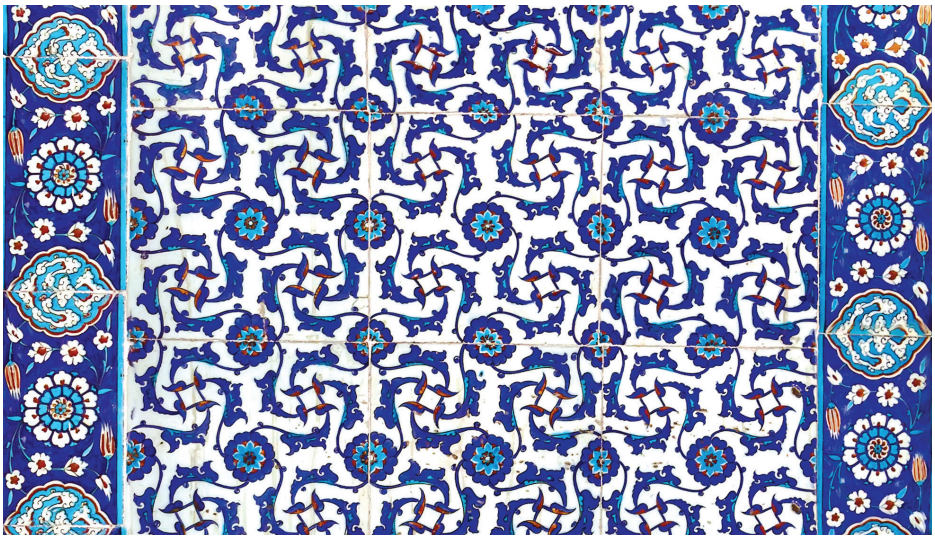
Not a single messenger was sent to divide people into different religious groupings. In fact, the aim of all messengers was to bring together those who stood divided, by worshipping one common God and following a way of life that would enable them to live together in mutual love and affection. *"This is your religion, one religion – and I am your Lord: be mindful of Me. But they have split their community into sects, each rejoicing in their own"* [Qur'an 23:52-53]. *"In matters of faith, He has laid down for you the same commandment that He gave Noah, which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus: 'Uphold faith and do not divide into factions within it...'"* [Qur'an 42:13]. The Qur'an always talks about how the teaching of one prophet endorses the teaching of the previous prophet, because the

teaching was the same. *"Step by step, He has sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth, confirming what was sent before. He sent the Torah and the Gospel earlier as a guide for people and He has sent down the distinction [between right and wrong]…"* [Qur'an 3:3].

If Revelation has laid down one and the same spiritual law of life, the way to God, why does there still exist differences between one religion and another? The Qur'an does not tolerate deliberate differentiation in religion; however, it justifies the necessary variations in the manner and method of implementing the religion according to the social aptitudes and conditions of life that vary from time to time. These variations are permissible if they do not contravene the basic belief in the unity of God and righteous living. *"We have appointed acts of devotion for every community to observe, so do not let them argue with you [Prophet] about this matter. Call them to your Lord – you are on the right path"* [Qur'an 22:67]. *"Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything"* [Qur'an 2:148]. *"We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God has so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about"* [Qur'an 5:48].

The Qur'an not only makes a clear distinction between the two aspects of Religion; *the way to God and the code of law,* it also presents the essential elements or composition of Religion in the following verse: *"Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in angels, the Scripture, the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphan, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God"* [Qur'an 2:177]. If the world still needs to understand what really constitutes *Religion,* this is it!

Before the Qur'an was delivered,



followers of all religions took the outward form of rituals and ceremonies as the *Religion* itself in all enthusiasm. Every group denied salvation to every other merely on the basis of their rituals and ceremonies. However, the Qur'an insists that ritual or ceremony was not *Religion* or the criterion of Truth; it was merely an outward aspect of it. The real *Religion* was devotion to God and righteous living, and was not an exclusive heritage of any single group, but the common heritage of all mankind. The *Law*, consisting of a code of conduct, actions, and customs has changed and is liable to do so from time to time under varying circumstances. The Qur'an recognizes the differences in disposition of the different sections of mankind living in different countries, resulting in differences in manners, customs, and styles of living, but holds that the differences of this character are incidental to the nature of man and should not form the criteria of truth and untruth, and result in mutual dislike and hostilities. The basis of the *Religion*, devotion to the One True God and righteous living, should not be disturbed. That is why the Qur'an lays great stress

on the need for religious tolerance, even with those who violently have opposed its very message of the unity of God. *"[Believers], do not revile whose they call on beside God in case they, in their hostility and ignorance, revile God. To each community We make their own actions seem alluring, but in the end they will return to their Lord and He will inform them of all they did" [Qur'an 6:108]. "Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth would have believed. So can you [Prophet] compel people to believe?"* [Qur'an 10:99].

One may ask, if all religions rest on truth, what then was the need for the Qur'an? The Qur'an replies: Although all religions are based on truth, their followers have turned away from it, and so the need arises to bring them back to it. That is the task of the Qur'an. It had to dispel all wrong notions about religion. It made faith and righteous deeds the sole means of salvation, which is available to all mankind and not exclusive to a particular group. It asserted that the *Religion* revealed by God was one for all mankind, from Adam to Noah, to Abraham to Moses, to Jesus to the last prophet, Muhammad, and that every deviation from it was a negation of religion. It emphasized that the real religion was direct worship of one God, without any mediating agency, and that this was the main teaching of all prophets, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and that every belief and practice that conflicted with it amounted to the denial of God. *"They also say, 'No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian.' This is their own wishful thinking. Say, 'Produce your evidence, if you are telling the truth'"* [Qur'an 2:111].

Religion according to the Qur'an is not exclusive to any grouping. Whatever the race or community or country you belong to, if only you believe in *One God*, and you do righteous deeds in consonance with the *divine code of law*, you are the follower of the Religion of God, and Salvation is your recompense. Opposite to this view, you have example of Jews and Christians who devised their own code of thought and conduct exclusive to them and drew circles around them so that whomever is inside that circle has Salvation and whoever is outside that circle is doomed. They have sidetracked the concept of faith

in one God of all humanity and in righteous living.

One might be an ardent devotee to God and practice righteous living, but if he or she is outside of the circle of Judaism or Christianity, he or she would not be considered "rightly guided." On the other hand, one might indeed be a wicked person, and yet Salvation supposedly would be attained simply by membership with that order. The Qur'an disapproves of that kind of attitude, and it proclaims that whatever one's race or community or affiliation, he or she who offers sincere devotion to God and practices righteousness in accordance with the divine revelation has attained Salvation, and no fear shall come upon him or her. *"The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good – will have their reward with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve"* [Qur'an 2:62].

When the world was so divided into groups, each calling the religion of the other false, notwithstanding the fact that all religions were the same at their base, who was to decide who represented the truth? The Qur'an said that Truth in reality was with every one of them, but that in practice they had neglected it. Each had been given one and the same *Religion*, or one and the same universal principle of guidance, but one and all had chosen to disturb its basic character. Instead of adhering to the straight path, every group followed a line of its own and appropriated to itself an exclusive right to salvation. The Qur'an proclaims that the only guidance, or the path, is the divine guidance and is open to everyone, not reserved exclusively for any particular race or people. *"And some of the followers of earlier revelation say [to one another]: 'Declare your belief in what has been revealed unto those who believe [in Muhammad] at the beginning of the day, and deny the truth of what came later, so that they might go back [on their faith]; but do not [really] believe anyone who does not follow your own faith.' Say: 'Behold, all [true] guidance is God's guidance, consisting in one's being granted [revelation] such as you have been granted...'"* (Qur'an 3:73-74).

THE UNIVERSAL MESSAGE OF ISLAM

What Allah says in the Qur'an

The following translation of the verses from the Qur'an presents what Allah says on the continuity and consistency of the message of Islam taught by all prophets.

ONE GOD

"Your God is One God. There is none worthy of worship except Him, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate." **[Qur'an 2:163]**

"Say: He is Allah, the One and Only God. Allah, the Absolute, the Eternal, the One on whom all depend, while He is independent of all. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none like Him." **[Qur'an 112:1-4]**

ONE COMMUNITY

"O Mankind! Allah created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and races so that you might know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you to Allah is the one who is the most righteous of you." **[Qur'an 49:13]**

"All people were originally one single community, but later they differed." **[Qur'an 10:19]**

"Mankind was a single community, then God sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements..." **[Qur'an 2:213]**

ONE RELIGION

"The Religion and Way of Life with Allah is Islam, that is, submission and surrender to the Will of Allah." **[Qur'an 3:19]**

ONE REVELATION

"When a Scripture came to them from God confirming what they already had…" **[Qur'an 2:89]**

"We sent you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them…" **[Qur'an 5:48]**

"This is a blessed Scripture that We have sent down to confirm what came before it and for you [Prophet] to warn… Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in this Scripture…" **[Qur'an 6:92]**

MANY PROPHETS

"In every nation, Allah has raised a Messenger, who preached the same message: worship only Allah, and shun false gods." **[Qur'an 16:36]**

"Allah has mentioned the stories of some Messengers in the Qur'an, and others He has not." **[Qur'an 40:78]**

ISLAM
The Religion of All Prophets

The following selection of the verses from the Qur'an presents what Allah says about Islam as the religion given to all prophets:

ABRAHAM, Prophet of Islam

"Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a strict believer in One God, a Muslim, submitting to the Will of Allah, and he did not associate partners with Allah." [Qur'an 3:67]

MOSES, Prophet of Islam

"Moses said: O my people, if you truly believe in Allah, then put your trust in Him, if you are indeed Muslims, submitting to His Will." [Qur'an 10:84]

JESUS, Prophet of Islam

"Jesus said: "Allah is my Lord, and your Lord. So worship only Him – that is the Straight Path." "His disciples said: We are supporters for Allah. We believe in Allah, and testify that we are indeed Muslims, submitting to His Will." [Qur'an 3:51-52]

MUHAMMAD, Prophet of Islam

"O Muhammad, say: Indeed my prayer, my worship, my life and my death are all for Allah, the Lord of the worlds. Allah has no partners, and I am the foremost among the Muslims, submitting to His Will." [Qur'an 3:67]

WHY SO MANY DIFFERENT RELIGIONS?

According to the Qur'an:
God-given religion is one and the same and it is given to all prophets, but man-made religions are many and different. The following selection of verses from the glorious Qur'an point to us how followers later broke up the unity of one religion into different groups, each group deviating from the original teachings.

These groups also introduced distortions in their scriptures, creating doubts about the actual truth.

DISTORTIONS AND DOUBTS

"Even after Prophets brought them true knowledge, people still differed, due to animosity between themselves. Moreover, the Divine Book had become corrupted with distortions; yet it was passed down to later generations, who are indeed filled with suspicious doubts about the actual truth of its contents." **[Qur'an 42:14]**

Their followers later broke up this unity into different divisions, with each group exulting in their adhered-to deviated beliefs.

DIVISION AND DEVIATIONS

"Allah tells the Prophets: Your Community is One single community, sharing the same faith, and I am your Lord; so fear only Me." **[Qur'an 23:52-53]**

MUHAMMAD'S VERSION OF ISLAM

Renewed, Complete, Perfected, Universal

This selection of verses from the glorious Qur'an present the version of Islam given to Muhammad as a renewed, completed, perfected Religion, universal for all mankind and for all time.

FINAL CALL

"Allah has ordained for you the same Religion (Islam), which was ordained for Noah, and which Allah has revealed to Muhammad and also which He had enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. So uphold the Religion. O Muhammad, call mankind back to Islam. Say to them: Allah is our Lord and your Lord." **[Qur'an 42:13,15]**

FINAL PROPHET

"Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and the Last of Prophets."
[Qur'an 33:40]



FINAL REVELATION

"Allah has revealed to you, O Muhammad, this Book, The Qur'an, setting forth the truth, confirming the Revelations prior to it, as in the past, He had revealed the Torah to Moses, and the Gospel to Jesus." **[Qur'an 3:3]**

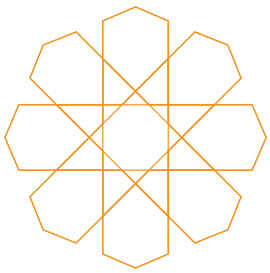
CHOOSE ISLAM

"Allah says: This day, I have completed for you your Religion, and I have perfected upon you My Blessings, and I have chosen for you Islam to be the Religion and the Way of Life." **[Qur'an 5:3]**

GAIN SALVATION

"Indeed, those who believe in Allah and do good deeds – they are the best of creatures. Their reward with Allah will be Paradise, Eternal, wherein they shall remain forever." **[Qur'an 98:7-8]**

As the Final Prophet, **MUHAMMAD** delivered, through the **QUR'AN**, the Religion of **ISLAM** in its renewed, complete, perfected, and universal form for all humanity, for all time.



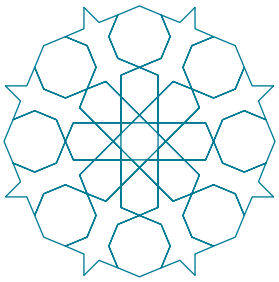
THE ONENESS

One God, One Community, One Religion, One Revelation, Many Preceding Prophets

Allah raised some 124,000 prophets and messengers to guide humanity to fulfill their purpose of creation, beginning from Adam (pbuh) - the first messenger, and ending with Muhammad (pbuh) – the last and final messenger.

The Qur'an mentions 25 prophets and messengers, and the five most prominent of them are: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace be upon all of them.

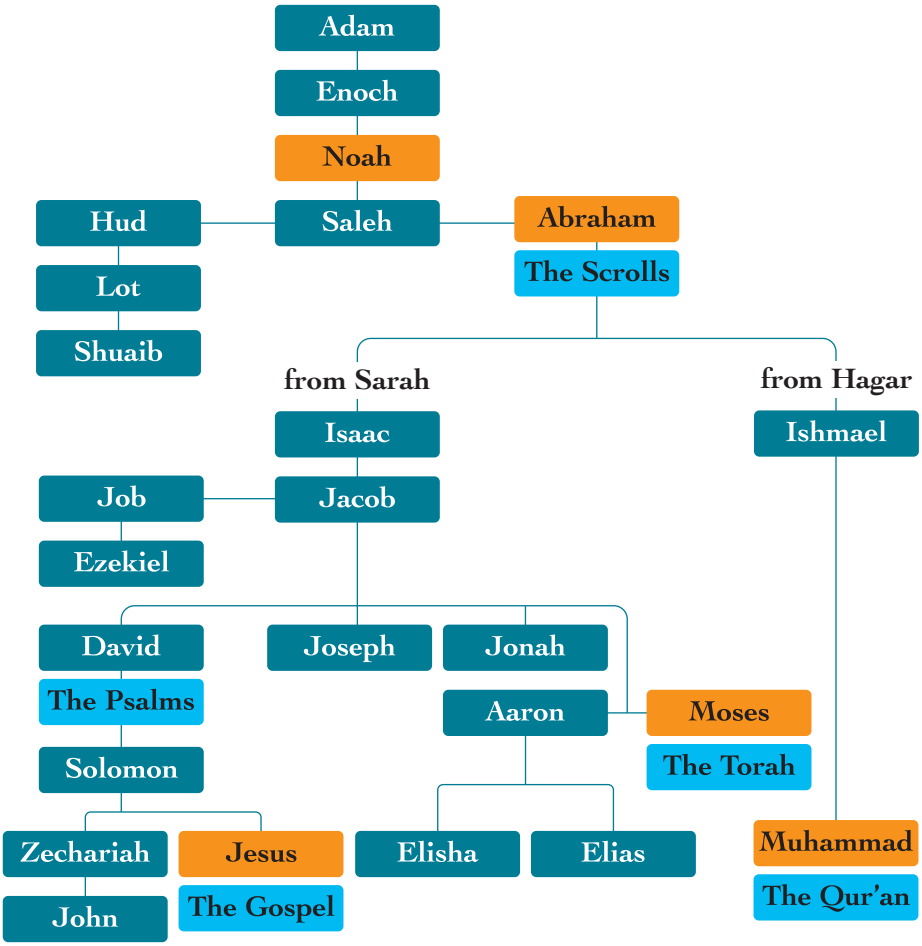
A simplified genealogy of the 25 prophets mentioned in the Qur'an (also mentioned in the Jewish and Christian Bible (Old Testament) except for a few).



Prophets and Messengers in Islam

The 5 Prominent Prophets

The 5 Books mentioned in the Quran



ONE HUMAN COMMUNITY, ONE DIRECTION

Equality and Unity in Diversity

The Ka'aba is a cubicle building at the center of Islam's most sacred Mosque in Makkah. It is the first house of worship of one God ever to be built on Earth.

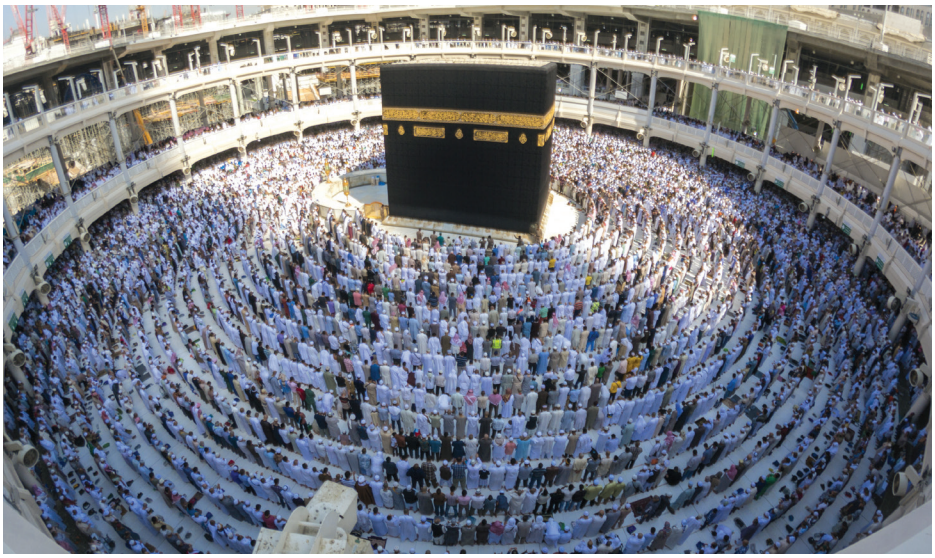








The Ka'aba has remained the sanctuary of Islam. It acts as the symbol of unity of all Muslims by giving them the direction to turn to during their daily prayers from wherever they are in the world. It was our father Adam who first built the Ka'aba. Later, it went into disuse after the floods of Noah. It was Abraham and his first son Ishmael who were asked by Allah to rebuild it on the same foundation. Today, Muslim men and women of diverse races, nations, languages, colors, cultures, and status, unite in their daily prayers facing the Ka'aba - one human community worshipping one God.



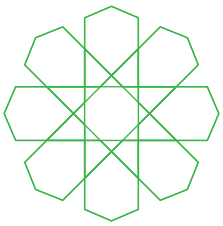
Picture: Prayers at Makkah. Millions praying in congregations standing shoulder-to-shoulder, foot-to-foot, as equals.

Makkah is, beyond any doubt, the city of Abraham. According to the Bible, Abraham was in advanced age when his first wife Sarah gave birth to Issac in Canaan (Palestine); it was not long after this that she insisted, to Abraham, that his elder son Ishmael from his second wife Hagar should no longer live with them. Abraham was very sorrowful at this, for he dearly loved Ishmael. However, the book of Genesis tells us that God told him to follow the wishes of Sarah, promising that He Himself would be with Ishmael, and Abraham altogether was reassured. We are told that Abraham took Hagar and baby Ishmael to wilderness of Paran, to the South (Arabia). In Psalm 84, a reference is made to Hagar and her son Ishmael: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are the ways of them who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well" (Psalm 84:5-6). Makkah sits in the valley of Baca, as the Qur'an also confirms this: *"Verily the first sanctuary*

established for men is the house at Baca, a blessed place and a guidance for all the world" [Qur'an 3:96].

The virtue in question here is trust in God to an altogether amazing degree by Abraham and Hagar with her child – for Baca was an uninhabited, barren valley with no water. Genesis tells us, "God heard the voice of the lad [that is Ishmael crying out for water]," and of Hagar it says, "And God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water" [Genesis 21:17-20]. The well and spring that fed it came to be known as *Zamzam*. Its quenching of Ishmael's thirst was the first of innumerable blessings that have been destined to follow from it. The miracle that made it gush forth may be said to mark the outset of God's establishment of a great place of pilgrimage. If a language is sacred because God has spoken it, the City is sacred because God has chosen and blessed the site of it, with a total absence of any human initiative.

Abraham still had many years to live, and he made few trips to visit his son, Ishmael, in the valley of Baca. It was also his God-given function to rebuild there along with his son Ishmael, the sanctuary of Ka'aba, to make it a place of pilgrimage and to establish a line of spirituality in those parts. God showed to Abraham the exact site where he and his first son Ishmael were to build the Ka'aba, near the well of *Zamzam*. Its name, the Ka'aba, or the Cube, reflects its shape, which is an elongated cube, with its four corners facing East, North, West, and South, the order in which they are visited in the seven anti-clockwise rounds that constitute the pilgrimage rite of visitation.



FUNDAMENTALS OF BELIEFS IN ISLAM

The Six Pillars of Faith

1. The One and Only God whose proper name is in both Arabic (the language of Muhammad) and Aramaic (the language of Jesus) is Allah. Allah is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and all that exists. Humanity is created to "worship Allah" [Qur'an 51:56].

2. Angels are spiritual beings created from light. They have no free will and have been tasked to execute Allah's commands without failing.

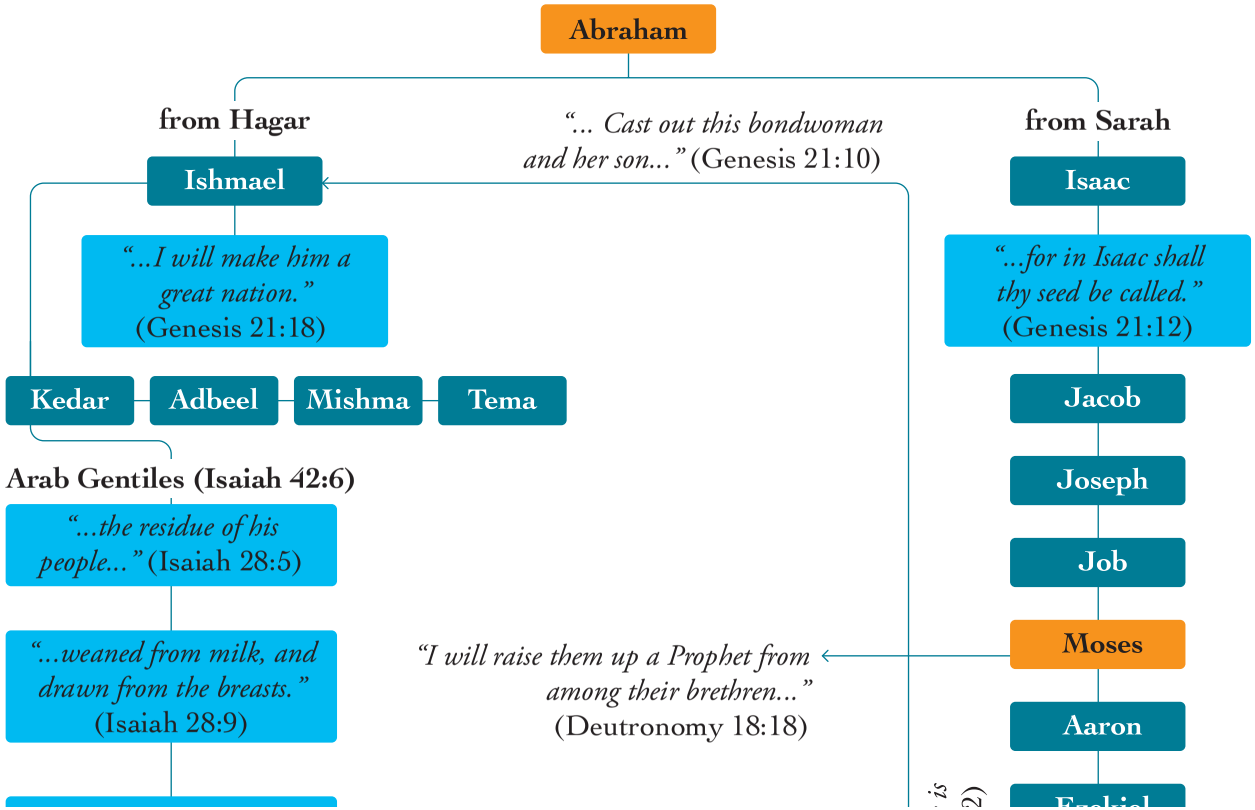
3. Divine Guidance sent to humanity through prophets and messengers. A prophet was a man appointed by Allah to receive Divine Revelation. A messenger was a prophet who received a Book of Divine Revelation and a Code of Divine Laws. According to Prophet Muhammad's saying, 315 of the 124,000 prophets were messengers.

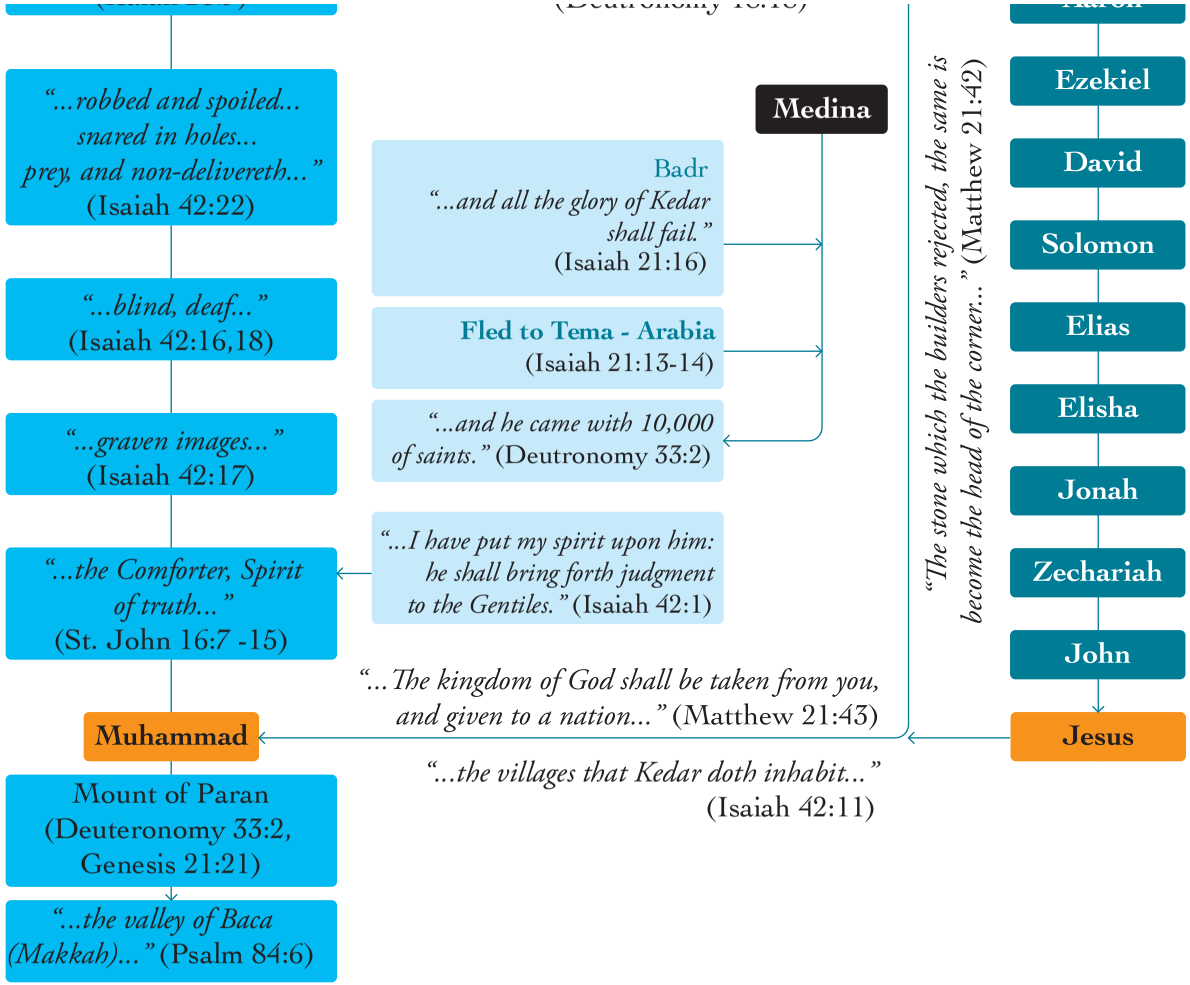
4. Books of Divine Revelation given to chosen prophets. The five books Allah mentions in the Qur'an are: the Scrolls of Abraham, the Psalms of David, the Torah of Moses, the Gospel of Jesus, and the final revelation, the Qur'an, revealed to Muhammad. The Qur'an is the only existing authentic Revealed Book because it is preserved intact in the original form, content, and language.

5. Accountability in the Hereafter, which includes personal free choice and responsibility, life after death, end of the world, resurrection, day of judgment, paradise and hellfire.

6. Divine Will, in which nothing, good or bad, occurs without Allah's knowledge and permission; *"Allah has power over all things"* [Qur'an 5:120].

PROPHET MUHAMMAD (peace be upon him) IN THE BIBLE




"...robbed and spoiled... snared in holes... prey, and non-delivereth..." (Isaiah 42:22)
"...blind, deaf..." (Isaiah 42:16,18)
"...graven images..." (Isaiah 42:17)
"...the Comforter, Spirit of truth..." (St. John 16:7 -15)
Muhammad
Mount of Paran (Deuteronomy 33:2, Genesis 21:21)
"...the valley of Baca (Makkah)..." (Psalm 84:6)
Medina
Badr "...and all the glory of Kedar shall fail." (Isaiah 21:16)
Fled to Tema - Arabia (Isaiah 21:13-14)
"...and he came with 10,000 of saints." (Deutronomy 33:2)
"...I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." (Isaiah 42:1)
"...The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation..." (Matthew 21:43)
"...the villages that Kedar doth inhabit..." (Isaiah 42:11)
"The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner..." (Matthew 21:42)
Ezekiel
David
Solomon
Elias
Elisha
Jonah
Zechariah
John
Jesus

HOW MUSLIMS PRACTICE ISLAM

Love God, Do Good to All

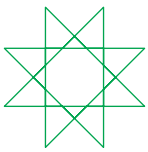
1 Love Allah and submit to His Guidance as in the Qur'an. Muslims testify, "There is none worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." In Islam, it's not enough just to have faith; one has to do righteous deeds. Muslims affirm their faith with good works.

2 Follow Prophet Muhammad, because his life example is complete and, "most excellent" [Qur'an 33:21]. *"If you love Allah, follow Muhammad"* [Qur'an 3:31].

3 "Worship the Creator, Serve His Creations," to bring about a better world. Worship in Islam includes all beneficial and permissible acts done for Allah's sake to please Him. Muslims, *"enjoin all that is right, and forbid all that is wrong"* [Qur'an 3:110].

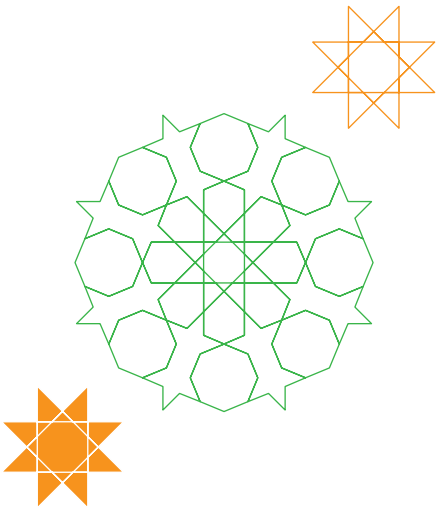
4 Perform Obligatory Acts of Worship known as, **"The Five Pillars of Islam,"** to develop God-consciousness so as to become better human being. These are the Testimony of Faith **(Shahada)**, Obligatory Prayers **(Salah)** five times daily, Obligatory Charity **(Zakat)**, Fasting in the month of Ramadan **(Sawm)**, and Pilgrimage to Makkah **(Hajj)** at least once in a lifetime if one can afford it.

5 Be responsible caretakers of the environment and all its creatures. *"Do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set in order"* [Qur'an 7:56].



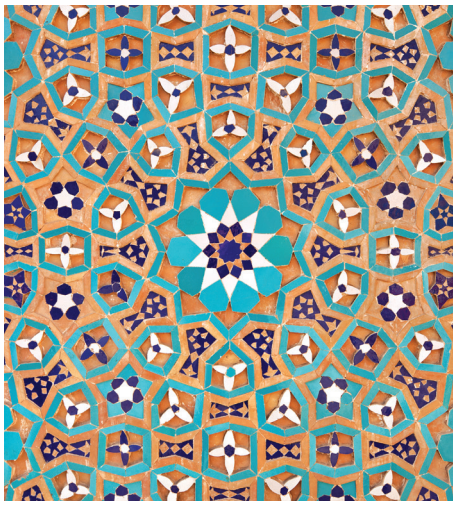
WHY RELIGION IN THE FIRST PLACE?

"True Success" for human beings means to fulfill the purpose of their creation or their existence, and thus to attain eternal happiness in the hereafter.



Eternal happiness is achieved only through, "Self-submission to the Will of the Creator" (this is the literal meaning of "Islam"). In other words, *Islam = Self-submission to the Will of the Creator*.

Islam is the religion that was given to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and in its final form, to Muhammad, as a complete, perfected, and universal way of life for all mankind. A Muslim is one who chooses to submit or surrender willingly to the Will of the Creator and adopts the way of life based completely on the Creator's guidance in order to gain peace with the Creator, within himself, with his fellow humans, with his environment, and ultimately gain the reward of salvation and paradise in the hereafter



by the mercy of the Creator.

God created you, and all that you see in the world and do not see, for a reason. Your body and spirit are different from the sky, the earth, the mountains, the birds, and the trees, but the collective purpose of all is not; it is to come to unwavering faith in God as He is, without seeing Him, and then to worship Him as if you do see Him. Your fellows in creation - the all non-human ones, always know their purpose and succeed in achieving it simply by being what they are, because God fixed this function into the natures He created them with. This does not, however, make them better than you. In fact, it is you, as a human being, whom God has raised above much of His creation, subjugating all that you see in this life, and much that you do not see, to your will. That is because you have what these other creatures do not have: freedom to choose and a mind to make those choices with – *free will.*

However, these two gifts come with consequences. First, God set faith in Him as our Sole Creator, deep within your human nature, even as He did in,



say, bees or flowers. Yet unlike them, your disposition to believe in and worship God sleeps in your soul and must be awakened by the use of your mind and your heart. Second, God may or may not choose to call the bee or flower to account for what it does, but He will definitely call on you and hold you responsible for the choices you make both as an individual and as a part of a larger community. Moreover, the results of this accountability will come to you and to your people, both in this life and after death on the day of judgement. This is *morality* coupled with *mortality*, the two defining qualities of the human being.

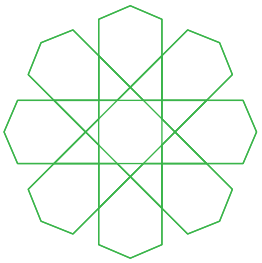
The idea that we are liable in life and after death for our beliefs and actions brings up two important questions: First, why has God obliged us to find our faith, instead of programming it in us, like the rest of creation that we know? Second, can it be that when we have lost our souls, and our bodies decay into the earth, that God truly will raise us to life again?



The first answer is that by making us come to the realization that we have a Creator, God tests our gratitude to Him for bringing us from a condition of nonexistence into the thrill of living existence, and from utter unawareness to the dignity of rational being. The second is that God, who created everything from nothing and then guided it to its natural way of life, can recreate it all over again with complete precision whenever He chooses and with no weariness. In fact, He has told us that He means to do exactly this with His entire human creation after we die and the world ends. Then, He will keep us in new states of being ever after. This last statement is both a major part of our test of faith and the perfection of the blessing of human life, for which no amount of thankfulness to God can suffice, a demonstration of pure divine mercy.

Many religions teach the essence of all that has been said. Moreover, the human sense of moral conduct and value system across time and the world is remarkably common. Yet, how can you know that these ideas are true? Why are the concepts of right

and wrong so widely and persistently shared? The response is twofold: God set free-willed people upon the planet to journey back to pure belief in Him alone and to strive for all that is good for themselves and the rest of creation along the way. He did not strand them in the lonely vastness of a planet adrift in space without the sustenance their bodies require or the guidance their souls need.





Provision flourishes all about us in the teeming creation God made to serve us as food, fuel, and habitation, and extends the way He divided us into genders and united us as families. As for the want of our spirits, God continuously sent among mankind two forms of guidance to stir our souls to remembrance of Him and to ease our social emotional existence. He sent us human beings, whom He communicated with, taught, and raised as models for the rest of us to follow. These are the prophets and messengers, most of whom we no longer know, though every community in the history of humanity has had them. He also revealed through some of His Messengers Heavenly Books that we ordinary people could access directly. These scriptures are inscribed in remembrance of God in His own words, meant to explain to the first of us and the last of us who our Creator is, what He expects of humankind, and what we can hope for in Him in the days of the world and the life everlasting after.

The revelations that these prophets and messengers propagated enjoin belief in the same One God, practice of the same human virtues, and admonition about our same ultimate destiny. However, God evolved their traditions and systems of human self-governance regarding the rights and obligations of the individual, the



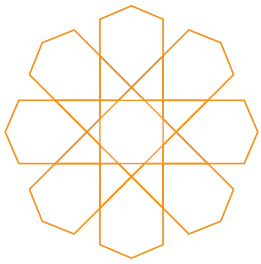
community, and human interaction as humankind itself developed personally, socially, and globally. It is God's way that whatever He does should come to perfection; thus, from the beginning, He willed that the human leadership of His prophets and messengers and the revealed guidance of His Books would reach a culmination at precisely the right moment in history, with Muhammad as His last Prophet and Messenger and the Qur'an as His last revelation to mankind until end of time.

The work that was re-introduced by Prophet Muhammad as written in the Qur'an represents the fruition of that anciently sacred tradition. The last revelation in its original Arabic language is named the Qur'an, meaning the Recitation, or the Reading, because God intended for believing men and women to read and recite it over and over again, as a grace and as a reminder to them. It makes clear to them who they are, where they come from, where they are headed, what they are to do, what will happen if they do not listen, what will be theirs if they do, and Who it is that brought them to life and why.

Any translation of the Book is not the Qur'an itself, and this is an important distinction to keep in mind. The

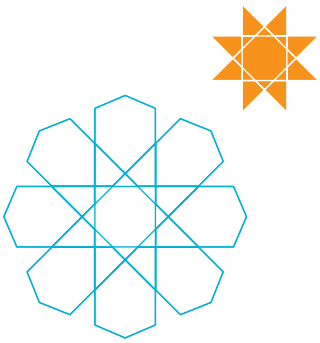
Qur'an only exists as God Himself revealed it and in the language He revealed it to the final messenger through His archangel Gabriel: letter-by-letter, word-by-word, verse-by-verse, segment-by-segment, and chapter-by-chapter. This prophet then conveyed it verbatim to all those around him as he received it, and saw to it that his companions memorized it accurately and transcribed it meticulously in writing. One thousand, four hundred years later, it still holds the selfsame language and order as when God's last messenger transmitted it to the world, bringing it to life and others to life with it.

God's blessings and peace be upon Muhammad, the last messenger of God, and upon all his brothers whom God sent as prophets and messengers before him. These include Jesus, Moses, Abraham, Noah, and many others, some of whom are mentioned in the Qur'an, and others who are not. All the prophets and messengers have been presented to mankind as role models. The Qur'an makes no distinction between them or between their creeds. They are a single fellowship charged with bringing to the world a solitary faith: The belief in one God without associating any partner, and living a righteous life. It does not take its name from any one of them, nor from their people or lands. Rather, from its central, singular truth comes its title: Islam, the religion of *willing human submission, or, surrender to the will of one God.*



THE MORAL FOUNDATION OF ISLAM

In Islam, the "religious attitude" is the natural outcome of man's intellectual and biological constitution. Man is unable to explain to himself the mystery of life, the mystery of birth and death, the mystery of infinity and eternity.



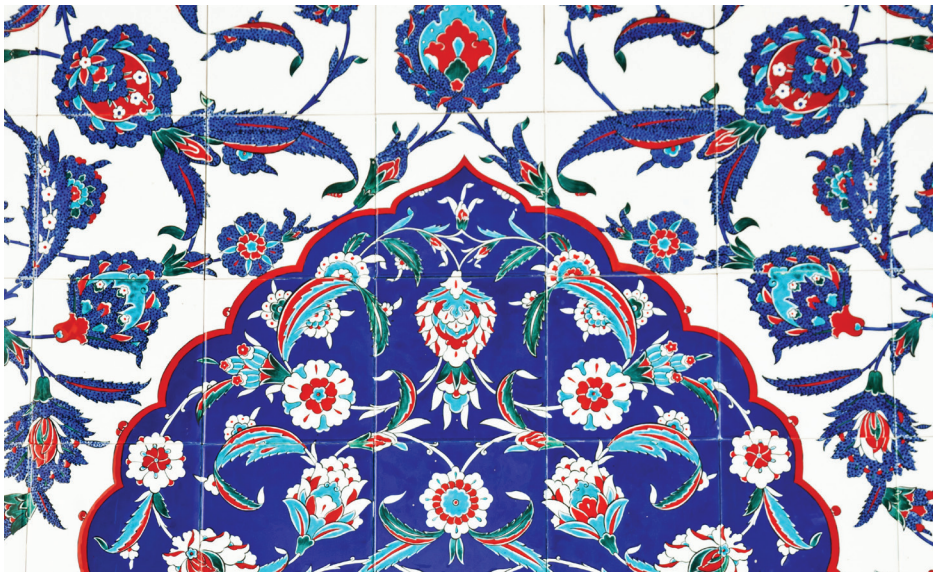
His reasoning stops before impenetrable walls. Man can either rely on the evidence of external experiences (science) alone that will give him only a grasp of a single fragment of life, but not understanding of the totality of life. The other possibility – which may exist side-by-side with the scientific one – is that of religion. It leads man to the acceptance of a unitary explanation of life, generally on the assumption that there exists a supreme Creative Power, which created and governs the universe according to some preconceived plan above and beyond human understanding. Islam does not preclude man from an investigation of such facts and fragments of life as offer themselves for external

observation. That is why there is no bitter antagonism in Islam between the external (scientific) and internal (religious) perceptions or between the human "self" and the objective world of facts and appearances (nature).

The benefit which religion thus confers upon man is the realization that he is, and never can cease to be, a well-planned unit in the eternal movement of creation – a definite part of the infinite organism of universal destiny. The psychological consequence of this conception is a deep feeling of spiritual security that balance between hopes and fears which distinguishes a positive religious man. You may say, this fundamental position is common to all great religions. That is true, but what Islam and Islam alone, goes beyond this theoretical explanation and exhortation. It not only teaches that all life is essentially unity – because it proceeds from the divine Oneness, but it shows us also the practical way by which individual, earthly life, the unity of idea and action both in his existence and in his consciousness. To attain that goal of life, man is, in Islam,



not compelled to renounce the world; no austerities are required to open a secret door to spiritual purification; no pressure is exerted upon the mind to believe in incomprehensible dogmas in order that salvation is secured. Islam is simply a program of life in accord with the laws of nature, which God has decreed upon His creation; and its supreme achievement is the complete coordination of the spiritual, and the material aspects of human existence. Both these aspects are not only "reconciled" to each other, but



their "co-existence" is insisted upon as the natural basis of life.

According to Islam, the activity of human life – our devotional thoughts and our practical life, all our actions and endeavors, must have the idea of God and His Oneness for their center in accordance with what God says in the Qur'an: *"I have not created invisible beings and mankind to any end other than that they may [know and] worship Me."* [Qur'an 51:56] Thus, the concept of "worship" in Islam is different from that in any other religion. Here it is not restricted to the purely devotional practices, for example, prayers or fasting, but extends over the whole of man's practical life as well. If the object or purpose of our life as a whole is to worship God, we necessarily must regard this life, in the totality of all its aspects, as one complex moral responsibility. Thus, all our actions even seemingly trivial ones, must be performed as acts of worship. Islam teaches, firstly, that the permanent worship of God in all the manifold actions of human life is the very meaning of this life; and secondly,

that the achievement of this purpose remains impossible so long we divide our life into two parts: the spiritual and the material. They must be bound together, in our consciousness and in our action, into one harmonious entity. Our notion of God's Oneness must be reflected in our striving towards a coordination and unification of the various aspects of our life. Thus in Islam, God-consciousness in the wider sense constitutes the meanings of life itself.

Of all the religions, Islam alone declares that individual perfection is possible in our earthly existence. Islam does not postpone this fulfillment until after a suppression of bodily desires, as in Christianity; nor does Islam promise a continuous chain of rebirths on progressive higher plane (or reincarnation), as the case of Hinduism; nor does Islam agree with the teaching that perfection and salvation can only be obtained through annihilation of the individual "self" and its emotional links with the world, as the case of Buddhism. Islam insists that man can reach perfection in the earthly, individual life by making full use of all his natural endowments and worldly possibilities. In Islam human perfection is not standardized in a certain way as Christianity does it in the ascetic saint – human being would have to give up or change or suppress all their individual differentiation – this would clearly violate the divine law of individual diversity that dominate all life on this earth. Islam allows to man a very wide margin in his personal and social existence, so that the various qualities, temperaments and psychological inclinations of different individuals might find their own way to positive developments. Thus, a man may be ascetic or he may enjoy the full measure of his sensual possibilities within the lawful limits; he may be nomad roaming through deserts without food for tomorrow or a rich merchant surrounded by his wealth and luxuries. As long as he sincerely and consciously submits to the laws decreed by God, he is free to shape his personal life to whatever form his nature directs him – his duty is to make the best of himself and to help his fellow human beings.

Islam puts forward the concept that man's original nature is essentially good, which is contrary to Christian

idea that man is born sinful or Hinduism teachings that man is originally low and impure and must painfully stagger through a long chain of transmigrations towards perfection. The Islamic teaching contends that man is born pure and potentially perfect. God says in the Qur'an: *"Verily, We create man in the best conformation and thereafter We reduce him to the lowest of low – except only such as attain to faith and do good works."* [Qur'an 95:4-5] According to Islam, man is originally good and pure; the disbelief in God and lack of good actions may destroy his original perfection. On the other hand, man may retain or regain that original, individual perfection if he continuously realizes God's Oneness and submits to His laws. Thus in this earthly life, Islam teaches that every one of us can reach a full measure of perfection by developing the already existing positive traits of which our personalities are composed. This way, Islam allows possibility for man to enjoy the full range of earthly life without necessarily losing spiritual orientation. How entirely different to the Christian teaching that mankind stumbles under hereditary "original sin" committed by Adam and Eve, and consequently the whole life is looked upon as a gloomy valley of sorrow. Such bad feeling can toss a religiously inclined person between the authoritative call to neglect the world and the natural urge of his heart to live and enjoy this life – it erects a barrier between man's spiritual longing and his legitimate worldly desires. In Islam, such a concept is contrary to the idea of God's justice; God does not make the child responsible for a sin of disobedience committed by their remote or near ancestors. As there is no concept of "original sin" in Islam, there is no concept of "Trinity" and "universal redemption" in Islamic teachings. In Islam, redemption and damnation are individual's. Every Muslim is his own redeemer – he bears all possibilities of spiritual success and failure within his heart. God says in the Qur'an: *"In his favor shall be whatever good he does, and against him whatever evil he does."* [Qur'an 2:286] *In another verse, "And that there is not for man except that [good] for which he strives."* [Qur'an 53:39]

Finally, though Islam does not share the gloomy aspect of life as expressed in Pauline Christianity, nonetheless,

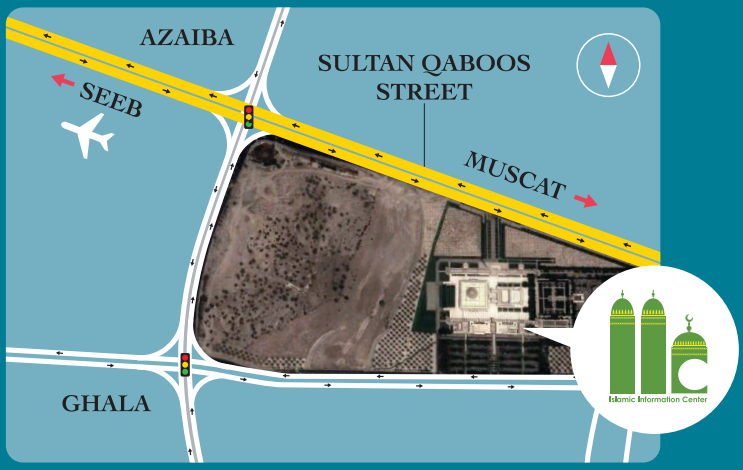
Islam does not teach attributing to earthly life exaggerated value as promoted by modern Western civilization, which is a distinct from Christianity. While Christian outlook implies that earthly life is a bad business, the modern West adores and worships the earthly life. Islam on the other hand, looks upon earthly life with calm and respect. It does not worship it, but regards it as an organic stage on our way to a higher existence. There is no room in material optimism of the modern West, which says "My Kingdom is of this world alone," nor for the life-contempt of Christian, which says, "My Kingdom is not of this world." Islam goes middle way. God teaches in the Qur'an to pray: *"O our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come!"* [Qur'an 2:201] The well-known injunction of the Gospels, "Give Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, and give God that which belongs to God" has no place in Islam, in which, firstly, everything belongs to God, and, secondly, Islam does not admit of the existence of a conflict between the moral and material requirement of our life.



ABOUT ISLAMIC INFORMATION CENTER

The Islamic Information Center, Sultanate of Oman, is a nonprofit organization which is under the support and guidance of The Sultan Qaboos Higher Center for Culture and Science. Its mission is to provide information on the teachings of Islam and its practices to non-Muslims. The Center offers introductory literature on Islam in the form of booklets, the Qur'an translations in different languages, pamphlets and audio/video CDs & DVDs.

HOW TO FIND US



ISLAMIC INFORMATION CENTER
Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Telefax: +968 24505170
Email: info@iicoman.om
Website: www.iicoman.om