UNDERSTANDING

ISLAM



A brief account of its principles, values and heritage

Highly Blessed is He, Who has sent down the Criterion (of right & wrong), to His servant (Muhammad) so that it may be a Warner to all Mankind

The Glorious Qur'an 25:1

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In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful

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Preface

Allah created human beings for the sole purpose of serving Him and living in accordance with His commandments. To this end, He established His religion, which is our Submission to His Will (*Islam* in Arabic), appointed messengers and revealed scriptures to guide humanity towards this religion. Thus, all human beings have the right to know this religion of God and thus have an opportunity to make informed choices in matters of faith. Unfortunately, from the beginning, Islam has been distorted by its critics and consequently, Islam has always remained misunderstood, thus creating a barrier to the seekers of spiritual truth. Moreover, much of that is presented today about Islam by the so-called "experts" is strongly tainted by various prejudices and biases, although there are exceptions. In fact, there is no religion in the world about which Western authors have written so much and at the same time in such a negative and misleading way as Islam. Thus, even with the increased writing on Islam in the last decade or so, authentic works on Islam based on truth and the intention to create mutual understanding rather than polarization are scarce.

The purpose of this book is to shed light on this great religion and remove the distortions and misconceptions about it, thus giving an opportunity to all humanity to see Islam in its proper and true perspective and pave the way for individuals to see the right path to faith. Faith is often determined by one's culture and it is only through knowledge that one can distinguish where the truth actually lies.

Islam in History

Islam is both a religion and a civilization, a historical reality that spans over fourteen centuries of human history and geographical presence in vast areas stretching over all the continents. It is a spiritual reality that has played a significant role in the development of certain aspects of civilizations, especially Western civilization, and transformed the inner and outer life of numerous human beings across the Globe. Today over 1.8 billion people from different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds are practicing Muslims. Not only Islam has a major presence in today's world, but its influence is also evident in the Christian West, Asia and Africa. That is why knowledge of Islam is so important for those concerned with the state of contemporary humanity and those interested in Western intellectual and cultural history, as well as those attracted to the reality of religion and its spirituality.

One cannot understand Islam without gaining a sense of the significance of the concept of Ummah, or the totality of the people who are Muslims and constitute the Islamic world. The Islamic Ummah is one, bound by the solidarity to the Qur'anic message of the Divine Oneness and Sovereignty, the messenger-ship of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the acceptance of the Divine Law (Shari'ah). Muslims are united by the powerful bond of brotherhood, a bond that is felt strongly to this day despite all the turmoil that has pitted some Muslim societies. Although Muslims are no longer politically united, they are nevertheless a single religious community. There is hardly any ethnic or racial group of the world that does not have some members belonging to the Islamic Ummah. From the beginning, Islam as a religion that addressed the whole humanity, strongly opposed all forms of racism, divisions and tribalism. Its Ummah comprise all ethnic and racial groups of the world spreading in all the continents of the world: Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America, and Australia.

The history of Islam is inseparable from the history of Islamic society, institutions, and civilization in which it has manifested. The period from the migration of the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah, which marks the establishment of the first Islamic society in Madinah, to his death and the ruling of the four rightly-guided caliphs (622 CE to 661 CE) constitute a unique period in Islamic history. It is an idealistic period to which Muslims have looked for guidance throughout their later history.

The ruler who immediately followed the four-rightly guided caliphs, established a vast empire with Damascus as its center, but at the cost of converting caliphate of the rightly-guided to a hereditary dynasty. Umayyads, the first Muslim dynasty, were able to rule from Central Asia to Spain and France, establishing a system of communication, administration, and legal and military institutions, much of which survived over the centuries. Many reforms were introduced to their areas of domain related to improvement in public administration, commerce, agriculture and postal services. Umayyad dynasty was at peak when they made monumental decisions of making Arabic the lingua franca of the Muslim world and introduced a single currency by minting their own gold and silver coins. The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem are among important architectural achievements of the Umayyads.

In 750 CE the Umayyads were overthrown by the Abbasids who moved the center of Islam to a new city of Baghdad. The Abbasids rule marks the period in which the Islamic civilization reached its peak. Abbasid rulers were great patrons of the arts, sciences and philosophy. It was this time that both Islamic science and philosophy flourished. The Abbasids created an intellectual culture that rivaled the classical Greece and Rome. As time went on, the centralized authority of Baghdad devolved to new independent centers of power and learning across the Muslim world, where institutions of learning and research sprang up to rival each

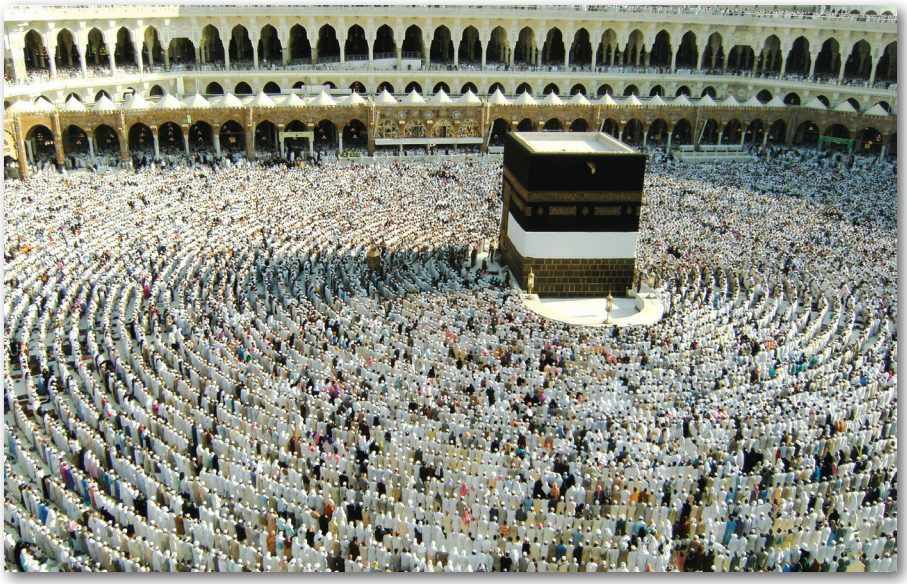
other. Knowledge seekers from all over the known world benefitted from centers like Baghdad, Damascus, Bukhara, Cairo, Fez, Cordoba, Shiraz, etc. Polymath figures such as al-Kindy, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Ibn al-Haytham, al-Biruni, al-Khawarizmi, and many others shone like stars with new ideas. Most of the activities of philosophy, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and science in general were going on in the Muslim world and were conducted in Arabic – the international language of scholarship at that time. It was the period when the codification of Islamic law (Shari'ah) that started with Umayyads was finalized and traditional schools of law as they exist today (Sunni, Shia and Ibadhi) were established. It was also the period when the definitive and canonical collections of Hadith by Bukhari, Muslim and others were established. Ninth and tenth century Muslim Baghdad and Cordoba were wonders of the world - the most civilized cities and magnets to intellectual and cultural minds. When rulers of France, England or Italy needed a consultant, surgeon, architect, or even a musician and dressmaker, they would contact Baghdad or Cordoba. Muslim cities were built with stoned houses and palaces, there were lighted paved streets, running water, universities and libraries, hospitals and pharmacies, art galleries, and public baths. Medieval Muslims were already consuming advanced products of personal hygiene such as soaps, cosmetics and perfumes. The Abbasid period represents the Muslims' "Golden Age" in terms of science and innovation, high standard of living and modern society.

Gradually, however, the power of Abbasid dynasty began to wane and was put to an end in 1517 CE by the Ottomans who took over the caliphate. The Ottoman Empire reached its peak under Sultan Suleiman, The Magnificent, who ruled from the former Byzantium city of Constantinople (today's Istanbul). By the time of his death, the whole of Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Arabian Peninsula and many parts of Eastern Europe was under his rule. The Ottoman Sultans ruled

a massive empire with superb bureaucratic efficiency unrivalled by any other state of its time. The Sultans didn't force the different elements of their empire into one culture; they were quite tolerant and pluralistic. The Ottomans provided a framework where different groups could live together peacefully, but each following its own beliefs, culture, laws and loyalty to its members and leaders. Ottoman rulers were able to establish an enduring and successful empire that lasted six centuries. Seventeenth through twentieth century saw European colonial expansion when non-Muslim merchants and missionaries, soldiers and colonial administrators came to dominate much of the Muslim lands. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, and French all developed colonial empires, and the Chinese and Russians also expanded their territories into Muslim-majority region. Such foreign domination was not only humiliating for many Muslims, but also threatened the very foundation of Islamic society as European rulers replaced traditional Muslim educational, legal and governmental institutions with Western ones. Europeans undermined the religious ethos of Muslim territories by privileging Christian-influence, secular and materialistic cultural values. At the onset of the twentieth century, only a frail Ottoman rule exercised power until when it was defeated and abolished after the First World War. After the collapse of Ottoman Empire, the present-day Turkish Republic was founded based on a Western-style secular model. The remaining of Ottomans confederates gained their independence.

Majority of Muslims continue to live in the world in their own tradition despite all attacks on their traditional point of view in modern times. To understand Islam today, it is first important to realize that history of different religions do not all follow the same trajectory. Christianity had the Reformation movement in the sixth century that resulted in Protestantism. Judaism had also experienced both Reform and Conservative schools. Islam, however, has not undergone, nor it is likely

to undergo in any appreciable degree, the same kind of transformation either juridically or theologically. Its religious life and thought remain for the most part within the framework of orthodoxy and tradition. The modernism and so-called fundamentalism that are evident in certain sectors of Islamic society and in certain lands have caused traditional Islamic life to wither, but have been unable to create any theological or juridical worldview that could challenge the traditional one laid down during the Prophet's time and the time of the four rightly-guided caliphs. The vast majority of Muslims still practice the traditional rites described earlier, and the rhythm of their lives is punctuated by events related to Islam as traditionally understood. Moreover, the traditional Islamic sciences of the Qur'an, Hadith, Shari'ah, and the like continue as they have done over the centuries despite the devastations brought on the traditional Islamic education and legal systems.



The Ka'bah in Makkah is the first house built on Earth for the worship of One God, Allah. (Qur'an 3:96)

The Meaning and the Basic Principles of Islam

The Religion of Islam is defined by the belief in the Oneness of the Creator, Allah, and total acceptance of and obedience to His Will as revealed to His last messenger, Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.[1]

Thus, Islam means willing, sincere and peaceful submission to the Will of Allah. Submission to the Will of Allah implies reverence, piety and devotion to the Creator, and these are the perfect conditions for being at peace with God, with oneself, with other creatures and with the environment. Those who believe and follow the religion of Islam are referred as **Muslims.**

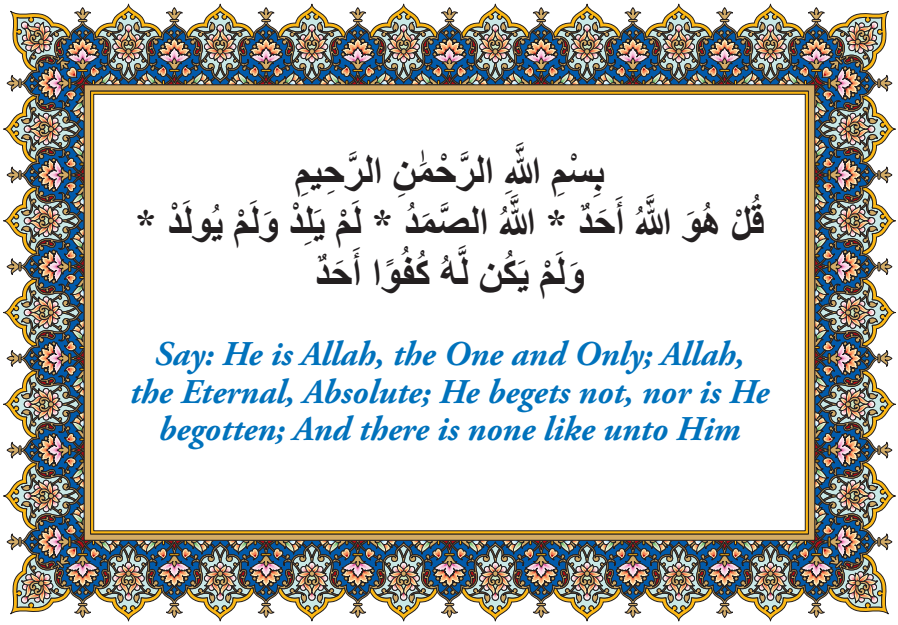
Islam is not a new religion. It is the same religion which was revealed to all the prophets of God, from Adam to Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, as well as Moses, Jesus and finally Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon them. All these prophets were Muslims because they all worshipped only Allah and submitted only to His Will.[2] Similarly, all who followed the religions brought by all the prophets of God are also referred as Muslims. It is in the context of this inherent meaning of the word 'Islam' that Allah declares in the Qur'an (3:19);

The Religion in God's view is submission to His Will, (Islam)

Islam is based on **Six Articles of Faith,** (*Imaan*) **and Five Articles of Religion**, (*Islam*). Faith is what one believes in by conviction, and religion is the practical affirmation of that faith. Islam considers faith as prerequisite to religion, because faith is the recognition and acknowledgement of the Creator and His Divinity, Lordship and The Right of Servitude (*Uluhiyya*, *Rububiyyah* and *Ubudiyyah* in Arabic).

The Six Articles of Faith

The articles of faith are prescribed in various verses of the Qur'an.[3] For example, on the first article Allah says in chapter 112:



First Article:

Belief that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah. He is the Creator of the universe, the One and Only, whose attributes are unique and indivisible and partners cannot be associated with Him. This principle of belief is called monotheism (*At-Tawheed* in Arabic).

Significance of this article of faith: *(a) Unity of the Creator implies unity of purpose in the creation and hence unity of religion which is the unity of the way of life. Most of the humanity is in a spiritual despair and disharmony because it is lacking this unity of purpose in life. (b) Assigning the attributes of God to other beings creates superstitions which lead to fear, corruption and exploitation.*

Second Article:

Belief in the Angels, who are the spiritual servants and agents of Allah. Unlike humans, Angels are spirits and have no physical bodies. Their nature is to perpetually worship Allah and carryout His commands.

Significance of this article of faith: *Belief in things which are beyond our human physical perception is one of the requirements of faith. This article further enhances human intellectual capacity to realize and appreciate the non-physical creation.*

Third Article:

Belief in all divine books or scriptures which were revealed to the messengers of Allah. For example, the Psalms (*Zaboor* in Arabic), the book revealed to David, the Torah (*At-Tauraat* in Arabic), the book revealed to Moses, the Gospel or Evangel (*Al-Injeel* in Arabic), the book revealed to Jesus, and the Qur'an, revealed to Muhammad, Peace and blessings of Allah be upon them all.

Significance of this article of faith: *This is a logical principle because all the scriptures came from the same Creator with the same basic principles of faith and ethics. The acceptance of one scripture and rejection of the others would be a contradiction. It is also inconceivable that the Creator would send different and contradicting messages to mankind. The Qur'an confirms the previous scriptures, completes God's message to mankind and corrects the changes made by man in what are presumed today as the messages of the earlier messengers.*

Fourth Article:

Belief in all the messengers of Allah from Adam to the last messenger Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon them.

Significance of this article of faith: *This is also a logical principle because*

all the messengers came from the same Creator and carried the same basic message to mankind. The acceptance of one messenger and the rejection of the others would not only be a contradiction, but also would create divisions in the religion of God.

Fifth Article:

Belief in the Day of Judgment. Unlike Angels, human beings have been given freedom of choice: One can choose to obey the commands of Allah or choose to disobey. However, this freedom comes with responsibility and accountability to Allah. On the Day of Judgment we will have to account for the choices which we have made in this life. Those who have made the right choices and follow the message of Allah will go to Paradise for eternity and those who have made the wrong choices and disregard the message of Allah will go to Hell for eternity.

Significance of this article of faith: *This article implies accountability to God and accountability for our actions in this world. Our hope for eternal justice and satisfaction will be attained when true and absolute Divine justice will be established on the Day of Judgment.*

Sixth Article:

Belief in the Divine Determination and Destiny: Everything that occurs in the creation (good, bad or indifferent) occurs in accordance with the laws and measures (*Qadha wa Qadar* in Arabic) which are predetermined by Allah in His infinite wisdom and knowledge. Nothing in the Creation is outside Allah's governance and control through these laws (both physical as well as spiritual laws) and due measure (i.e. degree and extent). Furthermore, Allah not only possess absolute control through His laws and measures, He also possess absolute knowledge of everything that includes all space and time and He has recorded everything that occurred in the past, present and that will occur in the future. We read in

the Qur'an (6:59);

> ***And with Him are the keys of the unseen, none knows them but He. And He knows whatever there is in the earth and in the sea; not a leaf falls but He knows it. There is not a grain in the darkness of the earth not anything fresh or dry but is written in a Clear Record.***

Allah's absolute knowledge includes the flow as well as the ebb and tide of human life. However, Allah's knowledge of human acts in advance of their commission does not force a person to commit those acts, just like astronomers for example, can predict and put on record when a solar eclipse will occur years in advance using their scientific knowledge. The solar eclipse doesn't occur because of their knowledge or prediction. Similarly, Allah by possessing infinite knowledge (being not limited by time and space) knows what humans will do and records their actions, but this doesn't force the person to commit that act.

Therefore, the above principles do not negate the freedom of choice given to man; it all simply means that the ways and means of our choices will always follow (a) the laws of Allah, (b) the consequences of our choices will be in accordance with the divine measure, and (c) Allah has prior knowledge of our choices and actions, but we are still accountable for our choices[4]. Furthermore, human beings have the freedom of choice and they are agents of their choices and their actions, but they do not have creative power to undertake their choices.

> ***Allah has created you and all that you do. (Qur'an 37:96)***

This means that with respect to human freedom of choice, Allah has made "human will" to be a precondition to "Divine Will" or Divine initiation of certain acts pertaining to human actions. In other words, humans wish those actions, and Allah fulfills them (if He decides to fulfill them). This

is how "human will" operate within Allah's "Divine Will". It is possible to say, the creative part of both good and evil belongs to Allah, yet, evil is created as a consequence of human choice – that is a consequence of human being either not using or misusing their independent will. Allah creates the acts and the resultant consequences.

> ***Whatever good happens to you, it is from God; and whatever evil befalls you, it is from yourself. (Qur'an 4:79)***

From Allah's perspective, creation of evil or allowing evil to happen is not evil in and on itself, but choosing evil is evil. God does not choose evil, human beings do.

Significance of this article of faith: *Belief in the absolute control and governance of the creation by the Creator, Allah, affirms our faith of His Sovereignty over the creation. With Allah's attributes of Mercy and Care for His Creation, this article instills hope and inner peace, and strengthens the hearts of the believers.*



These six principles of faith define a "believer" in the complete sense. Omission of any one of these principles, such as believing in one prophet and rejecting the others, makes one an "unbeliever".



The Call to Prayers

Allah is The Greatest, Allah is The Greatest,

Allah is The Greatest, Allah is The Greatest,

I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah,

I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah,

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,

Come to prayers, come to prayers,

Come to success, come to success,

Allah is The Greatest, Allah is The Greatest

There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah

The call to prayers invites people to eternal success. It is a constant reminder to humanity that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, is the (last) messenger of Allah.

The Five Articles of Religion

The five articles of religion are prescribed in various verses of the Qur'an.[5] For example, in relation to the first article, Allah says in the Qur'an 49:15,

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

Indeed the ones possessed of true faith are those who believed in Allah and His Messenger and then they did not entertain any doubt and strove hard in the Way of Allah with their lives and their possessions. These are the truthful ones.

First Article:

The declaration in the heart and mind that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. This declaration affirms one's belief in the Oneness of the Creator (monotheism) and that Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, is the last and final messenger of Allah. It is called the *shahadah*, an Arabic word which means to testify, standby and establish the declared truth.

Having declared one's faith, the Muslim is obliged to fulfill in practice the following articles as a practical affirmation of that faith.

Second Article:

The performance of ritual prayers to Allah five times a day, (*Salaa* in Arabic); at dawn, mid day, late afternoon, after sun set and at night. Prayers are a direct communication with Allah, without an intermediary, and involve the glorification and praise of Allah as well as our supplications to Him.

Significance of this article of religion: *Allah describes prayers as a remembrance as well as a protection against disobedience to Him (Qur'an 20:14 & 29:45). Thus, regular prayers help us to develop and maintain God consciousness, (taqwa* in Arabic[6]*).*

Third Article:

Giving charity to the poor and the needy (*Zakaa* in Arabic). A Muslim is required to pay an equivalent of 2.5% of personal wealth that one has not utilized during the preceding year, such as savings on money, silver and gold. Payment of charity is also obligatory on agricultural produce, market shares and so on.

Significance of this article of religion: *The institution of Zakaa ensures that wealth is shared in the society, thus eliminating poverty, envy and bitterness in the society. The word 'Zakaa' means 'to purify', thus by the Grace of Allah it purifies our wealth and our souls.*

Fourth Article:

Fasting from the break of dawn to sunset in the month of *Ramadhan,* the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. During the day a Muslim must abstain from eating, drinking, and sexual activities, as well as refraining from all what is forbidden in the religion such as backbiting, false witnessing and so on.

Significance of this article of religion: *Fasting is a practice that helps to develop and strengthen one's willpower, patience, and ultimately one's faith and God consciousness (taqwa). It also helps us to remember the people who are less fortunate than we are; those people who can hardly afford one meal a day.*

Fifth Article:

Pilgrimage to Makkah (*Hajj* in Arabic), once in a lifetime for those who have the financial and physical means to do so.



The Station of Abraham (Maqaam Ibrahim) in Makkah, where Abraham, peace be upon him, stood whilst building the Kaabah

Significance of this article of religion: *Pilgrimage is a great annual assembly of Muslims all over the world. It is an affirmation and a demonstration of the unity of mankind and the unity of religion; God is One, humanity is one and their religion is one. Pilgrimage is a form of worship and glorification of Allah, as well as being a commemoration of the worship and sacrifices of Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael, peace and blessings of Allah be upon them.*

These principles of religion detach the Muslim heart and mind from the physical needs and materialism to the spiritual consciousness and development. In other words, they raise us from the material dimension to the spiritual dimension of our existence, where we are constantly conscious of the Creator, our duty and accountability to Him and our responsibility to humanity.



A view of the minaret at Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat, Oman. In the past, minarets provided a high place from which the calls to prayers were made. Today they remain as an architectural style which identifies a mosque.

The Nature and Attributes of Allah – The Creator

Just as each person has a name, so the Creator and the Lord of the Universe is known by His **personal** name of "Allah". It is a unique name without gender, plural or derivatives. Allah is neither male nor female. He is not derived from a father and/or a mother. He is without duplicate or replica, without equal or parallel. His status is so pristine and unshared that He is the Only One worthy of being called ***Al-Wahid***, The One and Only. Allah is Unique. Thus:

1. To Allah belong (a) unique attributes of Transcendence, such as His Independent Existence, Self-Subsistence, He has No Beginning and No End, and so on, (b) unique attributes of Incomparability which encompass His Nature and Absolute Capabilities, e.g. He is Unlike the Creation, He is Life and the Giver of Life, He is All-Hearing and All-Seeing and the Enabler of these faculties, He is All-Powerful and able to impose His Will, and so on. All these attributes are unique and are not shared by any other being.

2. To Allah belong the many beautiful names which stem from His Attributes. These names include The Most Merciful, The Forgiver, The Ever Compassionate, The All Wise, and so on.

3. Allah's Divinity, Lordship and the Right of Servitude, (*Uluhiyyah, Rububiyyah* and *Ubudiyyah* in Arabic) cannot be shared with any other being.

4. With this Divine Glory, the name Allah means the One to whom our absolute obedience and love are due, and from whom our absolute protection and refuge are derived.

Accordingly, the meaning of Allah's name defines true **monotheism**. Furthermore, this intense meaning of His name renders the word 'God' inadequate to describe Him, though in Islamic literature both words are

often used synonymously.

Allah being the Originator and Sustainer of the Universe and all the creatures in it calls for our faith in Him and our obedience to Him as an affirmation of our gratitude to Him. Denying the nature, the attributes and the names of Allah or associating them to any other being (which is called *Shirk* in Arabic) is a gross ingratitude to Him, and thus constitutes the gravest sin which Allah will never forgive, unless one repents. Allah says in the Qur'an (4:48);

> ***Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgives anything else to whom He pleases; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed.***



The Mosque–Cathedral of Córdoba, also known as the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the Mezquita, whose ecclesiastical name is the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, is the Catholic cathedral of the Diocese of Córdoba. The structure is regarded as one of the most accomplished monuments of Moorish architecture.

Prophet Muhammad – His Life and Personality

Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him (*pbuh*), was a prophet of Allah to all mankind. Before Prophet Muhammad, Allah sent many other prophets such as Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, peace and blessings of Allah be upon them (*pbut*). All prophets were each sent to a specific nation and for a specific period. Muslims honour and respect all the prophets of Allah. Prophet Muhammad is held in very high esteem by Muslims because he is the last of the prophets sent to the whole of humanity to convey a universal message which is ever living and prestine.[7]

His lineage

Prophet Muhammad was an Arab and a descendant of Ishmael the son of Abraham, (*pbut*). He belonged to the respectable clan of Bani Haashim, one among the clans of the dominant Quraish tribe in Makkah.

His birth

Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was born in Makkah in the year 570 CE, which was approximately six centuries after Jesus (*pbuh*). Both his parents were from noble descent and were related. His father was Abdallah, son of Abd al-Muttalib, son of Haashim, son of Abd al-Manaf, son of Qussay, son of Kilaab, son of Murrah. His mother was Aaminah, daughter of Wahab, son of Abd al-Manaf, son of Zuhrah, son of Kilaab, son of Murrah.

Prophet Muhammad's father died before he was born, and his mother died when Muhammad was just six years old. He was raised by his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib. Two years later he came into the care of his uncle Abu Talib, who had become the head of the Bani Haashim clan after Abd al-Muttalib passed away.

His personality and character

Before becoming a prophet, Muhammad (*pbuh*), grew up as a simple and virtuous person with a strong moral character. He was unlettered and he never worshipped idols, when idol worshiping was the practice of his people. Instead he used to retreat for days in a cave outside Makkah to meditate on the Creator and the creation.



Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him

He was known as 'the truthful and the trustworthy' (in Arabic *As-Saadiqul-Ameen*), and was highly honest. Many people entrusted him with their properties for business or for safekeeping.

Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) cared for his people by protecting the poor and the underprivileged, and by engaging in an alliance to protect and help them.

The Revelation

It was during one of his retreats to the cave that Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) received the first revelation from Allah through the Angel Gabriel:

> ***Read! (or Recite! or Proclaim!) In the name of thy Lord, who created. Created man out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Read! and thy Lord is Most Bountiful. He Who taught the (use of the) pen, Taught man that which he knew not (Qur'an 96:1–5).***

This revelation was received in the year 610 CE when Muhammad (*pbuh*), was 40 years old.

It is significant to note that this first revelation points to knowledge and reason as basis for the proclamation of faith, and indeed, the basis of faith itself.

Revelations through the Angel Gabriel continued for the next 23 years of the Prophet's life. During the first 13 years he proclaimed the message of Islam in Makkah where he and his followers faced a great deal of opposition and persecution. But in 622 CE, due to the persistent and escalated persecution, the Prophet and his followers were forced to emigrate to Madinah, a city located about 400 km north of Makkah. The people of Madinah received them with honour and high generosity and there the Prophet continued to receive and proclaim the message of Allah for the next 10 years and started raising the Islamic state.

His death

In the year 632 CE, at the age of 63, Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) died and was buried in Madinah, in the house of his wife Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her.

So put your trust in Allah; you are (O Muhammad) certainly on the manifest Truth (27:79)



The Authenticity of the Prophet

Throughout the history of mankind the credentials of all the prophets of God have always been questioned and Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) is no exception. The Qur'an informs us that the credentials of the prophets of God are in their noble personal character and the compelling truth of the message which they bring from their Lord. With regard to Prophet Muhammad, there are four arguments supporting his authenticity.

First argument

As we have seen in Section 4, Prophet Muhammad was a man of very high integrity and was very highly respected by his people. He was even known by one of his nick names *'the truthful and the trustworthy'*. The Prophet began his prophetic mission at the age of forty. It defies all logic and reason to imagine that a man of such noble character can suddenly at this advance age turn a liar and an imposter.

One may argue that perhaps he wanted to enhance his social status. But he was already a highly respected person who belonged to the most powerful and respected tribe of Quraish in Makkah. In fact at the beginning of his prophetic mission he was offered a position of leadership in order to dissuade him from proclaiming the prophetic message and he flatly refused[8]. This proves that he was not seeking any social status.

Second argument

The messengers of God are supported by a Divine message which is revealed to them. Prophet Muhammad was supported by the Qur'an. As demonstrated in Section 7, the Qur'an could not have been written by the Prophet; it is certainly a Divine revelation. In fact humanity has been challenged in the Qur'an itself to produce anything like it, if anyone has any notion that the Prophet wrote it. After all, as mentioned earlier, the Prophet was not a scholarly person who could write such a book. The

Qur'an is a living credential of the Prophet's authenticity and in fact, it is the only miracle claimed by the Prophet.

Third argument

Prophet Muhammad began a movement which positively transformed human civilization so comprehensively and so rapidly than any other movement in human history. Furthermore, no religion had more sustained influence on human civilization and development than Islam. This rapid and sustained transformation of human civilization could not have been achieved by a movement championed by an imposter. Again such a thought defies all reason and logic.

Forth argument

Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) was foretold in the scriptures of all major religions: Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism.

In the Qur'an we are informed that Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) has been foretold in both the Jewish as well as the Christian scriptures.

> ***Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures); in the Torah and the Gospel. (Qur'an 7:157)***

In Deuteronomy 18:18 we read:

> ***I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee (Moses), and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.***

There is no prophet who came after Moses and fit this verse of the Old Testament except Prophet Muhammad: **Firstly**, the brethren of the Jews are the Arabs. The Children of Israel descended from Isaac and the Arab

race descended from Ishmael. Isaac and Ishmael are the sons of Abraham and therefore their descendents are brethren. **Secondly**, Muhammad is like unto Moses, where as Jesus is not: (1) Both Moses and Muhammad had a father and a mother. Jesus only had a mother and no father. (2) Both Moses and Muhammad were naturally conceived in the wombs of their mothers. Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother by a miracle. (3) Moses and Muhammad married and had children, where as Jesus did not. (4) Moses and Muhammad brought new laws and regulations for their people, where as Jesus did not. (5) Moses and Muhammad both died a natural death. In both Islamic and Christian beliefs, Jesus did not depart this earth in a natural way. **Thirdly**, as we are also informed in the Qur'an (53:3-4), Prophet Muhammad did not speak from himself but his words were a direct revelation or inspiration from God.

Coming to the New Testament, in the Gospel of John we read:

> ***I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you. (John 16:12-14)***

These verses speak of 'the Spirit of truth' who will not speak from himself, again. The Spirit of truth cannot be the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit was already with Jesus (Luke 4:1and 3:22, John 20:22, Acts 2:4, etc). Furthermore, this Spirit of truth shall glorify Jesus. There is no prophet who came after Jesus and glorified him except Muhammad, (see Section 11). There is no doubt that the 'the spirit of truth' who was to come after Jesus was Muhammad, peace be upon them all.

Furthermore, in the Bible Prophet Muhammad is foretold in Isaiah 29:12,

John 14:16, John 16:7, Matthew 21:43 and Acts 3:22. Note that the word 'Comforter' mentioned in these biblical verses is a translation of the Greek word *'Paracletos'*. This word is a corruption of the original Greek word *'Periclytos'* which translates to 'the praised one' or in Arabic, 'Ahmad' or 'Muhammad'.

Careful and unbiased study also shows that Prophet Muhammad was foretold in the Hindu as well as Buddhist scriptures. In his book entitled *"Muhammad in the Hindu Scriptures"*, Dr. Ved Prakash Upaddhay has uncovered in the Hindu scriptures many references to the Prophet. The Vedas speak of a coming Sage whose description fit that of Prophet Muhammad. The description, which is originally in Sanskrit language, includes:

1. *Narashagsa* which translates as 'the praised one'. This is the meaning of both of the Prophet's name, Ahmed and Muhammad. Furthermore, the place of birth and the qualities of *Narashagsa* exactly fit those of the Prophet.

2. *Antim Rishi* or 'the Final Sage'. Prophet Muhammad was the last messenger to mankind.

3. *Kalki Avatar*, that is the Sage who will come for the last generation. Prophet Muhammad was sent as the last messenger for the entire humanity.

4. *Kauram*, which means an emigrant. Prophet Muhammad was an emigrant in Madinah, (see Section 4).

5. His father is mentioned as *'Slave of God'* and his mother as *'Peace'* which correspond to *'Abdallah'* and *'Amna'* in Arabic. These are the names of the Prophet's father and mother.

6. The name of the coming Sage is *Mamaha*. This is not a Sanskrit word

but it seems to be the Sanskrit form of the Arabic name Muhammad.

In the Buddhist scripture Gautama Buddha gave a prophecy of the coming of *Antim Buddha* or the Ultimate Sage, whose name will be Maitreya. (*Gospel of Buddha* by Carus, page 217). The description of Maitreya fit the description of Prophet Muhammad:

1. Prophet Muhammad was the last messenger, the Ultimate Sage.

2. Maitreya means 'The Merciful'. Prophet Muhammad is described in the Qur'an (21:107) as *'merciful'* to all the people of the world.

3. Maitreya will have all the characteristics of a Buddha: He will come from an aristocratic family, will retire to a cave and visited by Angels, will have wives and children, work for a living, and he will complete his normal life, i.e. he will die a natural death. All this description fits Prophet Muhammad.

4. Maitreya will be a ruler. Muhammad was not only a Prophet but also the ruler of the Muslim nation.

5. Maitreya will speak of the previous Buddhas. Muhammad did speak extensively about the previous messengers. The Qur'an mentions the stories of twenty-five prophets who came before Prophet Muhammad.

6. Maitreya will not have a teacher in the world. Prophet Muhammad was unlettered and all his knowledge came by revelation from God. He had no worldly teacher.

To sum up, the credentials of the Prophet are in his noble character, the message which he brought, the sustained transformation of the human civilization brought about by his movement, and the prophesies of his coming which are found in the scriptures of all major religions.



The Prophet's Mosque at Madinah (Masjid Al-Nabawi). The mosque was built by the Prophet in the year 622 CE on a plot which was adjacent to his house. After many expansions over the years, today it is one of the largest mosques in the world and the second holiest mosque after the great mosque in Makkah (Masjid Al-Haraam)

The History and the Message of the Qur'an

The Qur'an is the scripture that was revealed by Allah to Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him (*pbuh*), through His Angel Gabriel. It is the last of Allah's revelations to all humanity until the end of time. The Qur'an was revealed to complete Allah's message to mankind, confirm the previous revelations and correct the changes and alterations contained in the existing remnants of the previous scriptures.[9]

Its revelation

The Qur'an was revealed in stages in the Arabic language over a period of 23 years, from 610 to 632 CE. This gradual revelation to the Prophet gave progressive guidance to the believers as specific circumstances required. It also ensured the effective assimilation and implementation of Allah's laws in the lives of the believers.

Its recording and preservation

As the Prophet (*pbuh*) received the revelations, he instructed his scribes to write down the revelations under his instructions and supervision. At the same time, the Prophet and many of his companions, men and women, memorized the revelations as they were revealed. In this way, the Qur'an was written down and memorized by male and female believers during the lifetime of the Prophet. This practice of memorizing the Qur'an continues to this day. Consequently, there are now millions of Muslims who have memorized the entire Qur'an in its original, pristine text.

Its contents and general themes

The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters. The number of verses in each chapter varies from 3 verses (chapters 103 and 108) to 286 verses (chapter 2). The Qur'an is a book of guidance, warning and good news, as well as a narration of the past nations and their prophets. In general, it covers four themes:

First, it tells us about Allah; His nature and attributes. For example, we have seen chapter 112 above describing His Oneness (*Tawheed*) and His unique attributes which are **not shared** by any other being. The verse below, known as 'the verse of the Throne' (*Ayatul Kursi* in Arabic) is another example which describes Allah's attributes;



Allah: the Everlasting, the Sustainer of the whole Universe; there is no god but He. He does neither slumber nor sleep. Whatsoever is in the heavens and in the earth is His. Who is there that can intercede with Him except by His own permission? He knows what is before the people and also what is hidden from them. And they cannot comprehend anything of His knowledge save whatever He Himself pleases to reveal. His Kingdom spreads over the heavens and the earth and the guarding of these does not weary Him. He alone is the Supreme and the Exalted. (Qur'an 2:255)

Secondly, it describes first our relationship with Allah; why He has created us and what is our duty to Him. For example, Allah says in the Qur'an 51:56:

> ***I have only created Jinns and men, that they may worship Me.***

Here the word 'worship' is in the sense of serving the Creator and living according to His commands. Then the Qur'an describes our relationship with the rest of the creation; the Angels, the Jinns, the animal world and the rest of the physical world; what is their relevance and interaction with our existence.[10]

Thirdly, it gives guidance in the form of laws and directives and sets standards of morality and good living: How we should worship Allah and how we should conduct our lives. It promises eternal bliss for those who follow the guidance and eternal torment for those who reject the guidance.[11]

Finally, the Qur'an tells us that all nations have received guidance through prophets. For example in 10:47 Allah says,

> ***A Messenger is sent to every people; and when their Messenger comes, the fate of that people is decided with full justice; they are subjected to no wrong.***

Thus, as a lesson to humanity the Qur'an narrates stories of how Allah dealt with the past nations. For example, it tells us about the struggle of Prophet Noah with his people and the subsequent flood. It tells us about the struggle of Prophet Moses with his people and with the Pharaoh. Then there is "the best of all stories", the life story of Prophet Joseph. All together, the Qur'an narrates the stories of 25 prophets out of thousands that Allah sent to mankind throughout the ages.[12]



Recitation of the Qur'an is an act of worship in Islam. Thus, Qur'an today is the most read book in the world.

Compatibility of the Qur'an with modern sciences

The Qur'an was revealed over fourteen centuries ago. Yet, in it we find many scientific facts which modern sciences have discovered only in recent times. These facts cover many fields in the natural sciences including astronomy, geology, physics, biology, botany, zoology and others. Let us examine a few examples.

Creation of the Universe

In the Qur'an (21:30), Allah says:

> ***Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of Creation), before We clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?***

Further, in chapter 51 verse 47 Allah says:

> ***The heaven, We have built it with power. Surely We are expanding it (or increasing its vastness).***

These verses are in line with modern knowledge that the universe started as one gaseous unit which then exploded to form the galaxies. This is known as the Big Bang theory. Furthermore, modern science confirms that our universe is still expanding since that first explosion.



Andromeda Galaxy, one of the billions of galaxies in Allah's creation. It was discovered by the Persian astronomer Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi in 964 CE

Development of the embryo

The development of the baby in the embryonic stages is described in the Qur'an in several places, for example;

> ***Man We did create from a quintessence (of clay); Then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump; then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be Allah, the Best to create! (Qur'an 23: 12–14).***

These verses describe graphically and accurately the development of the embryo from its inception, with precise Arabic words. First, the fertilized ovum develops into a clot of congealed blood (*'alaqah*), and then it develops into a lump (*mudghah*). After that, bones begin to develop in the lump and finally, the flesh begins to grow around the bones. This is how the Qur'an describes the development of the baby.

The two Arabic words used in the verse, '*alaqah and mudghah*, are very significant in their precision.

Apart from congealed blood, '*Alaqah* also means 'something which clings' and 'a leech-like substance'. If we examine the embryo in the early stages we find that it clings to the wall of the uterus, it is not floating about. It also looks like a leech. A leech is a creature which sticks on to the skin and sucks the blood of an animal. The foetus also gets its blood supply from the mother through the placenta.

The '*alaqah* then develops into *mudghah*, which means 'a chewed-like substance'. If we examine the embryo a stage after '*alaqah*, we find that it looks like a chewed gum with teeth marks on it.

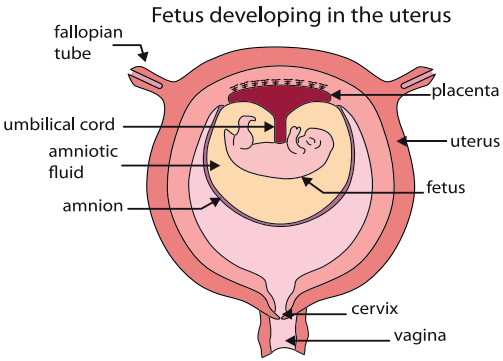
This is an amazing pictorial description of the development of the embryo given in the 7th. Century in the Qur'an. Scientists have been able to confirm these shapes only after the invention of powerful microscopes in the 19th. Century.

Another interesting point mentioned in the Qur'an is that the foetus is protected by three veils of darkness. In verse 39:6 of the Qur'an, Allah says:

> ***He makes you, in the wombs of your mothers, in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness.***

With modern technology, we now know that the foetus is protected first by the abdominal wall of the mother, secondly the uterine wall, and thirdly the amnio-chorionic membrane. These are the three veils, demonstrating once again the accuracy of statements in the Qur'an.





The picture on the left shows the embryo at the "mudgha" stage which very much looks like a chewed gum. The picture on the right shows the embryo in the womb clinging to the wall of the womb and is protected by three layers.

Function of the Mountains

We see the mountains as very impressive and picturesque undulations on the surface of the Earth. But in fact, they fulfill a very crucial role in maintaining the stability of the Earth's crust. Below the Earth's crust there is a layer which is less dense and rather fluid, hence the crust needs something to hold it in place and keep it stable. Scientists have discovered recently that what keeps the Earth's crust stable are mountains, which have peaks above the Earth's crust and roots below the Earth's crust. Thus, mountains act like pegs.

Allah says in the Qur'an (21:31):

> ***And We have set on the Earth mountains standing firm, lest it (the Earth) should shake with them.***

And in chapter 78 verse 6 and 7 Allah says:

> ***Have We not made the Earth as a wide expanse, and the mountains as pegs?***

These verses on the function of mountains are in complete agreement with modern knowledge.

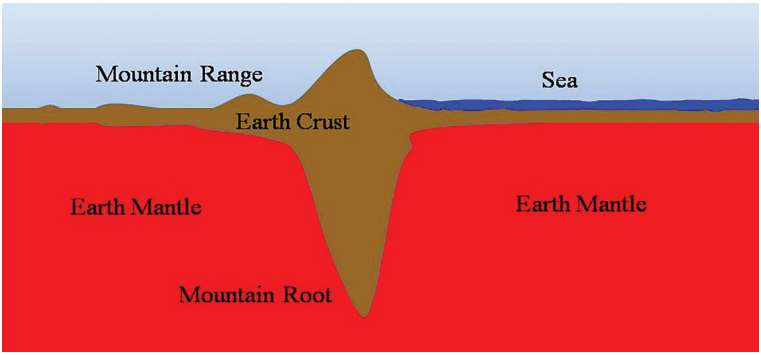


Illustration showing the mountain with a deep root in the Earth Mantle.

Water is life

It is common knowledge that water is life, however, the Qur'an goes even further by categorically stating that in fact every living thing is made of water. In addition to verse 21:30 quoted on page 33, we read in verse 25:54,

> ***It is He who has created man from water: Then has He established relationships of lineage and marriage, for thy Lord has power (over all things).***

It is now well established that 80% of a living cell is made of water and that all living organisms consist of at least 50% water. Furthermore, as we all know, all living things require water for their existence.



Water is Life: The changing global weather pattern and the resulting scarcity of rain are wiping out animal and plant life in many parts of the world.

The above scientific statements are but a few of the many statements found in the Qur'an which was revealed over 1400 years ago when people knew very little about astronomy, physics or biology. They are in complete agreement with modern sciences, although many of them have been affirmed only in the last century due to advanced scientific knowledge.[13]

The Authenticity of the Qur'an

Is the Qur'an really a revelation from God? This is a legitimate question because in the world today there are many scriptures that contradict each other, all of which claim to be from God. As an extension to this question some people might ask: How can we be sure that the Qur'an has not been changed over the ages?

The answers to these questions are found in the Qur'an itself which offers three criteria for truth.

The first criterion

A true revelation from God is entirely consistent and free from any contradictions. Allah says in the Qur'an 4:82:

> ***Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy.***

Any scripture which has contradictions or errors in it cannot be from God. The Qur'an is free from any discrepancies or contradictions. This also confirms that it has not been changed over the ages by any human hand. The apparent contradictions which are often quoted by some critics of the Qur'an are due to their lack of proper knowledge of the Arabic language of the Qur'an and the context in which the particular verses were revealed.

The second criterion

A true revelation from God exceeds human capacity to comprehensively fulfill human needs in legislation, moral values and spiritual guidance as well as in the force of argument, reason, eloquence and style. In this regard, Allah has challenged humanity to produce a book even similar to

the Qur'an. In verse 2:23, Allah challenged the unbelievers:

> ***And if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down (i.e. the Qur'an) to Our slave (Muhammad), then produce a Sûrah (chapter) of the like thereof and call your witnesses (supporters and helpers) besides Allah, if you are truthful. But if you do it not, and you can never do it, then fear the (Hell) Fire whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the disbelievers.***

Allah reiterates the challenge in verse 17:88:

> ***Say: If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.***

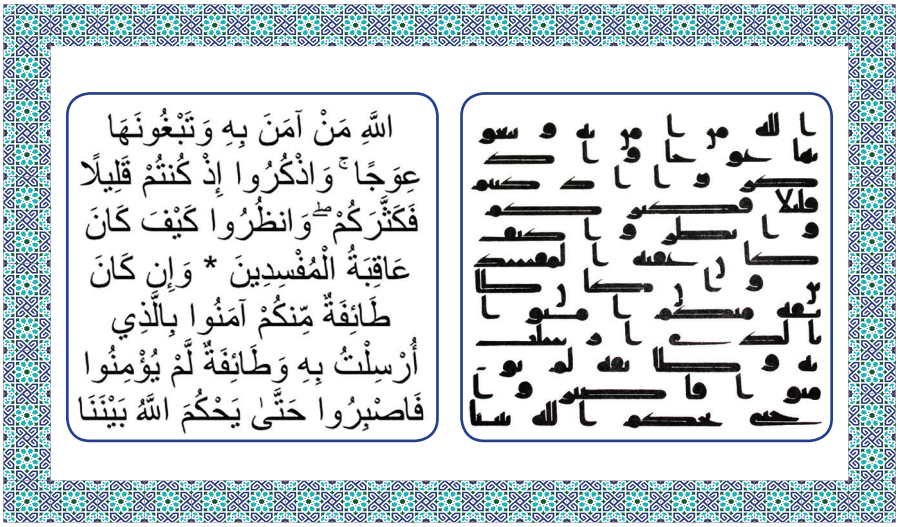
It is only the Omniscient Creator who can pose this challenge. No human can write a book and then claim that no one else is capable of writing a similar book, now or in the future. Moreover, if the Qur'an had been changed by human beings over the ages, people would have been able to produce a book resembling it. This challenge is still standing today as it did for the last 1400 years.

The third criterion

A revelation from God must withstand the challenges of time and stay relevant as human knowledge progresses and human needs change and develop. The Qur'anic principles of civil and criminal laws, economics, social systems and moral values are as relevant today as they were over 1400 years ago when the Qur'an was revealed. Furthermore, as demonstrated above, the Qur'an is completely compatible with all aspects of modern knowledge in the natural sciences.

Had the Qur'an been from other than God or had it been changed, its relevance would have been jeopardized over the ages. The Qur'an is forever relevant in all aspects of human knowledge and needs.

These criteria, together with the remaining revelations in the Qur'an, all of which carry intense and far reaching influence on human needs and guidance, demonstrate and prove the miraculous nature of the Qur'an. It is, in fact, the only miracle claimed by Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, although he performed by the Will of Allah many other miracles during his prophetic mission.



Chapter 7, verses 86-87 of the Qur'an in the original script (right) and later writing (left). During the time of the Prophet, Arabic writing consisted of very basic symbols with no vowels or diacritical marks, (tashkil and i'jam in Arabic). As Islam spread to non-Arabic speaking people, wrong reading and pronunciation of the Qur'an became apparent. To counter this danger vowels and diacritical marks were introduced around six decades after the death of the Prophet.

The Traditions of the Prophet

Traditions of the Prophet (*Sunna or Sunan* in Arabic), are the teachings and life examples of the Prophet which were transmitted by his companions. They are distinct and separate from the Qur'an, and they constitute the second primary source of guidance and Islamic law after the Qur'an.

Unlike the Qur'an which was revealed, recorded and compiled during the lifetime of the Prophet, the traditions were mainly written and compiled after his death (632 CE). The compilations started in earnest by the mid 8th Century CE and flourished by the 9th Century CE. Thus, for example, Musnad Ar-Rabi' bin Habib was compiled in late 8th Century CE and Sahih Al Bukhari and Sahih Muslim were compiled in the 9th Century CE.

As the traditions were narrated and transmitted by a chain of people over time, an elaborate methodology to authenticate the traditions evolved. The methodology scrutinized the chain of narrators, the contents of the traditions, and the context in which the particular traditions were reported to have occurred. Through this methodology, the traditions were classified into several categories of authenticity. This methodology of authentication (*isnaad* in Arabic) is used even today to authenticate false traditions which might have crept into the original collections.

The traditions of the Prophet fulfill the following role in Islamic guidance and the formulation of its laws:

1. Clarify the objectives of the revealed verses of the Qur'an and elaborate on their meanings
2. Explain and set examples on the application of the many laws contained in the Qur'an
3. Elaborate on the methods of performing acts of worship which are

commanded in the Qur'an

4. Explain and set examples on the application of the ethical values contained in the Qur'an

The following are three examples of the traditions of the Prophet.

> ***Narrated Abu Ubayda that Jaabir bin Zaid learnt from Ibn Abbas (May Allah be please with him) that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has said; "Anyone who defrauds us is not among us, and anyone who shows no mercy to our young and no respect to our elders is not among us". (Musnad Ar-Rabi' bin Habib, Hadith No. 582)***

> ***Abu Al-Minhal said, "I asked Al-Bara bin Azib and Zaid bin Arqam about practicing money exchange. They replied, 'We were traders in the time of Allah's Apostle, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, and we asked him about money exchange. He replied, 'If it is from hand to hand, there is no harm in it, otherwise it is not permissible.' " (Sahih Al Bukhari, Book of Sales, Hadith no. 276)***

> ***Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, as having said: A woman must not be married until she is consulted, and a virgin must not be married until her permission is sought. They asked the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, 'How her (virgin's) consent be obtained?'. He said, 'That she keeps silent'. (Sahih Muslim, Book of Marriage, Book 008, Number 3303)***

These examples are among the numerous traditions of the Prophet which elaborate on the law and give guidance on the social norms.

Life after Death

Death is inevitable and therefore one has to face up with the reality of the afterlife. One can deny it completely, i.e. entertain the notion that there is nothing after death, and another one can ignore it and hope for the best, but in either case one is betting in a mighty gamble because the afterlife means eternal existence, which is a very serious matter. The most sensible thing one can do is to anticipate it and do something about it. And this is what religion is all about; it is about our preparation for our eternal existence in the hereafter.

Proof of the Hereafter

Besides the faith in religion, the reality of the afterlife can be deduced through reason and commonsense. Consider the following arguments:

1st Argument: Among God's Creation, human beings posses intelligence, power of reasoning and freedom of will. These characteristics give us spiritual, physical and material potential to surpass all other creation. For this reason, upon the creation of Adam the Angels were commanded by God to prostate to him in recognition of this great potential[14]. Thus, man has probed the depths of the universe, can communicate across the globe in real time, produced genetically modified food, invented artificial intelligence, and many more feats of development to come as human knowledge expands. Now, this great creation called ***human being*** could not have been created for no Divine purpose and no Divine plan; we live and we die and that's it. This is what in fact people of old surmised as the Qur'an informs us:

> ***They say: 'There is no life other than our present worldly life: herein we live and we die, and it is only (the passage of) time that destroys us. Yet the fact is that they know nothing about this and are only conjecturing. (45:24)***

Yes, the notion that there is nothing after death is a mere conjecture!

2nd Argument: Everything in the universe points to the ultimate perfection in God's knowledge and design. Nonetheless, human beings always live with the expectation of a more satisfying life in this world, a sort of a parallel life. This points to an imperfection in our worldly existence; however comfortable and fulfilling our lives may be, human beings always yearn and long for an ideal life which we can not exactly define and hence we cannot reach it, leading to unhappiness and even despair. This parallel life which we are yearning for is in fact the afterlife where the ultimate perfection in God's creation will be fulfilled. Our existence in this world, which is not perfect, is a temporary one to prepare us for the next life which is eternal and perfect.

3rd Argument: Human beings have been created with the freedom of choice. Some of us can be righteous and some of us can chose to be evil and wicked. The wicked inflict a lot of suffering on fellow human beings and get away with it for various reasons; position of power and influence, weaknesses in human laws, corruption in the legal system, and so on. Yet others can commit crimes of such enormity that no human justice can ever penalize. Consider for example a person responsible for the unjust killing of a million people; what kind of punishment can really do justice to such a person? Ultimate justice can never be fulfilled in this world. Our hope for true justice can only be fulfilled in the hereafter. In fact it will be totally unjust if there is to be no hereafter.

4th Argument: The Qur'an informs us that everything in the creation is in pairs; the male and the female, life and death, the heavens and the earth, night and day, and so on. Now coming to our existence, there is ***this world*** and ***the hereafter*** as a pair, and there is this ***temporary*** existence in this world and the ***eternal*** existence in the next world as a pair.

5th Argument: The Qur'an elaborates on: (a) numerous phenomena in natural sciences (see Section 6), (b) historical events, (c) legislation and moral standards which have positively transformed human civilization and continues to have profound impact on humanity to this day. None of these elaborations have been shown to be false or invalid. With this established veracity and validity of the Qur'an, why would one question the reality of the afterlife which it elaborates so emphatically?

The above arguments should convince anyone that afterlife is not only a reality, but a necessity. Moreover, what are the arguments which prove its non existence?

Islamic Teachings on Death and Afterlife

Human soul passes through various phases in its eternal existence. Our life on this earth is a preparation for the next phases of our existence. Death marks the beginning of the next phase of our existence which is the 'Intermediate State between Death and the Resurrection'. This phase is called *Barzakh* in Arabic. It is the period in the grave in which one wakes up in another plane of existence with full spiritual consciousness. Those who have prepared for the afterlife in this earthly life will experience relief because of the prospect of the pleasures and contentment ahead, whereas those who ignored the reality of the afterlife will suffer immense remorse because of the impending calamities in display before them. The Qur'an informs us that these two opposing states are announced to the soul by the Angels right at the moment of death:

> ***Those who say 'Allah is our Lord' and then remain steadfast, upon them descend angels (and say): 'Do not fear nor grieve, and receive good tidings of Paradise which you were promised. (41:30)***

> ***And if you could only see when the angels took away the souls of the unbelievers, striking them on their faces and backs, saying: 'Taste the torment of burning. (8:50)***

This period in the grave is the first stage of the afterlife which signals the consequences of our choices which we have made in our earthly life. The Prophet is reported to have said; "The grave is the first of the stages of the next life. If one passes through it safely, then what follows is easier than it. However, if one fails at this first stage, what follows is more severe than it".

The soul remains in this intermediate state till *The End of Time* or *The Hour* when the physical creation as we know it will be transformed into a new plane of existence. This is a momentous event which has been described in vivid terms in the Quran. For example, in 22:1-2, we read;

> ***O people, save yourselves from the wrath of your Lord: the fact is that the quaking of the Hour is a terrible thing. On the Day you behold it, you will see that every suckling woman will forsake her suckling, and every pregnant female will cast her burden, and the people will appear to you to be intoxicated, though they will not be drunk, but the dreadful torment from Allah will be such (as to make them seem like drunkards).***

The End of Time ushers in the new World which will begin with the Resurrection of the dead and the entire humankind will be recreated again. The Qur'an describes this day as a very difficult day indeed for the disbelievers who will plead for a second chance of life on earth so that they can amend their ways. As for the believers they will have nothing to fear on this day[15].

Humanity will then be gathered for the final Judgment. This is The Day

of Judgment which is so momentous that the Qur'an describes it in many terms; The Day of Regret (19:39), The Day of Victory (32:29), a Calamitous Day (76:10), a Weighty Day (76:27), a Tremendous Day (19:37), a Day of Reckoning (38:16, 40:27), and so on. The Day of Judgment is the day when our spiritual worth will be judged by our Lord. It is a day of great joy and happy expectations for the righteous and a day of regrets and lamentations for the deniers of God and the Last Day, this Day of Judgment. These two scenarios are summed up in the following verses of the Quran:

> ***O man, you are striving unto your Lord and you will meet Him. Whoever is given the Record in his right hand shall be called to an easy accounting, and shall return to his people joyfully. But he who is given the Record behind his back shall cry for 'perdition' (annihilation) and will enter the Blazing Fire. He used to live joyfully among his people, thinking he would never revert (to Us). (84:6-14)***

Islam teaches us that in the hereafter the righteous will be united with the righteous members of their families and dear ones[16]; what a joy to meet our parents, our brothers and sisters, our children, our friends in paradise. But for the wicked, it will be a very forbidding scenario all together; they will wish they never existed:

> ***Lo! We warn you of a chastisement near at hand; the Day when a man will look on what his own hands have sent forth, and the unbelievers shall say: 'Oh would that I were utter dust.' (Qur'an 78:40)***



Islamic View on other Religions

Human beings have been created with a natural recognition of the Creator and inborn basic ethical values (*Fitrah* in Arabic). Throughout the history of mankind God has sent a chain of prophets to all nations to awaken this natural norm in mankind. The message of God to all these prophets has always been consistent in the basic creed – *the Divine Unity, belief in the Hereafter and Righteousness* – though the laws and forms of worship varied.[17] Allah says in chapter 42, verse 13:

> ***He has prescribed for you (O Muhammad) the religion which He enjoined upon Noah and which We revealed to you, and which We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus, commanding: 'Establish this religion and do not split up regarding it.' What you are calling to is very hard upon those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity. Allah chooses for Himself whomsoever He pleases and guides to Himself whoever penitently turns to Him.***

The diversity of creed and religion has emerged over time as a result of gradual deviation from the original messages. Allah in the Qur'an is calling humanity to return to the basic creed of Abraham who was true in faith and the ancestor of the later prophets of God in the human history. Hence, from Islamic perspective, all the divergent religions fall into two categories.

1. Monotheistic Religions

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are religions which share the same monotheist traditions of Prophet Abraham, peace be upon him. In their purest form, all these three religions have the same basic principles of faith and religion.

Jews and Christians are called *"People of the Book"* in many verses in the Qur'an.[18] This means that they are people who are associated with the divine scriptures, namely the Torah and the Evangel (Gospel). However, these two scriptures in their present form are not strictly the original messages of their respective prophets, Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them.[19] Consequently, Islam views Judaism and Christianity as religions which are not consistent with the true teachings of Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them.

The Qur'an was revealed not only to confirm and complete the messages of Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them, but also to correct the deviations in what remains of their messages.[20] For this reason, from Islamic perspective, the true followers of the messages of Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them, are in fact those who follow the Qur'an.

2. Other religions

With regards to religions other than Judaism and Christianity, e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism and others, Islam views them as religions which are far from the traditional prophetic messages and are thus not associated with Abrahamic traditions. Some of these religions incline towards atheism, and yet others grossly deviate from the worship of the One True God, Allah, by associating other gods with Him. Associating other gods with the One and Only True God is contrary to the principle of Divine Unity, (see Section 3).

However, despite all these differences, Islam respects all faiths as well as the people who follow these faiths, since Allah is the One who created mankind and gave us freedom of choice in matters of faith. He says in the Qur'an 10:99:

> ***If it had been thy Lord's Will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth! Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe?***

This is reiterated in another verse, 2:256:

> ***Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error.***

Thus, diversity in faith is within Allah's scheme in the creation of mankind.[21] With this recognition, Muslims throughout history have lived together with peoples of other faiths in peace, love, goodwill and harmony. It is indeed noteworthy that Islam protects human dignity and implements moral values based on the bedrock principle of equality of humanity and freedom of will in matters of faith.



The annual pilgrimage to Makkah draws more than three million people of all nationalities to one place for the worship of One God, Allah. It is a practical demonstration and reinforcement of the unity of religion and the unity of humanity.

Jesus in Islam

One of the principles of faith in Islam is to believe in **all** the Messengers of Allah. Muslims believe that Jesus, peace be upon him, was one of the greatest Messengers of Allah.

The life and teachings of Jesus as reflected in the Bible were recorded decades after his departure and thus they were very much shrouded in mystery. The Qur'an, which mentions Jesus twenty-five times by name, came to clarify the mystery and superstitions surrounding his personality and teachings, absolve him and his mother from the false claims attributed to them, and honour him and his mother as true and devout servants of Allah, may Allah be pleased with them. Thus, the Qur'an teaches us that:

- Jesus, peace be upon him, was born after his mother the Virgin Mary's miraculous conception. Accordingly, Jesus, peace be upon him, had no father and thus, no paternal genealogy but a noble maternal genealogy. However, despite his miraculous conception, he was human and, as the Qur'an informs us, he never claimed to be more than a human being appointed by Allah as a prophet.[22] For example, in the Qur'an 5:116-117, Allah describes a scene on the Day of Judgment:

  And imagine when in the hereafter Allah will say: 'Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people: "Take me and my mother for gods beside Allah?" and he will answer: "Glory to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right to. Had I said so, You would surely have known it. You know all what is within my mind whereas I do not know what is within Yours. You, indeed You, know fully all that is beyond the reach of human perception. I said to them nothing except what You commanded me, that is: 'Serve

Allah, my Lord and your Lord.' I watched over them as long as I remained among them; and when You did recall me, then You Yourself became the Watcher over them. Indeed, You are Witness over everything.

Even according to the Bible itself, Jesus, peace be upon him, was humble, asserted his servitude to God and never claimed divinity.[23]

- He was the Messiah (Christ), meaning that he was anointed or appointed by Allah as a prophet.[24]
- He performed many miracles by Allah's permission. The first miracle was that he spoke as a baby to defend his mother, Mary, who faced accusations of indecency because of the virgin birth. Later in life he performed many other miracles, by Allah's permission, such as raising the dead and curing the blind and the lepers.[25]
- He was sent with the Gospel or Evangel (*Al-Injeel* in Arabic).[26] For example, in the Qur'an 5:46 Allah says:

And We sent Jesus, the son of Mary, after the preceding Prophets, confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah. And We gave him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light, and which confirms the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah, and a guidance and admonition for the God-fearing.

- He was sent only to the Children of Israel, not to any other nation. Allah says in the Qur'an 3:49,

"And (appoint Jesus) a Messenger to the Children of Israel…"

The fact that Jesus, peace be upon him, was sent only to the Children of Israel is reflected even in today's Bible, in all its different versions.[27]

- He was neither killed nor crucified. Allah says in the Qur'an 4:157–158:

> ***That they said (in boast), "We killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah"; but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not. Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.***

There was an attempt by his enemies to crucify Jesus, peace be upon him, but Allah did not allow His prophet to be humiliated: He protected and saved His prophet.



Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest mosque in Islam. As mentioned in the Qur'an (17:1 & 53:13-18), Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, ascended to the heavens from this mosque in the year 621 CE.

Why Islam, aren't all Religions Right?

There is a misguided belief that any religion which promotes goodwill, harmony and love amongst people essentially leads to God and godliness and hence, any such religion is acceptable. In other words, all religions are essentially good, and/or equal, therefore, one does not need to follow any particular religion. This line of thinking is faulty and flawed for two important reasons.

First, religion is about our devotion to the Creator, Allah. It is about how we relate to Him, how we worship Him and how we conduct our lives on this Earth in accordance with His Will. All these 'hows' must come from the Creator. Hence, the true and right religion must be the one prescribed by the Creator.

Second, to say that all religions that exist today are true religions of the Creator cannot be correct because there are major doctrinal as well as practical contradictions in various religions in existence today. To give some examples: Not all religions, as practiced by their adherents, agree on the concept of the absolute Oneness of the Creator (Monotheism), secondly, there are major differences between religions on the principles of salvation, and thirdly, there are differences between religions on what is lawful and what is unlawful.

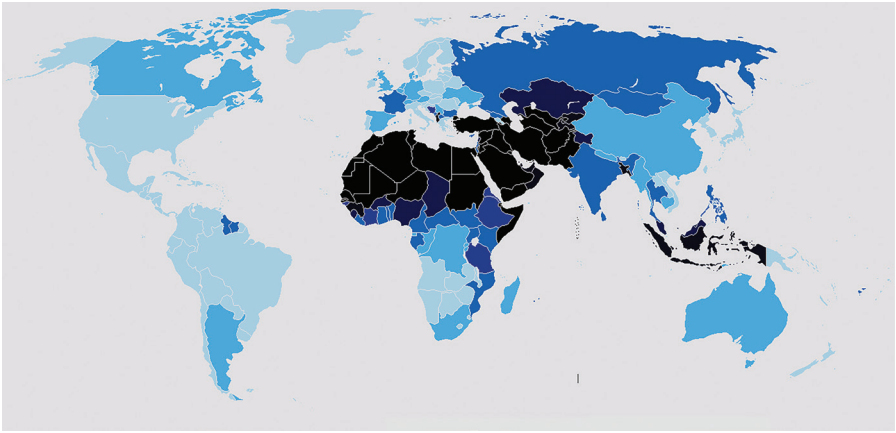
The Creator most certainly does not contradict Himself. His religion therefore must be consistent for the whole humanity – consistent in its basic beliefs and practices. It is up to the individual to seek the truth through knowledge and reason. One should not be deceived that all religions are essentially good and therefore acceptable to the Creator; the only religion acceptable to Him is **His** religion.

Islam does not claim originality in religion; it is the same religion which was revealed to all the earlier generations of humanity. Diversity of

religions in human history emerged due to deviations from the original messages of the prophets. The final messenger, Muhammad, and the final message, the Qur'an, came to guide humanity towards the original message. Thus, the only religion acceptable to the Creator is the one that conforms to this final message - Islam, which means submission to His will. Thus, Allah says in the Qur'an 3:85,

> ***If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (willing, sincere and peaceful submission to the Will of Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good).***

Islam was the religion of all the messengers of God who preceded the final messenger, Muhammad, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them all, because they were subservient to the Creator and fully submitted to His Will. Islam also was the religion of the sincere followers of the preceding prophets who adhered to the true teachings of their respective prophets.



Admonition on Atheism and Agnosticism

Atheism is the denial of the Supreme Being (God), and this also implies the denial of the life hereafter. Agnosticism is having doubt on the existence of the Supreme Being. Both Atheists and Agnostics base their denial or doubt on various reasons. In the olden times the reasons were about our inability to physically see or feel the presence of God, or about the human experience of suffering; if there is God why do we suffer. In modern times the reasons get more sophisticated; why God's existence cannot be proven scientifically? Also since we can explain scientifically many phenomena in the creation, there is no basis for God's existence.

Islam addresses this rejection or skepticism by appealing to the human conscious, intellect and reason on the existence of God. The nature of the Creator and the creation are infinitely different and as such human beings do not have the capacity to see God. Furthermore, if God has a physical form which we can see, He will be limited or constrained in space, time and matter. This is an absurd proposition, because space, time and matter are created things and hence, they cannot limit the Creator. The Qur'an instead invites people to an intellectual enquiry of the creation so that they can comprehend God through His Creation. Evidences of God's existence are called 'signs' in the Qur'an, (*ayah* in Arabic) and there are hundreds of these signs in the Qur'an. In chapter 41, verse 53 Allah says:

> ***We shall show them Our Signs on the horizons and in their own beings until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is a witness over everything?***

Thus, with this promise the Qur'an invites mankind to ponder on the many evidences of God's existence through His Creation. For example, in the Qur'an 16:10-11 we read:

It is He, Who sends down for you water from the sky, which provides drinking water for you and brings forth fodder for your cattle. And thereby He grows for you crops and olives and date-palms and vines and different kinds of many other fruits. Surely there is a great Sign in this for those people who ponder.

In this single verse many signs of the existence of God are mentioned. Just to take one element in the verse, the formation of rain: It involves hundreds of physical laws and precise parameters which cause evaporation of moisture from the earth, the ascent of the moisture to the sky, the condensation of the moisture into droplets, the accumulation of the droplets into clouds, the movement of the clouds laden with thousands of tons of water, and the falling of the droplets as rain. All these processes are governed by precise physical laws and parameters. The Qur'an invites us to ponder on many thousands of such processes in the creation. For a thinking and reasonable human being all this points to a Supreme Designer and Creator, God. It is unreasonable to assume that all this complexity and precision in the Creation and all its profound dynamics are a result of random chance. Indeed, many great modern scientists have come to this same logical conclusion.[28]

The Qur'an also informs us that all human beings are created with a natural disposition to recognize the Creator and to submit to Him, (this is called *fitrah* in Arabic).[29] The proof of this is that when we face a serious crisis and realize that no human can come to our help, we tend to turn to God for help. Our Creator has appointed prophets and sent scriptures to humanity to awaken this inner conscious of recognizing Him. However, because God has given us the freedom of will, we have the capacity to suppress this natural disposition of recognizing Him. But God tells us in the Qur'an that those who respond to the inner call to believe in Him, He will guide them, and those who chose to suppress their inner conscious

to believe in Him, He will leave them astray, and this is God's scheme of our creation.[30]

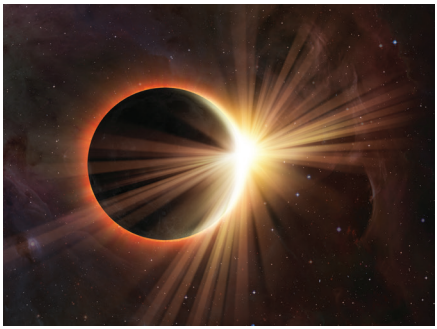
The Qur'an, which is the last revelation sent to mankind, is in itself a sign of the existence of God. We read in chapter 4 verse 82;

> ***Do they not ponder about the Qur'an? Had it been from any other than Allah, they would surely have found in it much inconsistency.***

An objective and open study of the Qur'an clearly shows that it could not have been written by man, (see Section 7). The Qur'an is a mighty testimony of the existence of God.

God created us for an eternal divine purpose and favoured us above most of His creation.[31] Our life on this Earth is transient and it is meant to prepare us for our eternal abode in the Hereafter. In this preparation our faith in the Creator will be tested through prosperity as well as adversity. Furthermore, we will also be tested on how we exercise our free will, and it is on this test of our free will that both good and evil will touch our lives; it is man who perpetrates evil and not God. The upside of all this, however, is that evil and suffering not only serve as a test of our faith, but they are also a warning and a deterrence for man. It is often in adversity that positive contemplation and a quest for a higher purpose are awakened in our inner conscious.

Eclipse of the Sun: This spectacular phenomenon is only possible because the Sun is four hundred times further away from the Earth than the Moon and also four hundred times bigger than the Moon. These precise ratios point to a designer who designed this beautiful sight, the Creator.



The Status of Women in Islam

Islam firmly places both men and women as equal human beings before the Creator. Men and women are biologically different and as such have different - but mutually dependent - roles in the family and society. However, neither is superior to the other. The following verse from the Qur'an (4:1) beautifully sums up this principle:

> ***O mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single person; created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; fear Allah, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (revere) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you.***



What this verse says is that women are of like nature to men, both have mutual rights, and Allah calls for special reverence and respect for women, especially our mothers.

In keeping with this noble principle, Islam liberated women from their status of mere servants of men, an evil custom prevalent throughout the world at the advent of Islam in the 7th Century, to a status of social and economic equality with men.[32] Thus, in Islam women have the right to property, the right to inheritance, the right to education, the right to earn their own living and all other rights enjoyed by men.

The injustices suffered by women in some Muslim societies are not prescribed by Islam but are, in fact, cultural practices. For example, forced marriages or depriving girls from education, both are practiced in some Muslim societies but they are illegal under Islamic law.

Religious Extremism and Violence

Religious extremism and violence in all the religions in the world are as old as the religions themselves. In all religions there will always be some people who will have extreme and often perverted views of their beliefs. Many wars are fought and many atrocities are committed by such people due to their extreme religious ideologies and radicalization of the minds. To deter this human tendency, Islam conditions faith and builds human character on the principles of freedom of will, preservation of human dignity, respect for all faiths, sacredness of life, justice and fairness for all humanity.

Freedom of Will and Respect for all Faiths

Allah created human being with a freedom of conscious and will in matters of faith, and thus faith in any religion cannot be imposed on anyone. In addition to verses 2:256 and 10:99 of the Qur'an already quoted above (see Section 10), Allah says in verse 11:118-119,

> ***Had your Lord so willed, He would surely have made mankind one community. But as things stand, now they will not cease to differ among themselves, except for those on whom your Lord has mercy. And it is for this (exercise of freedom of choice) that He has created them.***

Diversity in faith is within God's scheme of our creation and this implies coexistence and tolerance with people of all faiths.

Sacredness of Life

Islam condemns the killing of the innocent and condemns any other form of violence or injustice inflicted on the innocent. Killing a person unjustly is a grave sin in Islam. Allah says:

> ***If anyone slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew all mankind: and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved all mankind (Qur'an 5:32).***

War in Islam is permitted only in self defense and against any form of aggression or oppression.[33] However, a call for such a just war would be declared upon those who are engaged in the aggression, not on the innocent civilians and/or their properties. War in Islam is governed by very strict rules of engagement and how to deal with the captives, the innocent and the properties.[34]

Justice and Fairness

Lack of justice and fairness breed extreme and violent ideologies. Islam commands justice and fairness for all people, regardless of their faith. Allah says in verse 60:8,

> ***Allah does not forbid that you be kind and just to those who did not fight against you on account of religion, nor drove you out of your homes. Surely Allah loves those who are equitable.***

With these principles, extremism and violence can only occur in Islam due to ignorance in Islamic principles, excessive zeal in religion, or motivation other than religion. The violence which we see today in the world is basically politically motivated and has nothing to do with religion or sects in religion, although the name of religion is used to mask the underlying motives and mobilise popular support. Underlying these conflicts and violence are power struggle, domination, wealth, greed, vendetta and the consequences of military interventions. Islam as a religion is innocent of the wars and other forms of violence which are going on in the world today in the name of religion.

Islamic Jihad

The word *'Jihad'* is an Arabic word which means 'to struggle or strive' in order to achieve something. In the Islamic context it means 'to struggle in the way of Allah', i.e. to exert effort in serving our Lord. Many verses in the Qur'an call upon the believers to strive in the cause of Allah. For example, in 5:35 we read;

> ***O you who believe! Do your duty to Allah, and seek the means of approach unto Him, and strive with might and main in His cause (i.e. Jihad); that you may prosper.***

Therefore, every action of a believer which is done with the intention of earning the pleasure and approval of Allah is *Jihad*; this includes acts of worship, charity, controlling our desires, pursuit of knowledge, earning the means of living, raising our families, commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil, and so on.

In the history books as well in the modern media, the word *'Jihad'* is often mentioned in connection with fighting or violence. This is erroneous because fighting in Arabic is *Qital* and not *Jihad*. Islam is alleged to have been spread by the sword in the name of *Jihad*. This is the most fantastic fabrication ever repeated in the history books: Islam spread across the globe by its sublime principles and values, not by the sword; there has never been an Islamic Crusade or Inquisition. The word *'Holy War'* does not exist in Islamic terminologies. However, Muslims did engage in wars in the early Islamic history, but the wars were to repel aggression or to remove tyranny and establish freedom of conscious and will in matters of faith; they were in fact wars of liberation, not wars of conversions. Just to give one example, Muslims ruled India for hundreds of years and there has never been a campaign of forcing people into Islam; to this day India remains a Hindu majority country.

The words *'Jihadist'* and *'Jihadism'* are modern terms used in the media to describe Islamic extremist or militant groups and their ideologies. These terms are a modern invention and have no historical roots or meaning in Islam.

Islam does not sanction any wanton violence. Muslims are permitted to fight only in self defense and in repelling aggression. In this situation the fight would be classified as Jihad because one is striving in self defense or in warding off aggression. Allah says in 2:193;

> ***And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, Let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.***



The Sultan Ahmed Mosque is a historic mosque located in Istanbul, Turkey. Men still kneel in prayer on the mosque's lush red carpet after the call to prayer. The Blue Mosque, as it is popularly known, was constructed between 1609 and 1616 during the rule of Ahmed I. Its Külliye contains Ahmed's tomb, a madrasah and a hospice.

Islamic Shari'ah

Shari'ah is a detailed **code of conduct** that regulates the entire human life to conform to the Divine Will. It encompasses the basic beliefs (creed), forms of worship, ethics, socio-economic principles and the penal code. The word *'shari'ah'* means 'clear path' or 'the way', and thus in Islamic context it means the way to salvation and eternal success. To be a Muslim is to live according to the *shari'ah* because it is the Divine Way of life.

The basic principles of Islamic *Shari'ah* are derived from the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. The specific application of the principles, as well as the deduction of legal and religious rulings to address emerging situations, further define the shari'ah through consensus of opinions of the religious scholars, (*ijma'* in Arabic).

Human judgment alone cannot establish truly just and fair way of conduct for the entire humanity. This is because human judgment is negatively influenced by ego, arrogance, desires, self interest, emotions, shortsightedness and all other human weaknesses. We need our Creator to guide us and give us a truly just and fair way of human conduct, and this is the Islamic *shari'ah*. It is the absolute **code of conduct** which aims at protecting human life, dignity, mind, faith, family and property.

The *shari'a*h is often quoted in anti-Islamic rhetoric as the Islamic law which endorses the subjugation of women, child marriage, restriction of freedoms, and so on. This kind of rhetoric comes out of ignorance of what *shari'ah* actual is; it is in fact the **code of conduct** that offers solution and deterrence not only to the evils which the *shari'ah* is accused of, but to all the evils suffered by humanity.

Divisions in Islam

During the time of the Prophet and the time of the first three leaders (or Caliphs) after his death, the Muslims were one single community, even though there were some disagreements in governance particularly during the term of the third leader (Uthman ibn Affan, 644-656 CE). Political dissent and ultimately rebellion emerged during the term of the forth leader (Ali ibn Abi Talib, 656-661 CE). The ensuing conflict and war resulted into three factions; those who were fighting Ali, those who agreed with the arbitration between Ali and his opponents, and those who were initially with Ali but disagreed with the arbitration with the opponents of Ali. So historically, the divisions in the Muslim community were political in nature. At this juncture in the Islamic history political authority began to be separated from the legal authority; many Muslim scholars arose in the three camps who gave shape to the principles and concepts of determining *Shari'ah* which were already being used. Great Muslim jurists appeared like: Jabir bin Zayd (639–709 CE), Abu Hanifa (699–767 CE), Ja'afar Sadiq (702-765 CE), Malik (711–795 CE), Shafi'i (767–820 CE), and Ibn Hanbal (780–855 CE). Each of these scholars referred as Imam, an honorific title for outstanding religious and legal scholarship, developed a methodology of deducing laws and legal rulings and gathered a circle of followers. By the 10th century, the principles laid down by these great scholars had developed into well-defined "Schools of Jurisprudence" which adopted the exclusive allegiance of the scholars. Thus, the school of Jabir bin Zayd became known as *Ibadhi*, that of Abu *Hanifa* became known as Hanafi, that of Ja'afar Sadiq became known as *Shia*', that of Malik became known as *Maliki*, that of Shafi'i became known as *Shafi'i*, and that of Ibn Hanbal became known as *Hanbali*, though none of these Imams intended to create any distinct school. Over the next three centuries, ordinary Muslims also came to adhere to a particular school and owe exclusive allegiance to it for any legal and

religious rulings in response to issues of concerns.

With all these "Schools of Jurisprudence", Muslims are all united by one common scripture, the Qur'an, which has remained unchanged since its revelation over 14 centuries ago, and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. Muslims all over the world do not differ in the principles of faith and religion and perform religious rituals such as prayers and pilgrimage in unity.

It must be noted that Islam forbids division of religion into sects. Allah says in the Qur'an 3:103,

> ***And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves.***

In the spirit of this command, all Muslim schools of Jurisprudence lived as one single community in harmony for centuries. The unfortunate Muslim conflicts which we have seen in history and which we are seeing now have nothing to do with the religion, but they are about the geo-political struggles.



The Umayyad Mosque, also known as the Great Mosque of Damascus, located in the old city of Damascus, is one of the largest and oldest mosques in the world. It is considered by some Muslims to be the fourth-holiest place in Islam.

The Basic Human Rights in Islam

Mankind occupies a position of dignity and honour in Allah's creation. Allah says in the Qur'an 17:70:

> ***We have honoured the sons of Adam…; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of Our Creation.***

In respect and preservation of this honour, Islam has instituted basic rights for all humanity, irrespective of their faith, race or status. The following are some of the key basic rights in Islam, as prescribed in the Qur'an:

1. The sacredness of the soul and the right to life. Further to verse 5:32 quoted in section 15, Allah says:

   > ***…Kill not your children on a plea of want… Take not life, which Allah has made sacred, except by way of justice and law: Thus does He command you, that you may learn wisdom. (6:151)***

2. The right to the basic necessities of life. It is obligatory for Muslims to ensure that fellow human beings have their basic needs.

   > ***And in their wealth and possessions is the right of the needy, he who asks, and he who (for some reason) is prevented from asking. (51:19)***

   Helping the poor and looking after the needy is neither a favour nor a privilege, but a right of the poor and the needy.

3. The right to freedom in all its aspects.

   > ***But he has made no haste on the path that is steep. And what will explain to you the path that is steep? It is freeing the bondman. (90:11-13)***

Bondage has many faces. Among them are physical and economic enslavement, forced labour, sexual exploitation, and other forms of exploitation.

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said:

> ***There are three categories of people against whom I shall myself be a plaintiff on the Day of Judgment. Of these three, one is he who enslaves a freeman.***

Thus, Islam abolished slavery in the 7th Century, whereas slavery was abolished in the West as late as the 19th Century.[35]



The Great Mosque of Xi'an, China. Islam was introduced in China in the early 7th. Century. Today there are over 20 million Muslims in China.

4. Equality of all human beings: All people are considered equal and the only standard of excellence before God is purity of character and high morals.

> ***O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full Knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (49:13)***

5. The right to justice and fairness in all social and economic affairs, regardless of one's status in society.

> ***O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve, and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do.(4:135)***

6. The protection of honour, dignity and privacy of the individual.

> ***O ye who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor let some women laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames: Ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used of one) after he has believed: and those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong. (49:11)***

Furthermore, in verse 49:12, Allah says:

O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible) for suspicion, in some cases, is a sin; and spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would abhor it. But fear Allah: for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most-Merciful.

7. Freedom of expression and speaking out for what is right and just.

The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil... (9:71)

Furthermore, in verse 4:148, Allah says:

Allah loves not that evil should be noised abroad in public speech, except where injustice has been done; for Allah is He Who Hears and Knows all things.

8. Freedom of faith and the freedom to practice one's faith. Muslims believe that it is their duty to invite mankind to the truth of Islam. However, no one has the right to force anybody into any faith, for faith is willful conviction and sincerity in one's soul. Allah says in verse 2:256,

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error.

This freedom of faith in Islam is reiterated in the Qur'an in many other verses.[36]

These Islamic values as well as others prescribed in the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet are universal and constitute the essential elements of human rights and democracy.

Cultural Diversity in Islam

Islam acknowledges the diversity in people's customs, race, languages, dress, food, arts, folklores, and other cultural expressions, as not only legitimate but a sign of Allah's bounties. Islam, however, also disapproves of and even condemns those aspects of a culture that contradict its teachings and principles. Allah says;

> ***And among His signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colors: for in this, behold, there are messages for all who are possessed of (innate) knowledge!" (Qur'an 30:22)***

In another verse, Allah says;

> ***O mankind! We created you from male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God are the most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware" (Qur'an 49:13).***

In the modern globalized world, people often notice visible differences in Muslims coming from various racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It becomes important to differentiate between what is cultural and what is religious and the interplay between religion and culture in order to make sense of cultural diversity that exists within the Muslim world.

There are many variations in the way that Islam manifests itself in cultures around the world. This should surprise no one, as being a universal religion, Islam has spread to practically every corner of the world. This proliferation has involved diversity of cultures, all of which are expressed within the Islamic framework. That means, irrespective of the host country, the core of Islam – the essentials of faith and personal practice –

serve as a common denominator for all practicing Muslims. For example, all Muslim believe in one God. They all believe in angels. They all read and reflect upon the same Qur'an. They all believe in and follow the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. They all believe life after death and personal accountability on the Day of Judgment. They all believe in divine determination and destiny. The central practices of the five pillars of Islam are essentially the same for all Muslims around the world. You can hear the same call of prayer whether you are in Oman or Indonesia or Senegal or China. Muslims from all over the world fast together during the month of Ramadan and converge to Makkah together during the annual rituals of pilgrimage or Hajj. Therefore, In Islam there is a strong sense of unity within cultural diversity.

Of course, religion never exists within a cultureless vacuum. It always finds expression within a cultural setting. At the same time, cultures never form or evolve without referring to moral values and religious teachings held by majority of people. "There is, therefore, no religiously neutral cultures nor any culture-free religions."[37] One of the greatest challenge for Muslims (and non-Muslims) at any given time and place is to distinguish the timeless and universal teachings and principles of Islam from the cultural layers of interpretation often placed over these teachings and principles. Even Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, recognized and anticipated that Muslims would inevitably encounter situations that would not be described in the Qur'an or Sunnah. There will always be new cultural and legal situations that will require the critical analysis, and intelligence of insightful and sensitive juridical scholars. Certainly, there will be new issues in the world regions and epochs far more than those experienced at the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and therefore, interpretation and responding to evolving cultural nuances are tasks that the Muslims have always dealt with.

Observers especially those coming from the West, usually take one of two approaches when evaluating Muslim societies as they are trying to make sense. The first approach, Muslims are seen as a single monolithic and unchanging entity. Wherever Muslims are, irrespective of different geography and time, they are the same.[38] This approach ignores the visible cultural diversity in the modern Muslim world. The second approach, contrast significantly with the first. Islam is separated from its scriptures and mainly identified with people – its followers. Since Muslims are diverse peoples, there different "Islams," such as Turkish Islam, Lebanese Islam, Omani Islam, Indonesian Islam, etc. According to this view, there is no unitary world of Islam but a world of many "Islams". There are as many "Islams" as situations that sustains them.[39] Here, the cultural diversity line has been stretched to the point where Islam is broken down into national identities. A more correct approach would be to talk about unique experiences of Islam in time and space. Islam as a religion has been preserved in the textual sources of the Qur'an and Hadith in which the Sunnah (practical examples of the Prophet) is captured. Islam in text form does not change, but Muslims do not exist in a vacuum. They live in a certain time and in a particular space. The conditions and circumstances of particular geographies, and the issues and challenges of the times, provide a context in which Muslims seek inspiration from the Qur'an and Sunnah. In this case, both the "text" and the "context" provide a vessel where unique experiences of Islam are produced through fresh understanding and insightful interpretation of the same unchanging text.[40]

At an individual level, a Muslim's experience of Islam depends on his or her knowledge of its teachings, the level of understanding and the internalization of those teachings, and the degree to which those teachings are practiced. Similarly, each Muslim society experiences Islam depending on the factors that exist in its time and geography. Muslims are

not, therefore, monolithic entity nor are there multiple "Islams". Rather, there are unique experiences of Islam by individuals and Muslim societies. These experiences are inevitable and they explain the cultural diversity we see in the Muslim world. This diversity, in fact, is a testimony to the incredible adaptability of Islam to different cultures while maintaining its key principles and teachings. Muslims see this balance as evidence of God's providence and mercy. Islam is very cultural-friendly and it always strives to improve and enhance a culture. Regrettably, some Muslims forget or fail to connect cultural norms to their Islamic roots, either out of plain ignorance or lack of historical awareness. When this happens, cultural habits that are antithetical to the spirit and teachings of Islam can develop and give the impression that a warped or destructive convention is actually Islamic.[41] There are many such bad cultural practices encountered within some Muslim societies that are wrongly associated with Islam or mistakenly attributed to its teachings. These practices include forced marriages, child marriages, honor killings, preference for male child, and female circumcision. All these practices are un-Islamic, yet they serve to exacerbate misconceptions and reinforce negative stereotypes about Islam.



Young Muslim students in a study circle in a Mosque reciting the Qur'an, Nekhon-Sri-Thammarat, Thailand.

Why Religion is Important?

There are six reasons why religion is important:

1. Our values, behavior and actions are determined by what we believe as the norm in our inner conscious. This norm is shaped by the worldview of our culture which we inherit. The cultural worldview is heavily influenced by the faith, whatever that faith may be. Without a worldview our life orientation will be confused, leading to a lack of sense of direction, emptiness and breakdown of values and norms as perceived by the society, thus creating social as well as individual's inner disorder. Therefore, at the onset religion is important because it defines one's faith which defines our worldview. It is our integrity guarantor so to speak.

2. Religion is the only source of knowledge concerning God: Who is He, what are His attributes and what is His nature? Thus, religion is important because denying religion is akin to denying God.

3. Religion is the only source of knowledge concerning things which are beyond human perception and yet real. It is religion which tells about the eternal nature of the human soul, the life after death, the Angels, and so on. Thus, without religion one is totally oblivious of these realities which are beyond our physical perception.

4. Religion tells us about the purpose of life: Why am I here? Do I have any choices in my life? What are the consequences of my choices? Many people are in despair because they lack this sense of purpose in life.

5. Religion is defined as the way of life; a code of living which aims at protecting and preserving human dignity and safety as well as creating conditions for a harmonious and happy living. Religion

defines moral standards and equitable justice system for us to live by. Ignoring religion leads to the whole catalogue of human evils; exploitation, injustice, oppression, greed, discrimination, corruption, and the list goes on. Religion is necessary for our own collective good.

6. Last but not least, religion is important because it tells about how we can prepare for our next life. As argued in Section 9, life after death is a reality and what lies ahead depends upon the choices which we make in this life. Religion tells us exactly what our Creator is expecting from us, how we should conduct our lives and what will be the consequences of our actions in the hereafter.

Life without religion is a life oblivious of the purpose of life and the wider view of our existence, as well as a life which lacks the vision of things to come. It is not wise to brush aside religion as the following verses of the Qur'an admonish us (67:5-11):

> ***For those who reject their Lord (and Cherisher) is the Penalty of Hell: and evil is (such) destination. When they are cast therein, they will hear the (terrible) drawing in of its breath even as it blazes forth. Almost bursting with fury: every time a group is cast therein its Keepers will ask "Did no Warner come to you?". They will say: "Yes indeed: a Warner did come to us, but we rejected him and said `Allah never sent down any (Message): you are in nothing but an extreme delusion!' " They will further say: "Had we but listened or used our intelligence we should not (now) be among the Companions of the Blazing Fire!". They will then confess their sins: but far will be (Forgiveness) for the Companions of the Blazing Fire! As for those who fear their Lord unseen, for them is Forgiveness and a great Reward.***

How Can One Become a Muslim?

Islam is based on six articles (or pillars) of faith and five articles of religion which have been described in Section 2 of this book. Once one has understood and accepted these principles, one becomes a Muslim by simply declaring the following:

Ash'hadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah wa ash'hadu anna Muhamada-Rrasuulullah.

I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah; and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

This statement is called the *shahada* in Arabic, which means a pledge and affirmation of the Faith. It is first said in Arabic and then in the language which is understood by the new Muslim.

Once one has pronounced the *shahada*, one has become a Muslim and henceforth is committed in belief and action to the articles of faith and religion.

When a non-Muslim embraces Islam, he or she is actually reverting to his or her "religion of birth", because everyone is born a Muslim. That is, at birth everyone by nature is in full submission to the Will of Allah and has an inborn awareness of basic morality, (*fitrah* in Arabic). As one grows up, it is the parents and the surrounding culture which leads the person to a particular religion. It is therefore up to the individual to seek the truth and adopt what is logical and makes sense in matters of faith and religion.



The Truth about Faith

1. Blind faith based on the chance of birth and following ancestors is no faith.
2. True faith must be based on Knowledge, reason and logic.
3. The basis of one's faith must be supported by solid proof.

Glossary

Allah: The personal name of the Creator and the Lord of the universe. (see Section 3)

Ayah: Any verse in the Qur'an. It also means 'sign of God'.

Caliph: Leader of the Muslim community. The word comes from the Arabic word *'Khalifa'* which also means 'vicegerent'.

Hadith: *Hadith* (or *Hadeeth*) and *Sunnah* are (respectively) the sayings and life examples of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. They form the body of teachings of the Prophet which are collectively called '*Sunnah* of the Prophet'. (See Section 8)

Hajj: The Muslim annual pilgrimage to Makkah. (See Section 2)

Hijra: The emigration of the Muslims from Makkah to Madinah which took place in 622 CE. It marked the beginning of the Muslim lunar calendar which is called Hijra Calendar. (See Section 4)

Ibadhi: One of the Islamic Schools of Law. (See Section 18)

Islam: The name of the religion which calls for the belief in the Oneness of the Creator, Allah, and total acceptance of and obedience to His Will. (See Section 2)

Jihad: To strive or struggle for the cause of Allah. Thus, every action of a believer which is done with the intention of earning the pleasure and approval of Allah is **Jihad**. (See Section 16)

Ka'bah: The first house built on Earth for the worship of One God. It is located within the compound of the great mosque in Makkah and it is usually wrapped in black cloth.

Madinah: A city in Saudi Arabia located about 400 kilometers north of Makkah. It is the location of the second holiest mosque in Islam, The Prophet's Mosque, (*Masjid Al-Nabawi* in Arabic)

Makkah: A city located in the western part of Saudi Arabia. It the location of the Ka'bah and the first holiest mosque in Islam, The Inviolable Mosque, (or *Masjid Al-Haraam* in Arabic)

Muslim: A person who believes and follows the principles of the religion of Islam.

Qibla: The direction of Makkah towards which Muslims turn in prayers.

Qur'an: The last Divine Message revealed to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. (See Section 6)

Shari'ah: The Islamic code of conduct which encompasses the basic beliefs (creed), forms of worship, ethics, socio-economic principles and the penal code. (See Section 17)

Shia': One of the Islamic Schools of Law. (See Section 18)

Sunni: One of the Islamic Schools of Law. (See Section 18)

Surah: Any chapter in the Qur'an.

Ummah: The entire Muslim community in the Muslim World.

Endnotes

1. Whenever names of prophets are mentioned, Muslims invoke Allah by saying "peace and blessings (of Allah) be upon him/them". (See also Qur'an 33:56, 37:181)

2. Qur'an 2:132, 136, 22:78

3. The articles of faith are declared in many verses in the Qur'an, for example; 2:3-4, 2:285, 4:136, 54:49, and other verses.

4. It is clear in the Qur'an that our actions are not predetermined by God. See for example 4:62, 10:44, 13:11, 18:29, 30:41, and other verses.

5. The articles of religion are declared in many verses in the Qur'an, for example; 2:3, 2:43, 2:183, 2:196, 3:97, 22:78 and other verses.

6. Taqwa literally means to fear or to protect. It means the effort to protect oneself from Allah's wrath and to fear and be conscious of His presence. This God-consciousness is a driving force to the attainment of piety or righteousness, i.e. doing good and shunning evil.

7. Qur'an 7:158, 21:107, 33:40, 34:28

8. This offer for leadership was made by Utbah bin Rabia'h (father in law of Abu Sufyan) who was among the dignitaries in Makkah.

9. Qur'an 3:3, 4:47, 5:48, 15:9, 26:192-196, 76:23, and other verses.

10. The relationship of man with Allah and the rest of the creation is proclaimed in many verses in the Qur'an. For example; 1:2, 2:21-22, 2:257, 7:54, 50:21, 82:10-12, 18:50, 6:112, 12:5, 6:38, 2:164, 31:10, 36:71-73, and other verses.

11. Qur'an 2:38-39, 2:81-82, 17:9-10, and other verses.

12. Qur'an 3:137, 10:71–73; 11:25–49, 12: 1–113, 17:2-8, 71:1–28, and other verses.

13. For further reading on this subject please refer to: (1) Qur'an & Modern Sciences, by Dr. Zakir Naik, (2) The Bible, The Qur'an and Science, by Maurice Bucaille, (3) The Qur'an: Unchallengeable Miracle, by Caner Taslaman, translated by Ender Gurol.

14. Qur'an 2:34, 17:61

15. Qur'an 14:44-46, 74:8-10, 80:33-46

16. Qur'an 13:22-23, 36:55-56, 52:21

17. Qur'an 5:48, 16:36, 10:47

18. Qur'an 3:64–65; 3:98–100, 4:47, and other verses.

19. Qur'an 2:75, 2:79, 2:146, 159, 174, 3:71, 4:46, 5:13 and 5:15. Bible scholars of Christian background also assert to this fact, for example see (1) 'Misquoting Jesus' and (2) 'Jesus Interrupted' by Bart D. Ehrman.

20. Qur'an 5:48.

21. Qur'an 11:118-119

22. Qur'an 3:59, 4:171, 5:75, 5:116-117, 19:30,

23. The Bible (KJV); Matthew 24:36, John 5:30, 14:28, 17:3 and 20:17, Acts 2:22. For further reading on this subject visit the following site: http://www.islam-guide.com/ch3-10-1.htm. You can also read 'The First and Final Testament', by Dr. Lawrence Brown.

24. Qur'an 3:45, 4:171, 5:72, 19:30.

25. Qur'an 19:27–33 and Qur'an 3:49; 5:110.

26. Qur'an 5:110 and 57:27.

27. All versions of the Bible testify to the fact that Jesus, peace be upon him, was sent to the 'Children of Israel'. See for example, the Bible (KJV), Matthew 10:5–6 and Matthew 15:22–26.

28. Among the scientist was Sir Antony Flew who was a strong advocate of Atheism. In 2004 he announced his belief in God and in 2007 wrote a book entitled – 'There is God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind'.

29. Qur'an 7:172 and 30:30

30. Qur'an 3:86, 10:9, 13:27, 17:97, 18:17, 48:4, 74:31.

31. Qur'an 17:70, 23:115, 29:2, 30:8

32. The following are examples of the injustices suffered by women in history: (1) In pre-Islamic Arabia infant girls were buried alive. (2) The Roman civilization regarded women as slaves, whilst the Greeks considered women as commodity. (3) In France in 587 CE a conference was held to decide whether women were humans or not. (4) Before 1850 women were not considered as citizens in England, and they had no personal rights until 1882. (5) In Chinese culture men were not only allowed to sell their wives as slaves, but they were even allowed to bury them alive. (6) Hindus considered women as an affliction worse than death, hell, poison or fire.

33. Qur'an 2:190, 2:193, 2:217, 4:75 and 8:39

34. Qur'an 8:67-70. Large parts of chapter 8 and 9 (as well as other chapters), deal with the circumstances for war, the conduct of war, rulings concerning truce in war, asylum seekers, management of spoils of war, and the treatment of war captives. It is significant to note that Muslims were the first in history to introduce laws on the

treatment of war captives.

35. See abolition timeline: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abolition_of_slavery_timeline

36. Qur'an 10:99, 109:1–6 and other verse.

37. Reference VI, Page 183

38. Reference VII, Page 4

39. Reference VII, Page 4

40. Reference VIII, Page 110-114

41. Reference VIII, Page 116-118

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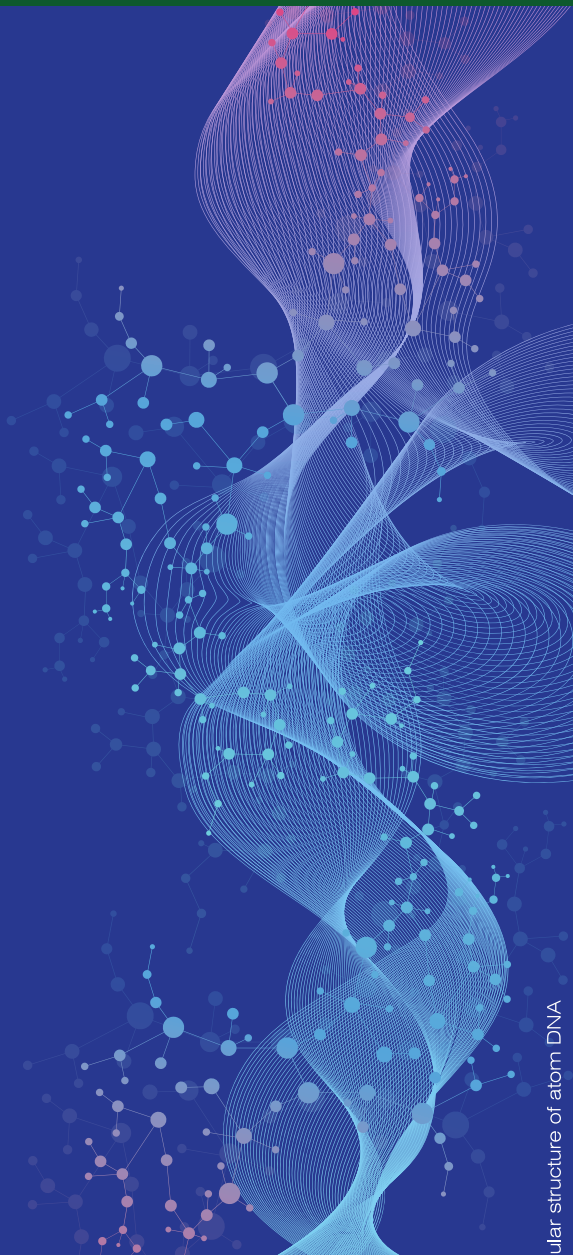
"Ar-Rahmaan", The Entirely Merciful. This is one of the attributes of Allah

تعريف الإسلام باللغة الإنجليزية



Molecular structure of atom DNA

NOT FOR SALE