



What is **ISLAM ?**

By
Jamaal al-Din M. Zarabozo

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Preface

In the name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. All praises are due to Allah; we praise Him; we seek His help; we seek His forgiveness; and we seek His guidance. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, for whom there is no partner. And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.

I would like to take this opportunity to express praise and to thank Allah for giving me the opportunity to write an important work of this nature. May Allah forgive me for my shortcomings in presenting His religion. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to the noble Shaikh Muhammad al-Turki of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da'wah and Guidance for his support. I would also like to express my thanks to Ahmad Ba-Rasheed for his continual efforts as well. These two devoted men were instrumental in producing this abridgement as well as the original work that this work is based on. There are many people that I would like to thank for their help in this particular work. First, I must express my thanks to my beloved wife who is always a source of assistance and help. Special thanks must also go to Dr. Abdulkarim al-Saeed, Br. Nahar al-Rashid, Dr. Mohammad al-Osimi, Dr. Ahmad al-Teraiqi and Br. Jalaal Abdullah. I can only pray that Allah rewards them and blesses them greatly.

It should be noted that this work is an abridgement of the author's *What is Islam*. Many details, further references and additional quotes from authoritative sources have been deleted in this abridgement. Any reader interested in additional references should consult the original, unabridged version of this work. I pray that Allah accepts this work from me as being solely for His sake. As with all such work, the responsibility for any mistakes lies with the author. I ask Allah to forgive me for my shortcomings and to guide me to the Straight Path.

Jamaal Zarabozo
Boulder, CO
May 15, 2006

Introduction

The Goal and Motivation for Writing this Book

This is a very important time for publishing clear and concise material about Islam. Today, for many reasons, Islam is often pictured in a very unflattering manner in many parts of the world. Since many people are unfamiliar with Islam beyond what they see in the mass media, it is not surprising that such misrepresentations of Islam have influenced public opinion. The easiest and probably the most productive cure for this situation is by reaching out to those people and allowing them to hear what Islam is truly all about. One must go beyond the hype and get to the true authentic teachings of the religion.

The goal here is not to deal with the wrong information that is spread about Islam. The goal here is simply to present what Islam truly is, based on the original and universally recognized sources of Islam: The Quran—or, in other words, the book revealed from Allah (God) to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)—as well as the words and guidance of the Prophet himself.

The Foundation and Sources of Islam

Before discussing Islam, it is important to understand something about the basic sources of Islam. There are only two authoritative sources of Islam: the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad¹ These two are the ultimate authorities in Islam because they constitute the revelation received by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from God. God inspired the Prophet with both the Quran and the Sunnah. Hence, all beliefs and practices are subservient to these foundations: if something is consistent with them, it may be accepted; if something contradicts them, it is unacceptable.

The Quran is very different from the Bible. The Quran does not consist of stories told by humans about different prophets, every so often actually quoting a prophet. The Quran is actually the word of God. It was revealed by God, via the angel Gabriel, directly to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The

¹ The statements and actions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are known as his *sunnah* and *hadith*. Upon reading further about Islam, one will come across these terms quite often. For the sake of familiarity, “example” and “statements” of the Prophet will be most often used throughout this work.

Prophet received the exact wording and passed it on to his followers. This revelation, with its exact wording, was memorized, recorded and passed on as is. Hence, again, it is God and only God speaking in the Quran. There are no comments, passages or quotes from humans whatsoever in the Quran.

The style of the Quran is therefore unique. It is Allah's words to the heart, mind and soul of humans. In its original language of Arabic, it is extremely moving and beautiful. (Today, the "meaning" of the Quran has been translated into numerous languages. However, none of these translations is ever considered the Quran. The Quran is only the Arabic original. Hence, in the prayers and rituals, only the true, original Arabic Quran is used.)

In addition to the Quran, there are the sayings and example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The authority of the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah is not because he is some kind of demigod. He was a human being, just like all of the other prophets. The prophet's authority is related to the issue of submission to Allah: It is Allah in the Quran who establishes the authority of the Prophet. Hence, following the way of the Prophet is nothing but acting in obedience and submission to Allah. Allah has virtually said such when He said, "He who obeys the Messenger has indeed obeyed Allah, but he who turns away, then we have not sent you (O Muhammad) as a watcher over them" (4:80).

There is a very important relationship between the Quran and the Sunnah. The Sunnah demonstrates how the Quran is to be implemented. It is a practical explanation of what the Quran is teaching. This complete, human embodiment of the teachings of the Quran is a great blessing and mercy for Muslims. It makes the guidance from God more complete and accessible to all.

Thus, the Quran and the Sunnah form one united unit that offer all the principles of guidance that humankind will need until the Day of Judgment.

Therefore, any reliable book on Islam must be based on the Quran¹ and the statements and guidance of the Prophet Muhammad

¹ The reader should note how the verses of the Quran are referred to: *soorah* or "chapter" number followed by verse number, e.g., 2:16 would mean the sixteenth verse of the second chapter.

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Although the original Arabic texts of both the Quran and the Prophet's sayings are available, one has to resort to modest translations to convey their meanings to non-Arabic speakers. With respect to the Quran, two translations into English can be recommended and will be used throughout this work. They are *The Noble Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, translated by Muhammad al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, and *The Quran: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meaning*, translated by "Saheeh International."

As for collections of the statements and actions of the Prophet, two important collections are available in complete form in English. They are known as *Sahih al-Bukhari* (translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan) and *Sahih Muslim* (translated by Abdul Hamid Siddiqi).

The Intended Audience for This Work

The work is addressed to anyone who is interested in a basic introduction to the fundamental beliefs and practices of Islam. Everything has been kept basic, but with the hope that the reader will be encouraged to study Islam in more depth. For the purpose of more in-depth study, many other important books will be recommended at the end of this book.

Before proceeding, one should also note the usage of the words Allah and God. Allah is the "personal name" of God, much like Yahweh (later interpreted as Jehovah). Thus, Allah and God will be used interchangeably.

The Belief in God (Allah)

In reality, belief in Allah is the cornerstone of the entire faith of Islam. All of the other Islamic beliefs and all Islamic practices revolve around the proper belief in God. For this reason, perhaps more than any other religious community in the world, the belief about God in Islam has been explained in great detail.

How Can One Know About God?

The Islamic religion does not deny that humans have been given by God great reasoning power and natural instincts. Furthermore, Islam recognizes that God has created humans with an innate ability to recognize and understand the truth that there is a Creator and a God. Most people, including the greatest thinkers, would never deny the various signs that point to the existence of the Creator. Hence, they wholeheartedly accept the notion of the existence of God. What has led some people astray and has confused them is that they do not know about God properly and they do not have access to a true and preserved revelation from God. These sources of error show that beyond believing in God, a person also has to have the right information to know the truth about God.

However, God, the Creator, obviously, is a distinct and separate being from His creation. Hence, God is not something within the realm of human experience, human thought or human testing. Therefore, to know the details about God and, in particular, to know what one's relationship with God should be, one can only turn to God Himself and to His revelation. There is no other possible way. No one except God has that knowledge.

The revelation from God as embodied in the Quran and the inspired words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) have thus provided a clear presentation concerning God. It removes all doubts about His existence, His power and His knowledge. It also answers all the questions surrounding how one should behave toward the Almighty. In addition to that, by God's mercy, God has provided extensive information about Himself, through His names and attributes, such that He does truly become the beloved, the sole object of worship and the main inspiration for one's life.

The Belief that God is the Sole Creator and Sustainer of all Creation

There is one thing that definitively stands out when one reads the Quran: Allah instructs humankind to ponder over the creation with all its magnificence. At no time do the teachings of the Quran shy away from reflection and rational thought. Indeed, these foundations of knowledge have been invoked over and over in the Quran as a path that will lead to only one conclusion: There is no way that this creation as one can witness and appreciate it today could have possibly come into being except through the intent and creation of a great, divine and masterful creator.¹

In fact, in one verse, Allah has given a powerful argument that was convincing to humankind for hundreds of years: “Were they [that is, humans] created by nothing, or were they themselves the creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth?” (52:35-36). The point of these verses has been clear to many, many people: Humans obviously did not come here by means of nothing nor did they create themselves. Hence, they are the result of the act of a Creator.

In addition to the realization that this existence must have had a creator, one can also notice the beauty and balance that exists throughout the universe. The order is so precise that it is sometimes referred to as “the delicate balance of nature.” It is truly amazing how everything works together—even within one’s own body. Without such cooperation between the different organs of the body, for example, there would be no possibility of sustaining life. This observed phenomenon leads to a number of other important conclusions.

First, the order and cooperation between the various inanimate elements of the universe—which have not been trained or taught—is a sign that they are still under the control and guidance of the creator. Their level of inter-working and cooperation is such that it

¹ Umar al-Ashqar provides another example: After finding the remnants of a city under desert sand, “Nobody among the archaeologists or others even suggested that this city could have appeared as a result of the natural actions of the wind, rain, heat and cold, and not by the actions of man. If anyone had suggested such a thing, people would have regarded him as crazy.” Umar al-Ashqar, *Belief in Allah in the Light of the Quran and Sunnah* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2000), p. 125.

points to their being all under the authority of one Being, who must have both full knowledge and complete power to sustain and guide them. If this were not the case, only chaos could be rationally expected, especially given the large number of atoms and other particles that make up everything that is in the universe.

Second, this is a clear sign that the Creator and Master of the Universe is one and only one—there cannot possibly be more than one Creator of this balanced and unified universe. This follows from the previous point. If there were more than one creator, each having a will and power, then it would not be expected that the creation would have the unity, balance and equilibrium that it currently exhibits.

Thus, the starting point that there is only one Creator, Sustainer and Ultimate Power over this universe is something that is both natural in humans and concluded easily and logically.

Once that it is concluded that Allah is the only Creator and Sustainer of the universe, other important issues come up. In particular, perhaps the most important question a person can ask himself is: What should be my relationship with that one creator? This leads directly into the next topic of Allah being the only one worthy and deserving of worship.

The Belief that Allah Must Be the Only Object of Worship

It is of extreme importance to realize that believing in the existence of only one Creator and Sustainer is not all there is when it comes to the Islamic concept of “belief in God.” Actually, recognizing that fact is something that should be beyond question and clear to all as, again, it is something natural in human souls. The far more important and subtler issue is what one then does concerning one’s belief in only one Creator and Sustainer.

Perhaps a couple of examples will make this point clearer. First, Allah’s creation points to His greatness as well as His great knowledge. In general, a person’s attitude toward that which they find to be perfect, great and marvelous is usually one of awe, respect and honor. Furthermore, the greatness of the Creator cannot be compared to the inability of one who cannot create. On this point, God says, “Do they attribute as partners to Allah those who created nothing but they themselves are created?” (7:191). God also says, “Can the One who creates and the one who cannot create be equal? Don’t you learn the lesson?” (16:17).

In addition, though, Allah is the source of all of one's bounties and blessings. Indeed, He is the source of one's life and everything that has been prepared in this creation for him. Thus, Allah says in the Quran, "If you count the Blessings of Allah, never will you be able to count them" (14:34). Can humans actually bring about these bounties for themselves without the aid and help of Allah? Allah gives another example when He says, "Say (to the disbelievers), 'Tell me, if Allah took away your hearing and your sight, and sealed up your hearts, who is there—a god other than Allah—who could restore them to you?' See how variously We explain the lessons, yet they turn aside" (6:46).

Is it logical for one then to be disrespectful, neglectful and arrogant towards the One and Only God? Indeed, can the attitude toward that One great and marvelous being who bestowed such bounties be anything but humility, humbleness, gratefulness, love and devotion?

These two examples, of Allah's creative power and knowledge and of Allah's solitarily bestowing of bounties, should be sufficient to demonstrate the point that Allah alone has the right to be loved, honored and worshipped. This is a point that Allah makes numerous times in the Quran in various ways while speaking to those who recognize that there could be only one creator and yet at the same time they ignore Him and worship false gods and false objects of worship. Thus, for example, Allah says, "Say [to the polytheists], 'Whose is the earth and whosoever is therein? If you know!' They will say, 'It is Allah's!' Say [then to them], 'Will you not then receive admonition?'" (23:84-85).

Just as important, it is Allah alone who has the knowledge needed to provide guidance. The false objects of worship cannot do this in the least. Thus, Allah says, "Say: 'Is there of your (so-called) partners one that guides to the truth?' Say: 'It is Allah Who guides to the truth. Is then He, Who gives guidance to the truth, more worthy to be followed, or he who finds not guidance (himself) unless he is guided? Then, what is the matter with you? How judge you?' And most of them follow nothing but conjecture. Certainly, conjecture can be of no avail against the truth. Surely, Allah is All-Aware of what they do" (10:35-36).

From the above—and from numerous other arguments and proofs scattered throughout the Quran—one should conclude that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah. Consequently, if there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah, it is rational for the individual to insist that he worships no one other than Allah. This is actually the key message of all of Islam and the message that all of the prophets preached.

At this point, though, it is important to clarify the meaning of this term “worship” from an Islamic perspective. The word translated as “worship” here is the Quranic and Arabic term *ibaadah*. This term has very different connotations from the English word “worship.”

The root of the word “worship” in English means “to honor” and, thus, it can be further defined in English as, “the performance of devotional acts in honor of a deity.”¹ But, as Bilal Philips notes,

However, in the language of the final revelation, Arabic, worship is called *'ibaadah* which is derived from the noun *'abd* meaning “a slave.” A slave is one who is expected to do whatever his master wills. Consequently, worship according to the final revelation means “obedient submission to the will of God.” This was the essence of the message of all the prophets sent by God to humankind. For example, this understanding of worship was emphatically expressed by Prophet Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew, 7:21, “None of those who call me 'Lord' will enter the kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”²

Thus, this aspect of monotheism—the belief in Allah as the only object of worship—goes well beyond the concept of worship as understood by many in the West, in particular.

This aspect of Islamic monotheism comprises ritual acts of devotion as well as the feelings in the heart and the deeds of the physical body. The feelings in the heart include putting all of one’s trust and reliance in Him alone, having utmost fear of Him alone, having utmost hope in Him alone, having contentment with Him as God and Creator and so forth.

¹ Bilal Philips, *The Purpose of Creation* (Sharjah, UAE: Dar al Fatah, 1995), p. 40.

² Bilal Philips, *The Purpose*, pp. 41-42.

In fact, there are two aspects in particular that must be combined in the worship of Allah. Al-Saadi stated,

The spirit and actuality of worship is by the realization of love and submission to Allah. Complete love and full submission to Allah is the reality of worship. If the act of worship is missing both or one of those components, it is not truly an act of worship, for the reality of worship is found in submission and yielding to Allah. And that will only occur if there is complete and full love [for Allah] which dominates all other expressions of love.¹

From the above, it is clear that the belief in Allah as the only object of worship has many meanings to it. In particular, there are a number of aspects of life that must be solely “dedicated to” Allah. Without an understanding of this fact, one has failed to grasp the reality of the statement, “There is none worthy of worship except Allah.” A brief explanation of these aspects should make this concept clearer.

First, all ritual acts of worship must be directed solely to Allah alone. Prayers, fasting, pilgrimage, alms and so forth must be done solely with the intent of pleasing Allah and as acts of worship towards Him alone. Thus, for example, if anyone prays to anyone other than Allah, he is actually violating the principles of worshipping no one other than Allah.

Second, ultimate authority in life rests with Allah. In other words, one must submit oneself only to the commands and revelation coming from Allah. He is the Creator and He has the right to lay down legislation and laws for the guidance of humankind. Intentionally ignoring or arrogantly superseding the laws from God means that one is not truly submitting to God and, thus, one is not taking Him as the only object of worship and submission.

Third, one’s loves, loyalties, likes and dislikes must be in accord with what Allah has revealed. This aspect flows from the heart when it is truly filled with the belief in, love of and adoration for Allah alone. This is a simple concept but it has far-reaching implications. The completeness of faith requires that Allah is the most

¹ Quoted in Muhammad al-Hammad, *Tauheed al-Uloohiyah* (Dar ibn Khuzaima, 1414 A.H.), p. 26.

beloved thing in one's heart—He is *the* beloved of soul. When this fact permeates the human, he begins to love what his beloved loves and dislike what his beloved dislikes. Thus, if Allah is found to love something, the devoted worshipper and servant also loves that thing. Conversely, if Allah is found to detest something—although He has created it and put it in this world as a test for humans and made it available to them—the devoted worshipper and servant will also detest that thing.

Although accepting Allah as the only object of worship is the essential aspect of true monotheism, it is a concept that is not always understood or practiced properly. This is a real loss for humans because it is this aspect of monotheism that is *the key* to a “real life”, a life that is sound and proper. Ibn Taimiya wrote,

You must know that a human's need for Allah— that he worship Him and not associate any partner with Him—is an incomparable need unlike any other. In some ways, it resembles the need of the body for food and drink. However, there are many differences between the two. The reality of a human being is in his heart and soul. These cannot be prosperous except through [their relation] with Allah, concerning whom there is no other god... If someone worships anything other than Allah—even if he loves it and attains some love in this world and some form of pleasure from that—[that false worship] will destroy the person in a way greater than the harmful displeasure that comes to a person who took poison...¹

Again, it cannot be emphasized enough that the belief in only one Creator and Sustainer of the universe is not all there is to a proper belief in God. Throughout history, it has been the case that some people stopped at this clear premise and thought that such was all there was to the belief in God. Nothing could be further from the truth. That belief is definitely necessary but it is not sufficient. That belief must be followed up with the proper relations, emotions of the

¹ Ahmad Ibn Taimiya, *Majmoo Fatawaa Shaikh al-Islam ibn Taimiya* (Collected by Abdul Rahmaan Qasim and his son Muhammad. No publication information given), vol. 1, pp. 24-29.

heart and acts with respect to Allah. It is by these acts that one truly takes the Creator as his only "God," meaning his only object of extreme love, adoration and submission. In so doing, he denies that anyone other than Allah deserves to be worshipped in any way. Then, and only then, he will be fulfilling what it truly means to believe in God.

In sum, based on the preceding: (1) the human should desire to worship Allah due to His greatness and perfection and the fact that He is the only Creator, Bestower and Sustainer; (2) Allah alone has these attributes just described and hence He alone deserves to be worshipped; and (3) the human should refrain from worshipping anything other than Allah in any shape or form.

There is one final but important point that needs to be added at the end of these two sections: Since the signs for the true belief in God are so strong (in human nature, in the physical surroundings, in the messages taught by the prophets throughout the ages) it is completely unacceptable rationally and religiously to worship anyone other than God. Therefore, associating partners with God¹ or refusing to worship God is a sin whose enormity and arrogance is so great that if one dies in such a state, Allah will not forgive that sin. Allah has clearly stated, "Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with him in worship, but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He pleases, and whoever sets up partners with Allah in worship, he has indeed invented a tremendous sin" (4:48).

Belief in Allah's Names and Attributes

To truly be devoted to Allah and to love Allah above all else imaginable one needs to have knowledge about Allah that goes beyond the basic aspects of Him being the sole Creator and Sustainer. Through His revelation and by His grace and mercy, Allah has revealed a great deal of information about Himself, such that any truth seeker can know and worship his Lord based on accurate knowledge.

Muslims are blessed to find Allah's names and attributes mentioned throughout the Quran. For example, Allah says, "He is

¹ Associating partners with Allah means coupling the worship of God with the worship of idols, trees, animals, graves, heavenly bodies, natural powers, and so on. It also means the acceptance of individuals or prophets as gods, or the pretence that Almighty God has sons and daughters. See Tabbarah, p. 47.

Allah other than Whom there is none who has the right to be worshipped, the King, the Holy, the One Free from all defects, the Giver of security, the Watcher over His creatures, the All-Mighty, the Compeller, the Supreme. Glory be to Allah! (High is He) above all that they associate as partners with Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor of all things, the Bestower of forms. To Him belong the Best Names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorify Him. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise” (59:23-24).

From the Quran and statements of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) one can learn the following about Allah: Allah is the Most Compassionate, Ever Merciful¹, Ever Forgiving, Ever accepting of repentance, Ever Patient, Pardoning and Loving. He is the Generous, the Magnanimous, the Bestower and the Clement. He responds to those who call upon Him and He is the Rescuer. He is the Glorious, the Great, the deserver of all Praise, Lord of all creation, Master of the Day of Judgment and the Judge of the Final reckoning. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, the All-Knowing and the All-Wise. He is the Ever Strong, Ever Capable, Almighty. He is the Self-Sufficient, free of any need and provider of all sustenance. He is the Exalted and the Most High. He is the Watcher over all affairs and the Protector. He is administering the affairs of His creation, commanding, forbidding, being pleased, being angered, rewarding, punishing, giving, withholding, honoring, debasing. He does whatever He wills. He is attributed with every attribute of perfection and free of even the tiniest amount of imperfection or shortcoming. Greatly exalted and perfect is He above all that they associate with Him. Not even an atom moves save by His will and permission.

This wonderful information about Allah Himself is a great blessing for humankind. God Himself has revealed sufficient information about Himself that humankind need not stray or be confused.

On this point, though, there is something very clear in the Quran: There is absolutely no hint of any trace of anthropomorphism

¹ Muslims remain constantly aware of Allah and of these two of His names in particular. Before beginning virtually any act, a Muslim states, “In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Ever Merciful.”

in the Islamic beliefs about God. This is a point concerning which many earlier peoples have strayed. The Creator and the created are separate and distinct. The attributes of Allah are perfect attributes that are becoming of His holiness and greatness. Even when there is some “common concept” between an attribute of Allah and an attribute of humans, there is actually no similarity in the quality of the two. Thus, Allah Himself says in the Quran, “There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seeing” (42:11). Here, there is a complete denial of anthropomorphism while at the same time affirming that Allah hears and sees. Muslims always realize Allah’s perfection while never belittling Him by describing Him in unbecoming manners. God does not have human-like attributes nor do humans have Divine attributes. Any violation of this latter principle is clear disbelief and associating of partners with Allah.

From the history of humankind, it can be argued that it is natural for humans to worship. They want to have a god that they can worship and adore. They know that there must be something special and great about that thing which they humble themselves to. However, so many of them put their hopes, trust, dreams and aspirations in things that are simply not deserving of such respect or worship—whether it be forces of nature, inanimate objects, other humans, materialism, nations, race, whatever. They force themselves to believe that these false objects of worship can bring about what they hope for and what they are dreaming of. In other words, they begin to give their false objects of worship the attributes of God. Instead of turning to God and knowing God by His attributes—and then realizing that He is the One they are truly looking for—they turn to other objects of worship, love and adoration. Due to this, they stray very far from the straight path and from their true God.

In numerous places, Allah speaks about such gross errors. The source of these errors is an incorrect belief about the attributes of those that they turn to while ignoring the attributes that reside with Allah. For example, Allah says, “Say [O Muhammad to mankind], ‘How do you worship besides Allah something which has no power either to harm or to benefit you? But it is Allah Who is the All-Hearer, All-Knower’” (5:76). Allah also says, “And who is more astray than one who calls (invokes) besides Allah, such as will not answer him till the Day of Resurrection, and who are (even) unaware

of their calls (invocations) to them? And when mankind are gathered (on the Day of Resurrection), they (false deities) will become enemies for them and will deny their worshipping” (46:5-6).

In sum, if one truly knows the names and attributes of Allah, one would never turn to worship anyone or anything but Him. None of those false objects of worship are deserving of worship. By worshipping them and seeking them, humans are doing nothing but debasing themselves. Worse of all, they are ignoring Allah, equating partners with Him, earning His wrath and preparing for themselves an evil end.

Summary

The proper belief in Allah is the essence and cornerstone of the Islamic faith. It is the key—the key to blessed life, the key to proper living, the key to understanding reality, the key to happiness and peace. When the person truly knows Allah, he will recognize that it does not make any sense to worship anything other than Him. He will realize that this is what his soul has been created for and this is what it has been seeking. Once he realizes the beauty of worshipping Allah alone, he will never desire or wish to worship anyone other than Him. His soul will be at rest and his heart will be tranquil.

The Universe and Humans

The Creation of the Universe and How it Points to Allah's Existence

The universe is made up of various parts. There are the galaxies and solar systems that are above earth. On earth, there are inanimate objects, such as the mountains, oceans and land. There is also the animal kingdom with all its great varieties. There are aspects of creation that humans are still discovering and coming across today. All of these are actually part of the creative work of God. In the Quran, it is clear that it was Allah Who created the heavens and the earth.

In numerous verses of the Quran, Allah points to different aspects of the creation and describes them as signs for those people who reflect. For example, Allah says, “Verily! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, and the ships which sail through the sea with that which is of use to mankind, and the water (rain) which Allah sends down from the sky and makes the earth alive therewith after its death, and the moving (living) creatures of all kinds that He has scattered therein, and in the veering of winds and clouds which are held between the sky and the earth, are indeed signs for people of understanding” (2:164).

In the hustle and bustle of today's world, many find little time to reflect upon this creation, their presence in this creation and any purpose behind it all. However, it is important that people take the time to reflect and think. When they do so, they will find signs and lessons that will bring them straight back to God—a most important step in their lives. The signs are actually all around them, if they would only reflect upon them. Thus, God says, “We will show them Our Signs in the universe, and in their own selves, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth” (41:53).

Reflecting upon the intricacy and order of this creation makes one realize that not only must there be a wise Creator but also that there must be some purpose behind this creation. It is unimaginable that any being would make something with such precision and perfection and yet there would be no rhyme or reason to the whole creation. This is a point that Allah makes in numerous places in the Quran. For example, Allah says, “We created not the

heavens and the earth and all that is between them for a (mere) play” (21:16).

The Quranic argument is that it is not logically possible to come to any other conclusion. Indeed, if a person believes in God as the Creator, by definition it is unbecoming of such a noble and great Being to create all of this order and beauty and yet have no purpose behind that creation. A person who believes in a creator yet believes that this creator had no purpose or thought behind his creation is describing a creator that is childlike and unintelligent. It is hard to believe that a creator like that could possibly come up with a creation like the one that everyone witnesses today. No, indeed, the creation points to certain attributes of the Creator and it points to there being an important and great purpose behind this entire creation. The whole nature of the existence points to the Creator being one of very special character who would not create anything of this nature for fun or without reason.

A second very important conclusion that one can derive by simply pondering over this creation is that the one who created this from nothing can easily recreate it. If He has the ability to re-create things even after their demise, this also means that He has the ability to resurrect them and bring them all in front of Him. This thought, obviously, has very ominous repercussions for humans and their behavior in this world. Thus, Allah points out this fact and reminds humans of its meaning throughout the Quran. For example, Allah says, “And he [the human] puts forth for Us a parable, and forgets his own creation. He says, ‘Who will give life to these bones when they have rotted away and became dust?’ Say (to them O Muhammad), ‘He will give life to them Who created them for the first time! And He is the All-Knower of every creation! He, Who produces for you fire out of the green tree, when behold, You kindle therewith. Is not He, Who created the heavens and the earth Able to create the like of them? Yes, indeed! He is the All-Knowing Supreme Creator.” (36:78-83).

Thus, this creation is a clear sign—when added to the fact that there must be a purpose behind this creation—of the Resurrection. The concept of the Resurrection is not something that violates nature but it is completely consistent with nature.

In reality, the one who negates the resurrection is expecting that Allah will treat the wrongdoers like the pious people. This is an unbecoming expectation of Allah. Allah makes it clear that such will never be the case, highlighting that such thoughts can only come from those who disbelieve in God. Allah says, "And We created not the heaven and the earth and all that is between them without purpose! That is the consideration of those who disbelieve! Then woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire! Shall We treat those who believe and do righteous good deeds like the evildoers on earth? Or shall We treat the pious like the wicked?" (38:27-28).

After so many signs in the creation and so many reminders and lessons in the revelation one must ask: What will be the human's excuse if he does not respond in the proper manner to the evidence all around him?

Humans and the Creation

There is something distinct and special about this creation known as humans. However, the original, physical creation of the first human was not greatly different from the creation of the other creatures of this world. According to the Quran, the physical make-up of the first human, Adam, was from clay and water, two of the already created substances of this cosmos. It is in the next stage of the creation of the first human, Adam, in which the real distinction occurred. At this point, humans are made a very separate and unique creature, combining a physical aspect and a special spiritual aspect that God bestowed on them. In fact, this is what makes them very different from the other living creatures on this same planet.

Among the most prominent distinguishing features of human beings are the following:

(1) A sound, natural disposition that is ready and capable to be directed to the belief in Allah alone as the object of worship;

(2) An ability to comprehend and understand matters via the intelligence and mind that Allah has bestowed on humans;

(3) A free will to decide between the path of goodness or the path of evil, as well as a limited free will to enact that choice that he has made;

(4) A responsibility for the choices he has made, which is a necessary result of being given free will and ability;

(5) These are all in addition to the fact mentioned in the Quran that all of the resources of the creation have been subjugated to his use.

Given all of these special characteristics, the human should realize that he has a special and noble purpose and goal in this life. The creation of humans and the special characteristics that humans possess should make each human realize that the Creator is too wise and lofty to create him simply for sport. “Did you think that We had created you in play (without any purpose), and that you would not be brought back to Us?” (23:115).

Indeed, even more than that, the great Creator who created all the creatures and the humans would not leave humans without guidance and without showing them what to do and what not to do— He has even guided animals to the means of their survival. Thus, rhetorically, Allah says, “Does man think that he will be left neglected [without being commanded and also punished or rewarded for the obligatory duties enjoined by his Lord (Allah) on him]?” (75:36).

Hence, the human should realize that his actions in this life have a real ramification to them. In this sense, *nothing* that he does is meaningless or without consequences. His life has purpose here and the Creator is ever aware of every action, thought, intention and movement that he makes.

It is extremely important for the human to realize this point, that he has a purpose in this life. Indeed, this realization may be the first step along a change of life in which one turns to his Great and Wonderful Creator, to submit to Him willfully. Without realizing this fact, there may be no need, meaning or purpose to behaving in a specific manner. If nothing truly matters and if nothing is morally wrong or right, since there is no God or real purpose to existence, it is expected that people will behave in any fashion they wish. There should be a great and profound effect when a person’s eyes are open to the reality of this creation, his purpose and role in it.

This author has had personal experience working in prisons in the United States. Upon asking numerous inmates why they committed their crimes, the response was invariably, “Why not?” The only question to them was whether they could get away with an act and not get caught. There was no question of any responsibility towards a Creator or any sense of purpose in this life. Indeed, one

cannot argue much against their way of thinking if one is foolish enough to believe that this existence is purposeless and by mere chance.

As opposed to the Islamic beliefs, some people today believe that humans are simply descended from animals in some evolutionary sense. In this way of thinking, humans are doubly a process of mere materialist elements as well as being directly descended from animals, apes being the closest relative. Ignoring the fact that there are many “missing links” and scientific doubts raised against the theory of evolution, could this possibly be what this great and grandeur cosmos is all about? Could humans, who have been given so many capabilities above and beyond the animals, be nothing more than animals without any noble purpose or Creator to answer to? In reality, it can be concluded that this view seems to be completely illogical and potentially very harmful.

Some people also believe that the human soul is inherently evil. On the contrary, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself said, “Every child is born on the *fitrah* (the natural way, the religion of Islam). It is his parents who then make him into a Jew, Christian or Magian.”¹ That is, far from the child being born inherently evil, every child is born upon the true religion. It is only afterwards, via the influence of family, society and environment, that an individual becomes influenced to follow paths that are not pure.

Many Christians believe in the concept of the “original sin.” This is the belief that the sin that Adam, the first man, committed is passed on through all of his progeny. Hence, it is on the neck of every individual, even the newborn baby. The only way it could be removed—they claim—is by God sending His son as a sacrifice to remove this sin. This belief, especially the last part of it, is obviously completely inconsistent with Islamic monotheism. God does not have a son. He has no equals or anyone who is in any fashion similar to or “related” to Him.

The Islamic belief is that Adam and Eve together did commit a sin, by allowing themselves to be deceived by Satan. However, they both repented to God and God accepted their repentance. That was the

¹ Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

end of their sin. There was no means for that sin to be passed on to others. Furthermore, it would be the height of injustice on the part of Allah to hold innocent individuals responsible for the sins of others. Thus, Allah says, “No person earns any (sin) except against himself (only), and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another” (6:164).

Therefore, from an Islamic perspective, the concept of the original sin seems clearly false and is also potentially harmful. It gives a very wrong impression about God and His justice. It also taints the human with the belief that his soul is inherently evil.

The Islamic concept of the soul is free from the errors of previous thinkers and incorrect religious beliefs. It places the human in its proper role and is completely consistent with one’s nature, logic and remainder of creation.

The Nobility of Humans

Humans are a creation of God. Humans are not divine in any way whatsoever. They do not share any divine qualities with God. This is true for humankind as a whole as well as for each individual human. No human is a literal son or daughter of God. In fact, humans should realize that they are not the greatest or most magnificent of what Allah has created. Allah says, “The creation of the heavens and the earth is indeed greater than the creation of mankind, yet most of mankind know not” (40:57). It should be humbling for a human to reflect upon what a small speck in the mass of God’s creation he truly is. At the same time, though, as previously mentioned, Allah has blessed mankind in many ways and given them virtues above and beyond much of Allah’s creation.

In reality, every human has two very different possible potentials awaiting him. This has been the case since the creation of the first human. When Adam was created, the angels were ordered to bow down to him. These angels are spiritual forces that are always ready to be at the side of humans when they wish to do good deeds. At the same time, there was Satan¹ who vowed to be humankind’s enemy and to mislead as many humans as possible. Thus, the two

¹ Satan, according to Islamic beliefs, was not a “fallen angel.” Angels would never “fall” or become anything like Satan. Such goes against the very nature of the angels. Satan is from another class of creatures known as the Jinn.

potentials were established. Humans are free to ascend to the highest of heights or to descent to the lowest of lows.

Indeed, the goal of life is to worship and please Allah—thus, to receive His pleasure in return. To be a true servant of God is the ultimate goal for humankind. There can be no greater goal. In fact, this is the only goal that can bring true solace to the soul of humans because this is the goal that is recognized deep within the person's soul.

Furthermore, the most exalted, noble, and honored human can be is by worshipping Allah. There is nothing greater or nobler than that. That is the maximum potential. This is something that should be clear to every human. The more he moves to that goal, the happier he should become and the more honor he should feel by submitting himself to the only true God and Lord. When he realizes this fact, his efforts should be exerted to maximize this potential.

Actually, when a person realizes that he has only one, clear goal, the effects upon his soul are profound. He need not chase after an endless array of goals, never being able to satisfy or achieve any of them completely. (Indeed, many times people's goals are contradictory and they can never achieve all of them.)

Note that although this is the ultimate purpose for humankind, Allah is actually not in need of human worship. If so, who then actually benefits from the worship of Allah? It is actually the human who chooses to worship who benefits from the act of worship. He has benefited by purifying his soul, bringing tranquility to his heart and, most importantly, by having the correct relationship with God. Allah reminds humankind of this point in numerous places in the Quran. For example, Allah says, "Who receives guidance, receives it for his own benefit: who goes astray does so to his own loss" (17:15).

The Essential Equality of All Humans in Islam

The teachings of Islam are emphatic on a point that modern societies are still trying to grapple with. This is the essential equality of all humans. All humans are creatures of Allah and each and everyone of them has the ability to soar to the greatest heights of being a human by worshipping and submitting to Allah. As such, there is no distinction between any of them as humans—it is only the choices that humans make that will distinguish them in the sight of

Allah, the Law and other members of the community. However, race, color or nationality have no role to play in this whatsoever.

Allah says, "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has piety. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware" (49:13). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) made that Quranic teaching most explicit when he stated in front of one of the largest gatherings he had ever assembled, "O people, verily your Lord is One and your [original] father is one. Certainly, there is no virtue in an Arab over a non-Arab or a non-Arab over an Arab. Similarly, there is no virtue in a light-skinned person over a dark-skinned person or a dark-skinned person over a light-skinned person. Only by piety [does one become more virtuous over another]. Have I indeed conveyed to you the message?"¹

Instead of being causes of division among humankind, the variations in people are meant to be signs of the greatness of the Creator. Allah says, "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Verily, in that are indeed signs for men of sound knowledge" (30:22).

Thus, the door to be a true worshipper of Allah is open to everyone, regardless of race, nationality and so forth. In fact, it is only via such worship of Allah that one becomes deserving of honor and dignity and one becomes full of virtues. This is a tenet of Islam that has been practiced throughout its history.

This essential equality of humans covers both males and females—regardless of what propaganda one may hear about Islam. As a spiritual being and one worthy of worshipping Allah, there is no difference between a man and a woman.² Both of them are equal before God.

Allah says, for example, "Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he (or she) is a true believer verily, to him (or her) We will give a good life, and We shall pay them certainly

¹ Recorded by Ahmad.

² In fact, in Islamic belief, it was both Adam and Eve who committed the original sin together, both repented to Allah and both were forgiven by Allah.

a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do [i.e., Paradise in the Hereafter]” (16:97). The meaning found in this verse is repeated in other places in the Quran.

It is well-known that Islam gave women many rights that women did not achieve in the West until recently, such as the right to own property and handle their own business affairs. However, there are actually much more important issues. Every ideology, religion or culture values some matters above and beyond others. The most important quality in Islam is piety and dutifulness to Allah. Perhaps the second most valued quality in Islam is knowledge of the religion. On both of these issues, women are completely equal to men. Throughout the history of Islam, women have been known and respected for their piety and their knowledge. On the other hand, Islam does not say that a person’s value is measured by how beautiful one’s face is, how sexy one’s body can be, how fast one can run in sports, how well one can sing, dance or act. These are ludicrous criteria of a person’s worth from the Islamic perspective—although it seems to be much of what “modern civilization” cares about. In sum, according to the things that have the greatest value in this life—piety and religious knowledge—women are exactly equal to men and this is the most important statement of equality given the Islamic criteria.

Religion

Now that the creation and humans have been discussed in detail, it is time to discuss the need for religion itself. In addition, the basis on which a religion is to be accepted will also be discussed.

Human's Need for Religion

The world has entered into a very materialistic stage. It seemed that science had conquered nature and there was no need for religion, myths and superstitions of earlier times. However, religion has not gone away. Not only has religion not gone away but in recent times there has been a resurgence in religion throughout the world.

From the texts of the Quran and Sunnah, it is clear that "religion" is something natural in humans. Allah created humans with a natural disposition that longs to know God and worship Him.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, "Behold, my Lord commanded me that I should teach you that which you do not know and which He has taught me today... [God has stated] 'I have created My servants all having a natural inclination to the worship of Allah. But the devils come to them and turn them away from their [true] religion. And he makes unlawful what I declared lawful for them and he commands them to ascribe partners with Me for which no authority has been sent down.'"¹

This quote clarifies that there are evil forces that may try to hide, conceal or distort this natural inclination in humans but they can never truly kill what is so deeply rooted in a person's soul. Furthermore, if they can kill this natural tendency in some humans, they will not be able to kill it in all humans. Hence, at least some humans, if not the majority, will always recognize God and that with God comes a religion—a set of beliefs and practices related to God. Thus, it is not by coincidence that virtually every people have had some form of religion and some concrete belief in the Ultimate Being or God.

What the materialists of this world will never be able to deny is that humans are made up of a physical component as well as a non-physical component, called the soul or spiritual side of humans. Materialists—and material comforts—can only touch upon the physical side of a human. They can do nothing to assist the vast

¹ Recorded by Muslim.

spiritual side of humans, leaving a great void in the psyche of a human. When humans experience this vacuum, they realize that something is wrong. They seek something to fill this void. Although they may turn to more material things or different types of material things (alcoholism, drugs), such things will never truly fill that void in their lives.

If they can get above all of the materialistic propaganda around them today, they realize that it is God and religion that is missing from their lives and from their hearts.

The famed Islamic scholar Ibn Taimiyyah once wrote, The heart can only become sound, achieve success, take pleasure, be satisfied, experience enjoyment, become pleased, attain serenity and calmness through the *'ibaadah* [worship] of its Lord, having love of Him and turning to Him (in repentance). Even if it were to attain every type of pleasure from creation, it will not acquire serenity and tranquility. This is because the heart possesses an intrinsic need for its Lord, since He is its deity, love and pursuit and with Allah the heart achieves joy, pleasure, delight, amenity, serenity and tranquility.¹

Ibn Taimiyyah's statement is supported by verses of the Quran. For example, Allah says, "Those who believe, and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah, verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest" (13:28). Allah also says, "O you who believe! Answer Allah and (His) Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life" (8:24). It is the real life—the only life that is worthy of living—that Allah and His Messenger are calling each and every individual to. It is the real life and salvation for the heart as it frees it from being enslaved to desires, lusts, superstitions and myths. It is the real life for the mind and it rescues it from ignorance, doubt and confusion. It is the real life for the human himself as it frees him from servitude and slavery to other humans and ideologies. It frees him to worship and serve Allah alone, the ultimate goal that his own self recognizes and yearns for. This is the source of his honor and dignity, the purpose for which he has been created. In

¹ [Ahmad ibn Taimiyyah,] *Ibn Taymiyyah's Essay on Servitude* (Birmingham, United Kingdom: al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1999), p. 121.

the end, it is the real life of eternal bliss and happiness, in Paradise, being pleased with the Lord and the Lord being pleased with the servant.

The Tests of a True Religion

Mere reflection on the history of humans demonstrates that humans have a desire to have religion. Yet there are many religions and each is presenting itself as the “true religion” that will bring solace to the individual. Thus, in this section, the author would like to present what he feels are the four tests by which one may distinguish the true religion.

The first test is that the religion must have God as its original source. As stated earlier, no one can know the details about God except God. Most importantly, no one knows how He should be worshipped except Him. Although humans are able to come to many sound conclusions about God, no human could logically claim that he has somehow—*independent of revelation from God*—discovered the way in which God should be worshipped. Thus, if the ultimate goal in one’s heart is to truly please and worship God as He should be worshipped, then one has no alternative but to turn to Him for guidance and direction.

Thus, based on this first premise, any man-made religion is not a logical alternative. No matter how hard humans may try, they cannot authoritatively speak about how God is supposed to be worshipped.

This test does not mean that one time God played a role in the formation of the religion. No, this test means that the entire scope of the religious teachings come from God. There are some religions that may have originated from God but, afterwards, their adherents felt free to rely upon human reasoning to adjust, modify or alter the religion. In the process, they have actually created a new religion, different from that which God had revealed. This, once again, completely defeats the purpose. What God revealed does not need any improvement or changes from humankind. Any such change or alteration means a deviation away from what God revealed. Thus, any change or alteration will only take humankind away from the true and proper way of worshipping God.

Thus, the first test states that the religion originates with God. However, this is not sufficient. The second test is that the

teachings from God must be preserved in their original form. The logic behind this point should be obvious. If the original revelation came from God but was then later tampered and distorted by humans, one now has a mixture of God's religion and human interpolation. This is no longer God's pure religion. Although this may seem like an obvious premise, it is amazing to see many people who have not even considered this point blindly following scriptures or teachings that cannot be historically authenticated.

The third test is that the religion is not abrogated or superseded by a later form of the religion. In other words, God may reveal more than one revelation or send more than one prophet, with the latter repealing or superseding the earlier. Under such circumstances, if one is truly submitting to God, one does not have the right to choose to follow an abrogated teaching and neglect the teaching that God is now demanding to be followed. Again, this would violate the principle of submitting to God and would arrogate to the individual the right to choose what he willed to follow instead of what Allah has decreed.

The above three test are straightforward and obvious. In this author's opinion, though, there is also a fourth parameter. The fourth test is that the basic beliefs of the religion have to be something fathomable by humans and not repugnant to human nature. It is inconceivable that the same God who created such order and gave humans the ability to understand and derive lessons from what is around them would then ask them to believe in matters that are completely unfathomable to them and inconsistent with what the soul can accept as truth.

Islam in the Light of These Tests

Due to space limitations, it is not possible here to compare different religions and how they fare with respect to these tests.¹ Here, only Islam will be discussed.

The first test is that the religion must have its original source with God. Again, this means that the beliefs and teachings of the religion must originate with God, without any claim that humans have a right to change or alter them in any way. In Islam, as opposed to many other religions, there is no priesthood. Every scholar, no matter

¹ In the unabridged version, Islam is compared with Judaism and Christianity.

how great, is simply a human who is prone to error. Hence, any ruling made by anyone must be judged in the light of the revelation from God. The Quran and Sunnah have remained the ultimate authority, no one having the right to violate them. This is an agreed upon principle in Islam. The Muslim scholars understood that the religion is God's religion and it is the role of humans to convey faithfully and attempt to understand—but never to distort or alter.

The second test discussed earlier has to do with the historical preservation of the revelation from God. This is essential in order to verify that one is accepting the truth. The history of Islam presents a different scenario than that of Judaism and Christianity. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) lived just over 1400 years ago. He is definitely the most "historical" of the various prophets.

Both the Quran and the statements of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were preserved with meticulous care. The Quran, which is not a large book, was preserved in memory as well as written form from the time of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Many of the Companions of the Prophet had memorized the entire Quran and, fearing what had happened to earlier religious communities, they took the necessary steps to protect it from any form of adulteration. Soon after the death of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the Quran was all compiled together and shortly afterwards official copies were sent to the distant lands to ensure that the text was pure. To this day, one can travel to any part of the world and pick up a copy Quran and find that it is the same throughout the world.

Beyond the Quran, the statements of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were also preserved with great diligence. They were recorded, studied and passed on carefully from the earliest years of Islam. Even the language of the Quran and the language of the Prophet has been preserved. Such cannot be said for earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus, whose Hebrew and Aramaic no longer exist.

Thus, the revelation from God as received by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has been preserved in tact and is available to the truthseeker today.

The third test was related to the revelation not being superseded or abrogated. The point is that if it can be shown that God is now demanding that a new message is to be followed, then, if one is truthful to God, one has no choice but to follow the new message. This point will be discussed in more detail when discussing the concept of prophethood, as the Prophet Muhammad explicitly claimed to be the final prophet.

The last parameter offered by this author has to do with whether the belief can be fathomed. Earlier in this work, brief refutations were made for materialists and Darwinians. Their claims are simply untenable. Similarly, the Christian belief about the Trinity is something that they themselves fought over for years and had council after council to try to determine what it truly meant. Some have simply declared it a "mystery." Religion should not be simply "faith-based"—a leap of faith, as such. Actually, it should be first as well "knowledge-based," so that both the heart and the mind find solace in it and submit to it with a firm resolution. Such is the case with the Islamic beliefs, such as the beliefs about God, which are completely consistent with human nature, logic and reality.

Prophethood

Jews and Christians are familiar with the concept of prophethood. Indeed, the Muslim claim is that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the final in a long line of prophets that included, among others, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

The Reality of Prophethood

Messengers and prophets are specific individuals whom Allah has chosen to convey His message to humankind. He reveals to them and they in turn convey that message. The messenger must convey the message faithfully and has no right to change it or distort it any manner. At the same time, after conveying, they are to be obeyed by those whom they are sent to. Allah says, “We sent no Messenger, but to be obeyed by Allah's Leave” (4:64).

Allah chooses whom He wills to be a messenger. This choosing of messengers is certainly not a random choice. Instead, “Allah knows best with whom to place His Message” (6:124). Thus, Allah chose from among humankind men of specific character.

Allah also says, “And We sent not [as Our Messengers] before you [O Muhammad] any but men, whom We inspired. So ask of those who know the Scripture if you know not” (16:43). This verse and others makes it clear that the messengers were humans. They were not semi-divine in any way whatsoever.

Allah specifically chose humans to be His messengers. The purpose of the messengers is to spread the truth from God. They make this truth clear and leave humans no excuse for not following it. The goal of the messengers was to present the reality—the reality that is recognizable to the souls of mankind—in a clear and unquestionable fashion. In this way, those who are willing to accept the truth will accept it while those who do not wish to accept the truth will then reject it. This fulfills the purpose of distinguishing between those who are deserving of Allah’s love and mercy and those who are deserving of Allah’s wrath and punishment.

Thus, the messengers came with clear guidance, glad tidings and stern warning. If Allah had not sent such messengers conveying the truth, humankind would have cried and claimed that they would have followed the messenger had he come to them. Allah, who knows what happened, what will happen and what possibly could happen,

has said, "And if We had destroyed them with a torment before this [Messenger Muhammad], they would surely have said, 'Our Lord! If only You had sent us a Messenger, we should certainly have followed Your revelations, before we were humiliated and disgraced'" (20:134). Once the messengers are sent with the clear signs, there is no longer any excuse for humankind: "Messengers as bearers of good news as well as of warning in order that mankind should have no plea against Allah after the Messengers. And Allah is Ever All-Powerful, All-Wise" (4:165). To the astute, this verse is a grave warning indeed.¹

The Sign of Prophethood

From a study of the prophets of the past, one can deduce certain "indirect" signs of prophethood. First, the individual chosen by God must have been a person of good and respected character before Allah first revealed anything to him. It would be inconceivable, for example, that someone who never lied about the matters of this world would all of a sudden begin to propagate lies about God and claim to be receiving revelation. Second, there is excellence and virtue in what he is preaching. Similarly, the basic core of his message is consistent with earlier individuals recognized to be prophets. God's basic message concerning the reality of the universe and life is not going to change from one prophet to another. Additionally, the individual does not seek any personal benefit or payment for his conveying of the message. His goal is not a worldly one. He is conveying the message only to obey and please God. Finally, one finds that the prophet always enjoys a spiritual victory, even if he does not experience a political victory. That is, he is always content with his message, never abandons his purpose and demonstrates his resolve until his death. No one recognized as a true prophet of God has ever been known to abandon his message and beliefs.

In addition to all of that, Allah provides His messengers with special signs—something out of the ordinary to demonstrate that the

¹ Although the truth of monotheism is ingrained in human nature, by Allah's mercy though, He never punishes until after He sends a messenger and the message is made clear: "Whoever goes right, then he goes right only for the benefit of his ownself. And whoever goes astray, then he goes astray to his own loss. No one laden with burdens can bear another's burden. And We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (to give warning)" (17:15).

individual is truly being sent by the Lord. This is all due to Allah's complete justice, mercy and goodness. He chooses and sends messengers in such a way that only the obstinate will refuse to accept the truth of the message. Hence, not only is the content of the message completely in accord with human nature, the messengers who come with the message are sent in such a way that there is again no excuse for humans not to accept them as messengers of God. As Allah says, "Indeed We have sent Our Messengers with clear proofs" (57:25).

These special signs that God bestows on the messengers are referred to as "miracles." In this age of "science," people today tend to be skeptical about the recorded miracles in the past. However, there is nothing inherently illogical about such occurrences. Starting with the premise that God has created this universe, a very defensible premise (as discussed earlier), it can also be understood that God has complete control over the workings of this universe and may alter its workings at whatever time for whomever He wills. To this day one still repeatedly hears of medical miracles or miraculous recoveries from disease—things that simply cannot be "rationally explained". No one can deny these "inexplicable" events.

In the past, there were such things as the parting of the Red Sea for Moses and the healing of the sick and blind by Jesus. These were all signs that further supported the claims of those prophets that they were being supported and guided by God. All of those, though, were signs that only those present could completely and truly appreciate. Thus, over time, people either began to doubt those stories and claims or the affects of those miracles began to wear off. However, as long as there were yet other prophets to come to revive the message, this was not a major issue.

Thus, when Allah sent His last prophet for all of humankind until the Day of Judgment, He sent him with a very different kind of miracle—a miracle with everlasting appeal. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "There was no Prophet among the Prophets but was given miracles because of which people had had belief, but what I have been given is the Divine Revelation which Allah has revealed to me. So I hope that my followers will be more than those of any other Prophet on the Day of

Resurrection.”¹ In other words, the Prophet Muhammad’s great sign and miracle was the Quran.

Thus, the greatest sign that the Prophet Muhammad received is still being witnessed and experienced today.² The Quran has issued an eternal challenge for anyone to produce something similar to it. For example, Allah says, “And if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down [i.e., the Quran] to Our servant [Muhammad], then produce a chapter of the like thereof and call your supporters and helpers besides Allah, if you are truthful” (2:23).

The Quran is miraculous in many ways. For example, the Arabs at the time of the Prophet excelled in language. However, even though they greatly opposed the Prophet for many years, they realized that they could not meet the literary eloquence of the Quran. But the Quran is much more than simply a “literary miracle.” It is miraculous as well with respect to its fulfilled prophecies of future events, its scientific accuracy, its historical accuracy, its precise preservation, its magnanimous and wise laws, its affect that it had and still has in reforming and changing humans and so forth.

The Prophet Muhammad himself was illiterate. Still Allah chose him to be His messenger, as his illiteracy was not a deficiency in his case. In fact, it was further evidence that this illiterate Arab living just six centuries after Jesus could not have produced this book. For example, Allah revealed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) the stories of the earlier prophets. The Prophet was not living in an environment wherein he would have had much access to the teachings of the Jews or Christians. However, the stories of the prophets of old are given with precise accuracy. Actually, the case is even more astonishing. Today, many people recognize that the current Bible contains statements that are historically impossible or that are anachronisms. The Quran, though, is free of all such problematic material—another sign that it is not the product of a mere mortal. In an extensive work, Fatoohi and al-Dargazelli produce many

¹ Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

² Indeed, as shall be demonstrated later, new aspects of its miraculous nature are continually being discovered.

examples of Biblical errors of a historical nature not found in the Quran, although the same stories and incidents are touched upon.¹

Humans' Need for Messengers from God

The sending of messengers to humankind is one of Allah's greatest blessings. In describing the sending of the Prophet Muhammad, Allah says, "And We have not sent you [O Muhammad] except as a mercy for all that exists" (12:107).

Humans are actually in great need of this blessing from Allah. They are in need of a practical example to show how one should lead one's life to please Allah. They are desperately also in need of the knowledge that these messengers brought.

Had Allah willed, Allah could have simply revealed His message in written form on mountainsides, for example. However, there is a great blessing and wisdom in His sending of human messengers instead. The benefit of these messengers are twofold: (1) By sending human messengers instead of simply communicated or written word, Allah has transformed His message from the realm of the abstract to the realm of the practical. The implementation of the message by the messenger gives humans a practical implementation of the guidance. The guidance is not simply vague, general principles that anyone could understand in a variety of ways. No, the message has been given in a concrete and practical format with detailed examples for humans to follow. (2) Although messengers were humans of excellent character, they were still mere humans. In fact, they were humans who were meant to be examples for others. Hence, by their implementation of the divine teachings, it demonstrates that these teachings are practicable and within the means of humans. No one should think of righteousness as something beyond human capacity. It is within human capacity and the actions of the prophets are a proof of that.

As noted above, humans are also in desperate need for the knowledge that the messengers convey. This knowledge can be divided into two types, both being essential for humans.

¹ See Louay Fatoohi and Shetha al-Dargazelli, *History Testifies to the Infallibility of the Quran: Early History of the Children of Israel* (Delhi, India: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1999), pp. 247-248.

The first type of knowledge is that of the supernatural, or what the Islamic texts call the “unseen.” These are matters beyond the realm of human experience. Humans can know about these issues only via revelation from Allah. This realm includes detailed knowledge about Allah and His attributes, the purpose of creation, how can one distinguish between good and evil, what occurs to humankind after death and in the hereafter and so forth.

However, Allah’s guidance is not concerned only with those issues. Allah’s guidance that He revealed to His human messengers also guides humans in worldly or mundane affairs. Except for technological matters that Allah has easily put within the reach of humans, humans are just as much in need of Allah’s guidance on these issues. It is Allah, the Creator, the Fashioner, alone who knows what is best for humans. Allah has said, “Should not He Who has created know? And He is the Most Kind and Courteous (to His servants), All-Aware (of everything)” (67:14). This point needs further elaboration because it strikes at the root of secularism, which is dominating the world’s thinking today.

Humans have attempted to construct their own economic systems, political systems, international laws and so on. When doing so, though, they have to admit that they are attempting something that is beyond their means. Thus, the harms of what they produce many times outweigh the good, even with the best of intentions. For example, in the realm of economics, the first thing that may come to mind is the collapse of the theories of socialism and communism. One should, though, also take a closer look at capitalism and how far its reality is from what it is supposed to be, resulting in exploitation, wherein the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

In general, man-made laws, as opposed to revelation from God, are susceptible to a number of distinct problems. First, humans are repeatedly influenced by desires. However, even if humans are able to raise themselves above any passions and desires on their part, they have to realize that there is a great deal of difference between the physical sciences and social sciences. Social scientists cannot test humans to see how they behave under all different circumstances. They are doing nothing too much more than guessing about reality. In the Quran, Allah speaks about such limited ability on the part of humankind: “They know only the outside appearance of the life of the

world” (30:7). If such is admitted, it demonstrates that humans are in need of guidance and knowledge from their Creator, who had graciously sent such guidance through his prophets. Finally, secular laws cannot inspire humans like divine revelation can. There can be no effective moral influence in such laws. In other words, except for the use of force, there is nothing in man-made laws to drive a person to comply with such laws. However, adherence to the laws promulgated by the prophets is driven by a desire to please God and to avoid His wrath.

In sum, there is no escaping the fact that humans are gravely in need of the knowledge vouchsafed via the prophets and they are also in need of the example that the prophets established.

The Principles of the Messengers’ Call

It has been narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that Allah had sent 124,000 prophets.¹ Allah stated that He sent a messenger to every nation (Quran 16:36).

Even though so many prophets and messengers were sent, they were actually all along the same path. Indeed, Allah tells the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that He is guiding the Prophet to the same religion as his predecessors. Allah says, “He (Allah) has ordained for you the same religion which He ordained for Noah, and that which We have inspired in you (O Muhammad), and that which We ordained for Abraham, Moses and Jesus...” (42:13).

Thus, a Muslim believes in all of those different prophets and messengers and, with respect to belief in them and honoring them, does not differentiate between any among them. God sent all of them. They were all believing in the same essential truths and calling to similar paths. Hence, one has no right to say that he will believe and respect some of them and reject, belie or disrespect others. In the first place, this would be disrespectful to God, who sent each and every one of them. It would also be illogical since they all came with essentially the same message and were, as the Prophet described, brothers to one another.

Hence, they all must be believed in and given the proper respect. Thus, Allah says, “Say (O Muslims), ‘We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us and that which has been sent

¹ Recorded by Ahmad.

down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and to the twelve sons of Jacob, and that which has been given to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam)'" (2:136). In sum, since they were all sent by the one and only God and since the truth of this existence is one and not changing, it is the case that their messages were essential one and the same.

Studying the Quran, one can see the basic principles of all of the messengers' call. Their message revolved around the following three points:

(1) Calling people to God, explaining with clear proofs that there is none worthy of worship except Him and inviting them to submit to Him alone and to renounce any and all false gods: Allah says, "And verily, We have sent among every nation a Messenger (proclaiming): 'Worship Allah (Alone), and avoid all false deities'" (16:36).

(2) Showing that there is a specific path of conduct leading to God's pleasure and the purifying of one's soul that each individual is obliged to adhere to: Every people were guided to a straight path. Allah says, "To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way" (5:48). However, all of the prophets brought the same basic path containing the same general laws, such as commandment to pray, prohibition of polytheism, prohibition of adultery, prohibition of murder and so forth. This does not mean that there were no differences whatsoever concerning their particular practices. In general, their practices were similar but God sent many prophets to specific peoples with specific laws for their time and place. This is part of Allah's mercy and wisdom. However, this variation in some of their practices does not imply any contradiction concerning their basic message or even the basic nature of their paths.

(3) Explaining the fates of individuals when they decide to accept and worship Allah and when they decide to refuse to submit to or worship Allah: On this point, the messengers taught humankind about life after death, resurrection, final judgment and reward or punishment from Allah. The details of these matters can only be known from Allah and Allah never punished any people until the messenger had made these points clear to them. Thus, all the messengers actually came with glad tidings for those who wish to

accept faith and stern warnings of a ominous end for those who wish to reject it. Allah says, “And We send not the Messengers but as givers of glad tidings and as warners. So whosoever believes and does righteous good deeds, upon such shall come no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who reject Our proofs, the torment will touch them for their disbelief” (6:48-49).

The above are the three basic points around which all the messages revolved. The prophets strove to convey their messages, fulfilled their trusts and conveyed the messages clearly. After their coming, there is no longer any room left for debate or excuse. The prophets fulfilled their missions and now the matter is left to the individual.

The Foretelling of the Prophet Muhammad in Earlier Scriptures

The previous section showed that the basic message of all of the prophets were the same. In addition, it was definitely the role of some, if not all, of the earlier prophets to foretell the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. For example, Allah says in the Quran, “Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write (i.e., Muhammad) whom they find written with them in the Torah and the Gospel...” (7:157).

Based on these and other verses of the Quran, Muslim scholars realized that there must exist some evidence of the coming of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in what is left of the original scriptures of the Jews and Christians. Indeed, Muslim scholars argue that many verses can be found that seem to point directly to the Prophet Muhammad. (Actually, a number of books have been written on this topic.)

For the sake of brevity, only a couple of examples will be discussed. The first of these passages comes from the Old Testament. Moses is speaking and says,

And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him (Deuteronomy 18:17-19, *King James Version*).

Perhaps the first question that needs to be answered is who are the brethren of the Israelites. According to the *Hebrew Dictionary of the Bible*, the term brethren refers to a “personification of a group of tribes who were regarded as near kinsmen of Israelites.”¹ A group that fits that description very well were the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and the half-brother of Isaac. It is from Ishmael that the Arabs, and Muhammad in particular, are descended.

Secondly, the coming prophet is described as being “like unto thee,” that is, similar to Moses. Now there are Christians who claim that this passage is a reference to Jesus. Given that Christians do not consider Jesus simply a prophet, this is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, Jamal Badawi has constructed a table that demonstrates how similar Moses and Muhammad were (and how dissimilar Jesus was to them). It demonstrates that with respect to birth, family life, nature of death, career, forced emigration, results of encounters with enemies, nature of teachings and acceptance of leadership by his own people, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was much more similar to Moses than Jesus ever was—may peace be upon all of them.²

The verses above then continue by saying, “and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.” This is an absolutely accurate description of the Prophet Muhammad in relation to the Quran. The words were put into his mouth via direct revelation from Gabriel, wherein Muhammad repeated verbatim what was revealed to him and he commanded all that the revelation contained.

In the New Testament, one can find the following passages in the *Gospel of John*, “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:15-16). John 16:7-8 and John 16:12-13 also speak about a future Comforter and the Spirit of Truth to come who could not come while Jesus was present.

Who is this who is to come after Christ and that cannot come while Christ is present? The Christians interpret these passages as

¹ Quoted in Jamal Badawi, *Muhammad in the Bible* (Halifax, Canada: Islamic Information Foundation, n.d.), p. 40.

² Badawi, p. 41.

referring to the Holy Ghost. But Christian theology states that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are all part of the trinity, together as one being. If this is the case, how is the one present and the other is not present? Such is completely incompatible with Christian theology. Furthermore, a portion in John 16:12-13 which states, “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 you things to come,” is nothing but another beautiful description of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and how he received and passed on the revelation from God.

One last set of verses will be presented that this author believes require virtually no comment other than saying that a great prophet was still expected: “And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias?¹ And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No” (John 1:19-21, *King James Version*). Who was that Prophet that John and the Jews were expecting?

These brief examples will have to suffice and the interested reader may consult more in-depth works. However, if these signs do point to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as Muslim scholars maintain, then, in sincerity to the Prophet who originally made the statement, one has to follow the prophet he pointed to.

The Final Message

After so many prophets sent by Allah, Allah sent the Prophet Muhammad. Muhammad was born around 570 years after the birth of Jesus Christ. He was born in Mecca, in the Arabian Peninsula. The people of Mecca were devoted to idol-worship. In Mecca, there was a building built by the prophets Abraham and Ishmael. This structure, known as the Kabah, was dedicated to the worship of Allah, the only true God. The Arab polytheists, though, filled it with their idols. Muhammad lived among them but never took part in idol-worship. He was known for his honesty and had the nickname, “the trustworthy.”

¹ In Matthew 17:12 Jesus is recorded as stating that Elias had already come.

At the age of forty, Muhammad received his first revelation. Although this was at first startling to him, he then understood the mission he had from God. The polytheistic Arabs quickly rejected his message that none is to be worshipped except God. Although he was known as “the trustworthy,” they belied him and soon after started a massive campaign to persecute those who believed in Muhammad. After thirteen years of preaching in Mecca, the Prophet himself was forced to leave to the city of Madinah, where he already had some followers.

The people of Madinah made him the leader of the city. The disbelievers of Mecca did not rest and attempted to militantly squash the new faith. However, what was originally a small band of Muslims grew in number and were able to withstand the onslaught of the disbelievers. Within ten years, the Prophet himself led an army back to Mecca and conquered it in a bloodless victory. Thus, Islam became victorious in Arabia and began spreading throughout the world.

Allah had sent numerous prophets throughout the centuries. However, He had determined that He should send this final messenger, Muhammad, with a final message. This final messenger would be the messenger for all of humankind from his time until the Day of Reckoning. There was to be no later revelation and no later prophet to bring any changes to this revelation. Hence, this one had to differ from the previous in some ways.

First, since no one could come later to correct any mistakes or distortions, the revelation received by the last prophet had to be preserved in its pristine purity.

Second, the nature of the “sign” of the last prophet would have to be different as well. This is because this sign would have to affect not only the people who were alive during the time of the prophet but also all those who would come later.

Third, this final prophet could not simply be sent for one community among humankind—each then having their own final prophet and then differing with one another. This final prophet had to be sent for all of humankind, putting an end to the succession of prophets and being suitable for the world as a whole.

Fourth, the laws and teachings of this message had to be fixed in matters that need to be fixed for all of humankind until the

Day of Judgment and guiding yet flexible or accommodating in those matters that need to be open to change due to the changing circumstances of humankind.

On all of these points, one sees that it is the message of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who fits all of these criteria. The exacting preservation of the Quran and the Sunnah was already discussed. Similarly, the nature of his “sign,” the Quran, the ultimate miracle that can still be experienced today, was also discussed earlier.

As for the third issue, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the only prophet to make it known that he was not sent only for a certain people but he was sent for all the various peoples of the world. Allah says, “Say (O Muhammad to the people), ‘O mankind! Verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah’ (7:158). Another verse reads, “And We have not sent you (O Muhammad) except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind” (34:28). The Prophet Muhammad also stated that he was distinguished from the earlier prophets by five matters. The last he mentioned was, “The prophet would be sent to his people only while I have been sent to all of mankind.”¹

Finally, when one studies the law promulgated by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) one finds that it has the needed elements of flexibility that allow it to be just as practicable today as it was during the time of the Prophet. What needs to be fixed forever is fixed in Islamic law. What needs to be left flexible is left flexible. For example, in business dealings, interest is prohibited forever. In addition to that, general guidelines are given. However, the guidance is such that when new forms of business dealings are developed, as in modern times, one can determine which are acceptable according to Islamic guidelines and which are not. Thus, Islamic Law has been proven to be feasible for over 1400 years and, according to Islamic beliefs, will continue to be feasible until the Day of Judgment.

Allah decreed that this Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) should be His final messenger. Allah says, “Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is

¹ Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the Prophets. And Allah is Ever All-Aware of everything” (33:40). The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself said, “I have been sent to all of the creation and the prophets have been sealed by me.”¹ Again, he said, “The Children of Israel were led by the prophets; whenever a prophet died, a prophet succeeded (him). Lo! There will be no prophet after me”²

Thus, there finally came the Prophet who explicitly declared that he is the final prophet. No prophet shall come after him. The truth of his message and his own honesty are well established. If one comes to the conclusion that he is to be believed or that the Quran is true, then it is also to be believed on this point of finality as well.

Furthermore, no one has the right to accept the other prophets while rejecting the Prophet Muhammad. No one has the right to say that Muhammad was truthful but, “I choose to still follow Jesus or Moses instead.” Logically speaking, one should not expect this to be acceptable to Allah. Allah has sent His final messenger to be believed in and followed, superseding and canceling what is left of the teachings of earlier prophets. In the Quran, Allah describes such an attitude: “And when it is said to them, ‘Believe in what Allah has sent down,’ they say, ‘We believe in what was sent down to us.’ And they disbelieve in that which came after it, while it is the truth confirming what is with them” (2:91).

The Prophet said, “[I swear] by [God], the One in whose hand is my soul, there will be none of my addressed people, be he Jew or Christian, who hears of me and dies without believing in that with which I was sent except that he will be from the inhabitants of the Hell-fire.”³ The Prophet even told one of his companions, “If my brother Moses were alive today, he would have no option but to follow me.”⁴

In sum, the signs pointing to the Prophet beforehand are there. The Prophet’s own honesty is unquestionable. The preservation of his scripture is established. All the indicators point to his

¹ Recorded by Muslim.

² Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

³ Recorded by Muslim.

⁴ Recorded by Ahmad and al-Daarimi.

prophethood. As a prophet, his word must be believed in. He has declared himself the last prophet and said that all of humankind must now choose to follow him. This is the choice facing every one of humankind and it is hoped that they will make the correct and logical decision.

Islam and “Faith”

The Definition of Islam

The word *islam* comes from the verb which means, “He resigned, or submitted, himself.”¹ So, *islam* is the way or act of submitting and resigning oneself. Hence, a “muslim” is one who submits.

As a technical term, the word Islam has at least two distinguishable usages: (1) It is a term used for the true religion of God since the time of the creation of humans; and (2) it is a term used today for the religion brought by the last prophet, Prophet Muhammad.

Islam: The Religion of All of the Prophets

In a religious sense, *islam* is used to mean, “the true submission and obedience to God alone.” In this sense, then, it was the religion of all of the true prophets of God. In fact, it was the religion of all of their followers as well. In other words, every true believer from the time of Adam to the last believer on earth practices Islam and is a Muslim. Furthermore, it is the only religion that Allah ever commanded humankind to follow. Islam, therefore, is the only religion that has ever been acceptable to Allah. Allah says, “Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam (submission to Him)” (3:19). Allah also says, “And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers” (3:85).

Throughout the Quran, Allah makes it clear that the religion and practice of all the prophets was that of Islam. For example, Allah quotes Noah as saying, after explaining the faith to the people, “But if you turn away [from accepting my doctrine to worship none but Allah], then no reward have I asked of you, my reward is only from Allah, and I have been commanded to be one of the Muslims” (10:71).

Abraham was also a Muslim. Abraham is often called in the West, “the father of monotheism.” Without any doubt Abraham was a pure monotheist and one who truly submitted to God (that is, a true Muslim). However, he was in no way the originator of monotheism.

¹ E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, England: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), vol.1, p. 1413.

Monotheism was the religion of Adam and was the religion of all true believers, such as Noah, between the time of Adam and Abraham. Belief in Allah alone as God and submission to Him has always been the pillar of the true religion of God.

Moses was also a Muslim, receiving the revelation from Allah, submitting completely to Him alone and commanding his people to do the same. Moses, for example, would have never rejected the prophethood of one of his fellow prophets, Jesus, as the Jews have done.

Jesus was another prophet of God who followed the religion of Islam or submitting to Allah alone. He taught this religion to his disciples. Jesus was human, like all the other prophets, and never claimed for himself any divine or semi-divine status. In fact, Allah makes it clear in the Quran that Jesus never asked anyone to worship him (see Quran 5:116-118).

Thus, the brotherhood of Islam and the bond of true faith stretches all the way from Adam until the end of time, spanning all localities and peoples. The true believers love one another and support one another. It is truly a blessed and unique brotherhood.

In particular, the true Muslims throughout all the ages believe in all of the prophets. They support all of them and defend their honor as well. This role of defending the honor of the prophets has truly fallen upon the shoulders of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad in particular today. The peoples of other faiths seem to have no qualms speaking badly about or even ridiculing their own prophets, not to speak of prophets that they reject. It seems as though it is only the followers of Muhammad today who are willing to stand and defend the honor of those noble prophets and believers. One would never hear a pious Muslim ever speak badly about Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Jesus or any of the prophets. Instead, the Muslim respects, honors and loves them *all* in the manner they deserve.

Islam: The Religion of the Prophet Muhammad

Before the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), one could say that there were many "Islams." That is, each people had their prophets, followed their teachings and were on the path of Islam. At the same time, if a new prophet in the same line of prophets came to them, they had no choice but to follow that new prophet. As was discussed earlier, the one who refuses to accept

Allah's later prophet is not truly submitting to Allah. If he is not truly submitting to Allah, then he is not a "Muslim."

Therefore, after the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) there is only one acceptable manner of worshipping and submitting to God: The path of the Prophet Muhammad. That is the only path that today can truly be called "submitting oneself to the will of Allah." Anyone who knowingly rejects the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), no matter how many other prophets he believes in, is no longer submitting to God and is not a Muslim.

It is interesting to note that the only religion that has kept the name "submission to Allah" or Islam is that of the final Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The other well-known religions are all named after individuals, peoples or places. According to *Microsoft Encarta*, the term Judaism did not even exist in pre-modern Hebrew. It is in reference to Judah. Christianity is, of course, named after Christ as Buddhism is named after Buddha. Hinduism has to do with the place, Hindustan. But, by Allah's wisdom and mercy, the name of the only true religion of submission to Allah—the religion of all the prophets—has been preserved and kept only in reference to the mission of the final prophet who was sent for all of humanity.

In sum, today, the only option left to be on the path of Islam and follow the way of all of the earlier prophets is by following the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet said regarding Moses, "If my brother Moses were alive today, he would have no option but to follow me."¹

The invitation is open for everyone to follow the way of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In a beautiful statement, the Prophet explained in a parable the nature of his call to all of humankind. The Prophet explained that some angels came to him while he was sleeping. Some of the angels said, "He is sleeping [therefore leave him]." The others answered, "His eyes sleep but his heart is alert." They said, "Your companion is like this" and they propounded a similitude. They said, "His similitude is like a person who builds a house and provides a table spread filled with

¹ Recorded by Ahmad and al-Daarimi.

provisions and calls the other people to it. Those who respond to his call enter the house and eat from the table spread. Those who do not respond to his call do not enter the house nor do they eat from the table spread.” Some of the angels said, “Give him its interpretation.” Others replied, “He is sleeping.” They were answered by others who said, “His eyes sleep but his heart is alert.” So they explained the parable to him, saying, “The house is Paradise and the one inviting is Muhammad (peace be upon him). Whoever obeys Muhammad (peace be upon him) has verily obeyed Allah. Whoever disobeys Muhammad (peace be upon him) has verily disobeyed Allah. And Muhammad (peace be upon him) is a separator of humanity.”¹

It is as simple as this: The invitation is out there and each individual will face the consequence of his decision of accepting or rejecting the invitation.

The Islamic Concept of “Faith”

In addition to outward submission to Allah, one must also have faith in one’s heart. One issue concerning faith is what one is supposed to believe in or, in other terms, the articles of faith. The Prophet once explained faith by saying, “It is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day and to believe in the divine decree, [both] the good and the evil thereof.” Here the Prophet mentioned the primary articles of faith. These articles are six in number as follows:

(1) Belief in Allah: Belief in Allah is the cornerstone of Islamic faith. This article of faith has been explained throughout this work and needs no further elaboration here.

(2) Belief in the Angels: Angels are a type of creation of Allah that is, in general, unseen by man. They have been created from light but they do have forms and bodies. They are servants of Allah and have no aspect of divinity to them whatsoever. They submit to His command completely and never stray from fulfilling His orders. The fact that there are some types of beings beyond the realm of human experience should not be shocking as even today on earth humans are still finding previously unknown species of animals.

(3) Belief in the Books revealed by Allah: Belief in Allah’s books refers to the revelations that Allah sent down to His messengers

¹ Recorded by al-Bukhari.

as a mercy and guidance to lead mankind to success in this life and happiness in the Hereafter. The Quran refers to a number of such books: the scrolls of Abraham, the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David and the Gospel of Jesus. (It must be recalled that the original revelations that these prophets received are not the same as the books that go under such names today. They were not preserved properly.) Belief in the books also includes belief in the Quran as the final revelation. It is very important to realize that it is considered the height of arrogance and a form of disbelief for an individual to declare for himself the right to believe in portions of what Allah revealed and reject other portions of it. Thus, Allah says, "Then do you believe in a part of the Scripture and reject the rest? Then what is the recompense of those who do so among you, except disgrace in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they shall be consigned to the most grievous torment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do" (2:85).

(4) Belief in the Messengers: This concept has also been discussed in detail earlier and needs no further elaboration.

(5) Belief in the Last Day and the Resurrection: "The Last Day" is called such because there will be no new day after it, as the people of Paradise shall be in their abode as will the people of Hell. Its other names include "The Day of Resurrection," and "The Day of Judgment." This is the greatest day that humankind shall pass through. Indeed, it will be the gravest and most fearful day. A person's new life will be decided on that day. It will mark a new beginning for each soul. This new step may lead to eternal bliss or eternal damnation. Belief in the Last Day implies belief in everything that the Quran or the Prophet (peace be upon him) has stated about the events of that Day and thereafter. There are some general aspects (resurrection, judgment and reward, Paradise and Hell) as well as more detailed aspects that the Quran or the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) mentioned. The more one has knowledge of that Day and its surrounding events, the greater the affect this belief will have on him. Hence, the Quran and Sunnah provide great detail as to the events of that Day and time.

It is important to realize that no one can say for certain who will be in Paradise or Hell.¹ Nobody knows what will happen to any individual. A righteous person today may change and become impious tomorrow, leading himself to Hell. The greatest enemy of Islam and disbeliever may repent in the future and become the most pious of people, leading himself to Heaven. In fact, there are some who may never hear about Islam or have only been offered a very distorted picture of Islam. Only God knows what will happen to such people in the Hereafter. However, some things are certain: God alone will be the judge on the Day of Judgment, God will never wrong any soul even the slightest amount and if a person is a true Muslim and believer, Allah will be pleased with him.

(6) Belief in the Divine Decree (*al-Qadar*): This refers to belief in the fact that nothing can occur in this creation except by the will and permission of Allah. There is no power that can go against His will. He has control over all things. This does not mean, though, that Islam is fatalistic. Humans have been given a type of free will. However, Allah, with His perfect knowledge, has foreknowledge of what humans will do. He has knowledge of what they will do and He wills it and decrees it but He does not cause them to make their life choices.

The above are the six articles of faith in the Muslim religion. There is an important second issue related to “faith”: What does “faith” really mean for a person and what are its implications? First, faith, meaning true and definitive belief in something, should lead to a corresponding submission to what one believes in. Otherwise, it is simply an acceptance of a fact but it is not the Islamic concept of “faith”

A person’s beliefs are the most important aspect of his being. They are, in general, the driving forces behind his way of life and personal choices. The true and effective beliefs never remain at an abstract level but their influence is manifested on a day-to-day practical level. In other words, there is no true “faith” without that having a strong influence upon a person’s acts. A person cannot claim, “I have belief in my heart,” yet, at the same time, that person never actually does deeds corresponding to what he claims to believe

¹ Unless, of course, such has been explicitly stated in the Quran or the Sunnah.

in. This person's actions are belying his claim of "faith in the heart." Thus, from an Islamic perspective, true faith in the heart demands that the individual submits to God in his actions.

The Ritual Acts of Worship in Islam

The Scope of Worship

The Islamic term for worship implies “servitude” to the Lord. To worship God is actually the only goal for which all of humankind has been created. Indeed, the noblest and greatest that anyone could ever be is being a true servant and worshipper of God.

Al-Miqreezee notes that the proper form of worship entails four aspects:

“Worship” is not restricted to the ritual acts of worship or acts that one may consider “religious” or “spiritual.” The goal is to become as complete a servant of Allah as one can. The correct concept of servitude is very comprehensive. “Worship” or *ibaadah* is a concept comprising every word or deed, internal or manifest, that Allah loves and approves. Hence, worship permeates every part of a person. It touches upon his internal characteristics as well as his outward actions.

In sum, worship is inclusive of: (a) One’s relationship with the Lord; (b) One’s relationship with his own soul and its rights upon him; (c) One’s relationship with society as a whole; (d) One’s relationship with one’s relatives, spouse, children and others who have special rights upon a person; (e) One’s relationship with the animals that Allah has placed in this creation; (f) One’s relationship with the environment and all the resources that Allah has created which are supposed to be used in a responsible and ethical manner.

Allah, though, did not leave humans clueless as to how they are going to be able to grow, persevere and continue in these acts of worship. Instead, Allah ordained for humans specific ritual acts of worship. These deeds are acts of worship in and of themselves but they are also acts that aid the individual in continuing along the path of worshipping Allah alone. The most important of these acts are what is known as the “five pillars of Islam.” The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated, “Islam is built upon five [pillars]: testifying that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establishing the prayers, giving the zakat, making the pilgrimage to the House and fasting the month of Ramadhan.”¹

¹ Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

The first pillar is the proclamation of faith. This first pillar demonstrates that submission is not something that one claims is in the heart with no public affirmation. The submission to God is not meant to be a private submission. It is a public submission, as it is the driving force behind the outward deeds one performs. Thus, with full conviction, belief, sincerity and honesty one proclaims: There is none worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

In reality, without this pillar, the remaining acts will become meaningless. The other acts must be built upon having faith. One cannot do an act to please God properly without first having belief in God and in His Messenger. This faith then drives corresponding acts. The first act that this faith should lead one to is the proclamation and declaration of that faith. Hence, it is the starting point for all of the other foundations.

The other four pillars are discussed below:

The Prayers

The second pillar is “to establish the prayers.” This pillar does not simply mean to pray whenever or however one wills to pray. There are formal, ritualistic prayers that every Muslim must perform as a basic sign of his willingness to submit to God.¹ There are five such prayers every day at fixed times. The time of the first prayer is between dawn and sunrise. The second prayer time starts just after high noon. The third starts at the mid-afternoon. The fourth starts right after sunset. And the fifth is at nightfall. Hence, as a Muslim goes through his day there is never any period of time in which he is distant from a formal prayer. These repeated prayers continually remind the person of his relationship with his Lord and his true purpose in life.

In general, these prayers are supposed to be performed in congregation in a mosque. Numerous mosques are therefore located throughout Muslim lands. The faithful are called to pray by a person reciting specific phrases, among them, “Come to the prayer, come to the success.” In the mosque, the worshippers form straight lines behind the prayer leader (Imam). They all face the same direction,

¹ Obviously, one can pray or supplicate at all times and perform voluntary prayers on one’s own. However, this is not what this foundational pillar is referring to.

towards Mecca. The prayer is said in Arabic and contains Quranic readings. The prayer also consists of bows and prostrations. If anyone travels throughout the world, he will find the Muslims praying in the same fashion and with the same Arabic terms and expressions. Thus, a Muslim enters any mosque in the world and feels immediately at home and among his brothers and sisters in faith.

The importance of the prayers lies in the fact that no matter what actions one performs in his life, the most important aspect is one's relationship to Allah, that is, one's faith, God-consciousness, sincerity and worship of Allah. This relationship with Allah is both demonstrated and put into practice, as well as improved and increased, by the prayer.

The Zakat

The third pillar of Islam is the giving of *zakat* or "alms." *Zakat* is a specific portion of one's varied wealth that must be given yearly to a specific group of recipients, such as the poor and the needy.

The concept of being obliged to give up a portion of one's wealth for the sake of God as an act of worship of God is something that one finds in the message of the previous prophets. Its important place in the purification of the soul is touched upon by Sulaiman Nadwi who wrote,

The main cause of spiritual illnesses of human beings is the absence of hope and fear of Allah and lack of love and attachment to Him. Cure to these illnesses is Salat [prayer]. There is also another cause of these illnesses, namely, attachment to worldly possessions, riches and wealth, instead of attachment to Allah. Zakat is the remedy for this second cause of illness.¹

This act of worship highlights a fact discussed earlier concerning the scope of worship. Worship does not deal simply with one's interaction with his Lord (if one can somehow compartmentalize that and remove it from all other interactions) but it also deals with one's interaction with the other believers in particular and the rest of humanity in general. Via the Zakat, one directly fulfills

¹ Sulaiman Nadwi, *Worship in Islam* (Karachi: Darul Ishaat, 1994), p. 179.

the needs of others. The basis by which one should interact with others is, once again, the worship of Allah.

Zakat develops within the soul a desire to sacrifice and assist others for the sake of Allah. The true believer cultivates in his heart the joy of giving for the sake of Allah, recognizing how pleased Allah is with such a deed. It is not simply a matter of removing the disease of selfishness, the ill amassing of wealth and the harms of egotism from one's heart. It is more than that. It is the replacement of those possible ill feelings with the feeling that a believer should sacrifice and work for others as a means of getting closer to Allah.

Fasting

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast of the nine month of the Islamic calendar, Ramadhan. This means to abstain from food, drink and sexual intercourse during the daytime—from dawn until sunset—of the days of this month.¹

Fasting is a source of self-restraint, piety and God-consciousness. It was prescribed by Allah for the prophets before Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In the verses obligating the fast of the month of Ramadhan, Allah has pointed out its goal or purpose: “O you who believe! Observing the fast is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become pious” (2:183).

Note that fasting is much more than simply restraining from food, drink and sexual intercourse. It is supposed to be a time in which God-consciousness is greatly heightened. This increased level of God-consciousness should be reflected in everything the individual does while fasting. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) alluded to this fact when he stated, “Perhaps the fasting person may get nothing from his fast except hunger. And perhaps the one who performs the late night prayers² may get nothing from his prayers

¹ Note that the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar. Hence, over the years, the month of Ramadhan moves throughout the different seasons. In any given year, those in the Northern Hemisphere may be fasting during summer (with relatively longer days) while those in the Southern Hemisphere are fasting during winter (relatively shorter days). However, in a number of years, the situation will be reversed.

² In addition to fasting during the daytime, there are also special prayers that Muslims perform during the nighttime in the month of Ramadhan.

except sleeplessness.”¹ The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, “The fasting is [not only abstaining] from food and drink but the fast is abstaining from vain speech and lewd speech. If anyone reviles you or acts foolishly with you, you should say, ‘I am fasting, I am fasting.’”² Finally, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, “If someone does not give up false speech and acting according to it, Allah is in no want of him giving up his food and drink.”³

Fasting is an experience wherein the person leaves his wants and desires for the sake of putting what Allah wants first. This reminds him of his true goal and purpose in life. This experience allows him to put matters into proper perspective concerning what he wants out of this life and what is of true importance to him.

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) once said, “Look at those who are lower than you [having less than you] and do not look at those who are above you [having more than you] as otherwise the bounties of Allah upon you would become insignificant to you.”⁴ In this hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has given an instruction that will help one appreciate the numerous benefits that he has received from Allah. The institution of fasting can take the person even further. While fasting, the person does not just view the plight of others, but he can actually begin to feel their plight. Hence, the rich can reflect on what they have been given and give true thanks. Especially in this day and age and in some materially advanced countries, one becomes very much accustomed to easy access to food, drink, clean water, electricity and so on. Since these are readily available, the person starts to take them for granted and does not realize what a great blessing they are and how so many in today’s world are actually deprived of these basic needs.

¹ Recorded by ibn Majah. Authenticated by al-Albani. See al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami al-Sagheer*, vol. 1, p. 656, hadith #3488.

² Recorded by al-Hakim and al-Baihaqi. Authenticated by al-Albani. See al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami al-Sagheer*, vol. 2, p. 948, hadith #5376.

³ Recorded by al-Bukhari.

⁴ Recorded by Muslim.

The Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*)

The final pillar of Islam is making the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the House of Allah, or the Kaaba. The pilgrimage should be made at least once in a Muslim's lifetime if he ever has the physical and financial means to perform it.

Part of the pilgrimage has to do with remembrance of the acts of Abraham, his wife Hagar and their son Ishmael in the valley of Mecca. One virtually retraces some of their steps. One remembers them as they sacrificed for the sake of Allah and Allah, in return, was pleased with them and blessed them in so many ways.

The pilgrimage is truly a moving experience. Millions of Muslims come from every corner of the world and descend upon Mecca. They all repeatedly express their willingness to come to be in the service of the Lord. The worldly distinctions between the pilgrims disappear as they all stand before their Lord during these blessed days.

The pilgrimage requires a great deal of sacrifice on the part of the Muslim, such as the sacrifice of time, money and effort. Every believer must realize the relationship between his faith and sacrifice. Sacrifice is an essential aspect of this religion. A true believer should be willing to sacrifice one's time, wealth and even life for the sake of Allah. In addition, the true believer must sacrifice all desires and pleasures that are not consistent with the Quran and Sunnah. In fact, a true believer must sacrifice anything that comes between him and the true worship of Allah alone.

Scientific Miracles in the Quran and Sunnah

As noted earlier, the “miracle” of the final Prophet is unique. Since he was the last prophet, with no prophet coming later, his miracle has to have a lasting affect until the Day of Judgment. The Quran is miraculous in many ways. However, in the past century or so, many have noted that it is miraculous in the manner in which it is perfectly consistent with scientific fact. In fact, as new discoveries are being made, people are realizing that some of those discoveries have already been alluded to in the Quran or the Sunnah.

Although space limitations do not allow a detailed discussion of particular examples, it will be sufficient here to quote the statements of a number of non-Muslim scientists concerning their study of the Quran.

General Statements Concerning the Scientific Miracles of the Quran

In recent decades, many scientists, in particular, have marveled at the miraculous nature of the Quran and have concluded that it is inconceivable that such a work could have been produced by a human some 1400 years ago. For example, the French medical doctor Maurice Bucaille, at the end of a comprehensive study on the Bible, the Quran and Science, wrote,

In view of the level of knowledge in Muhammad's day, it is inconceivable that many of the statements in the Qur'an which are connected with science could have been the work of a man. It is, moreover, perfectly legitimate, not only to regard the Qur'an as the expression of a Revelation, but also to award it a very special place, on account of the guarantee of authenticity it provides and the presence in it of scientific statements which, when studied today, appear as a challenge to explanation in human terms.¹

Upon reading the Quran, one aspect that catches many a reader's eye is the discussion of the creation of the human within the womb of the mother. In fact, the details and the analysis are so great that Keith Moore, Professor Emeritus of Anatomy and Cell Biology at

¹ Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Quran and Science* (Indianapolis, IN: American Trust Publications, 1978), pp. 251-252.

the University of Toronto, has included them in a special edition of his textbook *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*.¹ Commenting on the miraculous consistency between statements in the Quran and the historical development of Embryology, Dr. Moore stated in 1981, "It has been a great pleasure for me to help clarify statements in the Qur'an about human development. It is clear to me that these statements must have come to Muhammad from God, because almost all of this knowledge was not discovered until many centuries later. This proves to me that Muhammad must have been a messenger of God."²

Dr. T. V. N. Persaud, a specialist in Anatomy, Obstetrics and related fields and a Professor at the University of Manitoba, stated, "You have someone illiterate [meaning the Prophet Muhammad] making profound pronouncements and statements that are amazingly accurate about scientific nature. I personally can't see how this could be a mere chance. There are too many accuracies and, like Dr. Moore, I have no difficulty in my mind that this is a divine inspiration or revelation which led him to these statements."³

Prof. Tejjat Tejasen of Chiang Mai University in Thailand stated,

During the last three years, I became interested in the Quran... From my study... I believe that everything that has been recorded in the Quran fourteen hundred years ago must be the truth, that can be proved by scientific means. Since the Prophet Muhammad could neither read nor write, Muhammad must be a messenger who relayed this truth, which was revealed to him as an enlightenment by the one who is eligible [as the] creator... Therefore, I think this is the time to say...[at this point, Prof. Tejasen makes a declaration of Islamic faith].⁴

¹ See Keith L. Moore [along with Abdul-Majeed Azzindani], *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology [with Islamic Additions: Correlation Studies with Quran and Hadith]* Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: Dar al-Qiblah for Islamic Literature, 1983, in conjunction with W. B. Saunders Company.

² Quoted in I. A. Ibrahim, *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam* (Houston: Darussalam, 1997), p. 10.

³ Quoted in Ibrahim, p. 27.

⁴ Quoted in Ibrahim, p. 31.

The last person quoted declared his faith and became a Muslim. Actually, this has been the fate of millions who have studied Islam throughout the East and the West. Some may be famous people, such as rock star Cat Stevens or German diplomat Murad Hoffman, but the vast majority are simply honest people who understand that there is some truth behind this reality and via honest and unbiased study and contemplation realize and accept the truth of Islam.

How Does One Become a Muslim

The process by which one becomes a Muslim is quite simple and straightforward. All it entails is the declaration of one's belief. Thus, one states in front of witnesses, "I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." Upon stating those sentences, one enters into the beautiful brotherhood of Islam, a brotherhood that stretches from the time of Adam until the last days of this earth.

It is recommended that one do a complete washing of one's body, such as a shower, before making this declaration. This symbolic act represents the washing away of all previous acts as one is now entering a new stage in life. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated, "Islam wipes away whatever [sins] preceded it."¹ In other words, whether one had defiantly disobeyed God or was simply ignorant of faith, all of that is now behind the individual. He now has a new life. He should realize, though, that he has now taken his first step. There are many other wonderful steps ahead of him. He should now be prepared to grow and blossom as a devoted worshipper and servant of Allah until he finally meets Allah on the Day of Judgment, being pleased with being Allah's servant and Allah being pleased with him as His servant.

It was noted earlier that Islam is definitely a complete way of life. Upon embracing Islam, one must have the intention to submit to Allah. This means that many changes may take place in a person's life. Hence, again, it is truly a life-transforming step in many ways. One should make the commitment with that knowledge and with the firm conviction that pleasing Allah is the ultimate goal in one's life.

However, one never has to be alone in one's spiritual path. From the moment one embraces Islam, he is part of a brotherhood and sisterhood that is there for each other. In every major city throughout the world, one can find Islamic centers and mosques. It has been the experience of this author that those centers are always more than happy to welcome any newcomer into the fold and to try to help him or her grow as a Muslim.

¹ Recorded by Ahmad.

By Allah's grace, He has made His religion open to everyone. There are no restrictions—all that is needed is a sincere heart willing to submit to and worship Allah alone.

May Allah guide all the sincere truthseekers to the wonderful and beautiful path of His religion, Islam.

Conclusion

This author has attempted to shed some light on the religion of Allah, Islam. This is obviously an ominous task and difficult to perform in a small number of words. Sometimes, it is difficult to put into words the beauty that one experiences. However, the author hopes that some of what has been written here has touched the heart and the mind of the reader. The only advice that this author is left to give is to encourage every reader to turn to God with a sincere heart and ask Him for guidance. Allah willing, that sincere prayer will lead the individual directly to the truth and the beauty of Islam. Amen.

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