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WHAT IS ISLAM

ACCORDING TO THE QUR'AN

Mustafa ISLÂMOĞLU

TRANSLATED BY
ELMURAD KASYM



DÜŞÜN YAYINCILIK



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FOREWORD

What is Islam and who is a Muslim? Who is Allah? What is the difference between the concepts of Allah in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism? What is the difference between belief in monotheism in Islam and the concept of trinity in Christianity? Who is Satan according to Islam? Who is Muhammad? How to differentiate between divinely inspired actions and humanly traditions in Prophet Muhammad's actions? Does the Qur'an discuss the notion of the original sin? What is the Islamic understanding of fate and destiny? Does Islam have the concept of priesthood? What are the main prayers? What is the Islamic viewpoint on polygamy? Does the Qur'an order beating one's wife? Why do Muslim women cover their bodies? What is the explanation for Prophet Muhammad's polygamy?

The book you are holding contains answers to these and approximately 200 other similar questions. All of the answers were derived from the Qur'an because this divine revelation is undoubtedly the most trustworthy source for answers on Islam. Therefore, the book was named *"What is Islam according to the Qur'an?"* Every single Muslim, whether male or female, sincerely believes that the Qur'an comes from a divine source and has not even a hint of doubt on its contents. The Qur'an directly addresses Prophet Muhammad, *"You did not know what revelation is nor what faith (implies)"* (Shuraa 42:52). Even Prophet Muhammad himself learned about religion and faith from the Qur'an. Therefore, the only reliable and trustworthy source of answers to all questions about Islam posed thus far and to be posed in the future is the Qur'an.

If the question “What is Islam?” were posed as “according to Muslims” and not “according to the Qur'an,” more peculiarities and differences would have emerged beyond mere details. In turn, those differences of opinion would have been further broken down into even finer parts. In a word, the further one is from the original source, the more differences of opinion arise regarding that very source.

Over centuries, more and more people have been asking the question of “What is Islam?” No doubt, this question tops any list of issues in our modern days all over the globe. Unless a fair and balanced answer is provided, false “answers” and “explanations” would certainly flood media outlets and publications. Indeed, initial signs of such an outcome have already been emerging, paving way to increasing and expanding Islamophobic attitudes in the West. Perhaps, there are two causes behind this phenomenon:

1. Muslims have insufficient knowledge and consciousness about their own religion; questions arise from wrong lifestyles and symbols stemming from said insufficiency; and
2. Non-Muslims do not and/or cannot obtain reliable and correct information on Islam.

There could be numerous answers given to the question of “Why do we have to possess correct information on Islam?” Here are a few:

1. Muslims make up at least one-fourth of the population of the world. As time goes, every single person on the face of Earth, willingly or not, has to interact with the “others.” Our century is *an era of encounters*. Non-Muslims are encountering Muslims in various situations and numbers: a friend or a relative, a client or a partner, a neighbor or a roommate, an immigrant or a tourist, and many or few. The potential to cause or to prevent clashes arising from these ever-increasing encounters depends on the level of awareness and knowledge of the differing parties.

2. Islam with its object and subject matters has constantly been on the global agenda because of occurrences and events with the participation of some Muslims over the last several years. Therefore, learning about Islam has become an intellectual necessity expected from each one of us whether we like it or not and whether a Muslim or not, given the fact we live in a world so advanced in technology and communications. Certain groups and circles with prejudices against Islam are pouring massive disinformation via mass media outlets, seeking to wage clashes for political and other reasons. In turn, this move is bringing about the *globalization of prejudices*. The answer to the following question depends on the choices made by us—humans, who share this temporary dwelling we call Earth: will the phenomenon of globalization heal the disease of alienation among various cultures and civilizations or, on the contrary, worsen it?

3. As the notions suggest, knowledge and knowing are good, while ignorance and unawareness are bad. People are enemies of that, which they do not know. According to the Qur'an, Islam is a term that encompasses all the positive and beneficial notions, events, and attitudes, which have taken place in humankind's history. The Qur'an addresses all of humankind by saying "O sons of Adam" and "O humankind." According to the same source, Islam—the way of submission—is a religion all the prophets of the past practiced. This is why Islam has been defined as the religion of humankind over its entire history. Islam and Muslims are a part of human history, which could in no way be overlooked. Therefore, it is an inevitable necessity to learn Islam from its reliable and initial source.

The book you are holding prioritizes "whys" over "hows." Save a few exceptions, this book sheds light on almost all of the orders and prohibitions found in the Qur'an with justifications in its numerous verses and convincing logical explanations. This phenomenon is not observed in other religions' sacred scriptures.

We have, too, tried to emulate the Qur'anic morals and attempted to respond to each question based on "whys" and "what fors."

The book "What is Islam?" was originally conceived of as the first volume of a series of books. The decision to continue this project, and if so, its format, will be decided upon receiving feedback from our readers on this first book.

The actual writing of this book is only a part of the project; to be more specific, the last link in the chain of project phases. Whatever preceded the writing phase was not easy either. We have first established a group of volunteers in various continents, which classified the questions by their nature and area of Islamic practices. The preparation phase took three years, during which questions from non-Muslims were collected and categorized in countries spanning from America to Japan and from Europe to India. The first book of the "What is Islam?" project was only possible after such hardships were endured.

It is simply impossible to name every single contributor to such an enormous project, which demanded an uncountable number of people. But we are obliged to mention certain individuals and express our sincerest gratitude to them: Dr. Şakir Yücel, Bilgin Erdoğan, Kadir Gündüz, Dr. Murat Güzel, Dr. Fatih Aydoğan, Dr. Oktay Altun, Bilgehan Yıldız and Ergin Öztürk in the USA; Ahmed Mihmat and Ednan Arslan in Europe; Nurdan Özyilmaz and Muhammad Özyilmaz, the developer of the "What is Islam?" project's website (<http://www.a-zislam.com/>), in England; Perviz Hanim from the team of translators; R&D and Projects Department of the Akabe Foundation in Turkey. And a special gratitude goes out to the Hilal TV, whose exceptional support the project enjoyed. The last, but certainly not the least, are the Yardimeli Derneği Foundation, which promised to translate the book into major world languages and deliver it to readers, and a number of unsung heroes for all the contributions

they have already made and are willing to continue making. We wish to express our sincerest gratitude to each and every one of them. This project stems from the hard work of volunteers. We believe that the “What is Islam?” project will continue to enjoy support from volunteers, organizations and institutions.

Our only hope is to shed light on the darkness that ignorance casts on our minds and souls. As is known, darkness is an ideal environment for those willing to hide their identities after committing atrocities and crimes. The latter, in turn, is decreasing the goodness in our world, which is obviously saddening those with reason, will and consciousness.

The Qur'an says:

“He who would perish might perish in clear evidence of the truth, and that he who would remain alive might live in clear evidence of the truth”

(‘Anfal 8:42)

The Qur'an also says:

“And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe?”

(Yunus 10:99)

The humankind is facing most striking growth, deepest societal disruptions and most interesting renewal. There is no enemy of Islam on the face of Earth, but there are those unfamiliar with it. Those acting like enemies toward Islam harbor animosity towards Muslims, not Islam itself. Perhaps, Muslims are to be blamed for this situation as well. To be sure, Islam and Muslims are not the same concept. Because *Islam* and the *Islamic traditions*, conceived by humans over the centuries of history, are not the same thing. Therefore, the book you are holding pays due attention to such sensitive issues.

Those who defend Islam are to produce irrefutable proof; those who oppose Islam are to follow suit. No matter what choices the human makes, he is expected to make it conscientiously. One of the goals we are pursuing with this book is helping those who wish to learn more about Islam, because man becomes an enemy of things or concepts he is ignorant of.

We ask Allah to grant us a life wherein global peace reigns over Earth.

Mustafa Islâmoğlu
March 2014, Istanbul

Translator's note

The growing number of Muslims in the Western world in general and the events on September 11, 2001 in particular are causing an unprecedented interest in Islam. Given the scarce information available until the horrible events in New York over a decade ago and the little exposure to Islamic teachings, the Western world has been wary of the followers of a religion, which reportedly "advocates honor killings" or "annihilating non-believers." After all, "People are enemies of that, which they do not know" as the author of this book writes.

Mustafa Islamoglu embarked on a mission to show Islam's true identity based on its main source--the Qur'an. I am honored to join him in this effort. The book you are reading is a translation from the Turkish language and it answers many questions non-Muslims have about Islam.

The translation of the book "What is Islam according to the Qur'an?" would not be possible without an enormous effort many people contributed into proofreading the initial version of the translation. I would like to hereby express my sincerest gratitude to them for pointing out my mistakes and shortcomings, and suggestions to improve the translation.

In an effort to deliver answers directly from the Qur'an, I used the text of the book "The Message of The Qur'an" by Muhammad Asad, which is a translation of the Qur'an in English. The Qur'an--the central script of the Islamic religion--consists of 114 entitled chapters of various lengths in the Arabic language. The verses in each chapter vary in number as well, hence varying chapter lengths. In order to avoid confusions and excessive use of the Qur'anic

chapter names, I used a numbering scheme to refer to the chapter and the verse(s) in Asad's text. For example, the first chapter of the Qur'an is called Al-Fatihah (The Opening), of whose seven verses the first is translated as, "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace." In the text below, you would see this verse coded as 1:1, where the first number stands for the chapter and the second number stands for the verse therein. To illustrate the coding further, please consider the following example: "Say (o Muhammad): 'He is the One Allah: God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Being. He begets not, and neither is He begotten; and there is nothing that could be compared with Him'" (*Ikhlas* 112:1-4). The numbers in the parentheses stand for Chapter Al-Ikhlās: (The Declaration of Allah's Perfection), the 112th chapter, and its verses number 1 through number 4.

Lastly, just as this translation is only an effort to express the original message the author wishes to convey, no translation of the Qur'an can be considered as the original Qur'an, which was revealed in the Arabic language to the last of the prophets Muhammad (peace be upon him).

We value your opinion

We welcome comments, questions and feedback from the readers. You can send a message to info@uphillfoundation.org. Please be sure to include this book's title and author. We will review your comments and share them with the author, editors and translators of the book.

FOUNDATIONS OF ISLAM AND FAITH

What is Islam and who is a Muslim?

The Arabic word “islâm” is derived from a word, which is also used to derive words “*silm*” (“peace”), “*voluntary self-surrendering*” (“*taslimiyah*”), and “*salamah*” (“salvation”). A “Muslim,” therefore, is “one who fully embraces the way of life Islam shows, by unconditionally surrendering to the will of Allah.” Also, using these three terms, one could state the following: “Islam is a way of voluntarily surrendering (*taslimiyah*) for the sake of peace (*silm*) on Earth and eternal salvation (*salamah*) in the Hereafter.”

Islam is, as these very term implies, “peace”; a Muslim, on the other hand, is someone who lives in peace and promotes others to live in peace a volunteer for peace, in short.

Islam is a way for those who submit themselves to truth and not subdue truth to their whims.

Islam is a generic term for all the values humans cherish since the inception of humankind: The only true religion in the sight of Allah (*‘Ali Imran* 3:19) and self-surrendering is what Allah wills as the religion for humans (*Ma’idah* 5:3). Further, Islam is the name of a perfect system that unifies morals, faith, worship and values in humans’ life (*Baqarah* 2:208).

Islam promotes the notion of the Creator as the center of humans’ consciousness. Therefore, Islam confirms that the Creator granted reason, mind, will and conscience to humans. Islam is the way of those who recognize humans’ freewill to choose between the good and the bad.

Islam is not just a religion among other religions, but it is a collection of those values, which were promoted as a way of life by all the prophets and messengers of Allah (*Haj* 22:78).

In its broadest meaning, Islam is the name of the system Allah rules the universe with (*Fussilat* 41:11). If “cosmos” rules over universe, not “chaos,” then it is an indication of a majestic balance and a system in this very universe. Speaking of “cosmos” and “system,” one cannot but mention “harmony.” Hence, the harmony among all beings in the universe is their submission to Allah’s will (*Rahman* 55:6).

Muslim is one who willingly and conscientiously submits himself/herself to Allah for the sake of peace and harmony in both inner and outer worlds. Muslim is one who believes in the Lord of the worlds and fulfills His orders without hesitation or questioning. Muslim is one who prefers “Allah’s will” to “my ego’s will.” Muslim is one who found his true self. Muslim is any one who willingly and unquestioningly surrenders to Allah’s will—the way of life Islam teaches. Allah says in the Qur’an that those who sincerely believe in Him and unconditionally fulfill His commands are “muslimoon” (submitters) (*Haj* 22:78).

One’s surrendering to Allah’s will is not his/her grace toward Allah, but it is Allah’s grace that one attains faith in Him (*Hujurat* 49:17).

What Islam is not?

Islam cannot be decreased to the level of a simple belief:

Islam offers regulations and rules for both believing and living at the same time. After all, Islam has an answer to any and all aspects of humans’ life. As mentioned above, Islam promotes the notion of the Creator as the center of humans’ conscience.

In other words, Islam is a worldview that focuses on the Only Creator and implementing His commands. Islam confirms that the Creator granted humans reason, mind, will, and conscience, and that it is the way of those who recognize humans' freewill to choose between the good and the bad. These peculiarities warrant Islam's capacity to govern humans' faiths and lives. That said, Islam includes not only basics of faith, but also of action. Thus, Islam promotes the beauty of both faith and action (*Layl* 92:5-7).

Islam cannot be limited to conscience alone:

One's consciousness is the house of Allah. The Creator speaks to humans *through* their consciousness, while Islam speaks *to* humans' consciousness. Thus, unless Islam is embedded in one's soul, it is equal to a seed without soil. However, Islam cannot be limited to consciousness alone, for doing so would be tantamount to imprisoning Islam in it. On the contrary, Islam sets one's consciousness, reason, mind, and will in motion. Islam demands the human to become active and increase good deeds. Just like the Qur'an addressed the Prophet Muhammad in the beginning of his mission: "O thou [in thy solitude] enfolded! Arise and warn!" (*Muddaththir* 74:1-2)

Islam cannot be limited to an ideology:

Islam exercises a particular kind of ideology it generates. However, Islam is in no way limited to that ideology. Ideologies are secular notions. Islam, on the other hand, classifies becoming worldly as "alienating from the natural human disposition." Ideologies offer no eschatology (the Hereafter), while Islam looks beyond this temporal life and shows a way of life for humans for reaching eternal bliss in the Hereafter.

Islam cannot be limited to politics:

Islam generates Islamic politics, which rest on five pillars:

1. Truth/monotheism
2. Justice
3. Compassion

4. Competence

5. Counseling.

At the same time, limiting Islam to politics would be injustice towards its all-encompassing capacity. Politics aim at generating benefits and interests for politicians, whereas Islam aims at global goodness and benevolence. Politics focus on the outcome, while Islam focuses on efforts to reach an outcome. Politics aim at a triumph in this world, while Islam guides one throughout a journey to reach triumph in the eternal next world.

Is it true that Islam did not begin with Prophet Muhammad?

Prophet Mohammad did not found Islam. According to the Qur'an, Islam existed since the inception of humanity (see the Qur'an Haj 22:78). Allah is One and the humans are one in their kind; hence, there is only "one" mission/task/revelation/instruction Allah descended upon humans. Therefore, as prophets from the first to the last preached, the only valid religion Allah accepts is Islam (*Ma'idah* 5:3). Save certain modifications in worship and differences on permissible/non-permissible based on societies' peculiarities and circumstances, the foundations of faith have always been the same throughout the history of humankind.

The prophets Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all other prophets are named Muslims in the Qur'an. There is a consistent set of core values common to all humankind, and Islam is the religion that encompasses them. None of the prophets of Allah questioned His commands; on the contrary, they fully submitted themselves to His will and fulfilled His orders. Thus, Islam is the religion that Allah perfected and bestowed on humanity as a blessing, and Allah has willed self-surrender unto Him as humanity's religion.

How does one become a Muslim?

There is no authority, church, institution or clergy to accept one into Islam on behalf of Allah. Entering Islam is a covenant between Allah and said individual, which takes place without a mediator. Choosing the way of freely self-surrendering is sufficient for one to become a Muslim.

Joining the ranks of Muslims occurs by uttering the following two statements by tongue and confirming them with heart: *"Ashhadu an la ilaha illa Allahu wa ashadu anna Muhammadan abduhu wa rasuluh"* — "I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger." The testimony is obviously a fundamental notion in Islam. Allah Himself confirms His solitude as the only deity worthy of worshipping (*'Ali`Imran 3:18*). On top of that, Allah wills that humans also testify to His oneness. The goal here is dignifying humans and showing them His mercy by making them closer through their testimony of His oneness.

The first statement attests to a faith in the existence, oneness and uniqueness of the absolute and eternal Creator, who has no resemblance in created beings. The second statement attests to a faith that all messengers, including Prophet Muhammad, received revelations directly from Allah and that they were human beings.

For someone entering Islam by making these statements, there are two sources for guidance on how to live his/her further life: 1) The dynamic text of the Qur'an, which forms the theoretical framework for life, and 2) The practical examples of Prophet Muhammad who was a "walking example" of living by the Qur'an.

To be sure, there is no "entering Islam" component in a practice where one proclaims accepting Islam in front of a community of Muslims; the goal pursued here is notifying other Muslims of his/her decision.

How does Islam define “religion”?

According to Islamic teachings, religion is defined as “a way of life” and “a complete code of conduct” that Allah conveys to humanity through divine revelations. Religion is a manual for the cherished and inestimably valuable creatures named “humans.”

Islam is the only true religion that is acceptable to Allah. The Creator knows best about His creations and instructions for created beings is best written by their Creator. Human beings need a manual and a road map, and the religion of Islam provides just that, for Allah Himself is the author.

What is the purpose of the religion of Islam?

The purpose of the religion of Islam is to bring about the contentment of human beings in this world and hereafter through living with other humans and nature in peace. The Islamic religion does this in four ways:

1. Ensuring that humans meet their potential in accordance with the purpose of their creation;
2. Allowing humans endowed with active mind, will power, and conscience to develop a sense of moral responsibility;
3. Freeing humans from enslavement to their desires and instincts by providing them with a higher value system; and
4. Teaching humans about their status before Allah, and their status in relation to their fellow human beings and non-human objects.

What is faith (“iymân”) and who is the faithful (“mu’min”)?

To have *iymân* is to trust Allah completely. A *mu’min*, therefore, is one who places his/her trust in Allah. The natural consequence of such trust is a conscious submission to Allah; this complete and unconditional submission is called Islam.

One of the magnificent names of Allah in the Qur’an is Al-Mu’min (The One who trusts). Allah trusts and believes in human beings, and He wants them to trust and believe in Him. In fact, the very existence of human beings is the result of His trust in them.

The Arabic word religion (*al-deen*) is derived from the root word for debt (*al-dayn*). The Creator did not take any payment from human beings for creating them. Human beings are, therefore, indebted to the Creator since birth. However, the Creator does not expect them to pay off their debts, because it is simply impossible to do so. There is no way to pay off this debt other than by those means, which depend on Allah’s blessings. Every single breath a human inhales increases the debt. The constant consciousness of being indebted to Allah and acting accordingly is considered an adequate payment. Furthermore, humans who acknowledge their indebtedness are promised a divine reward—an eternal life in Paradise. The human is expected to believe in this pledge of Allah first, and then in all other messages He sent. Believing in Allah actually means being humbled by trust that He placed in human beings from the very beginning of their creation.

What are the principles of iymân in the Qur’an?

Every single word between the two covers of the Qur’an speaks of faith in Allah. The principles of faith particularly touched upon are the following (see: Baqarah 2:177, 284-285, and Nisa’ 4:136):

Belief in Allah

Belief in Angels

Belief in Divine Books

Belief in the Messengers of Allah, and

Belief in the Day of Judgment

Who is Allah? What does the term “Allah” mean?

Allah is unique and inimitable, beyond comparison, He is absolute, infinite and eternal, and He is the only Creator. The Creator is one, while created beings are uncountable. He is the One whose existence is essential to those created. The word “Allah” is derived from the root “al-Ilah,” meaning “the absolute and infinite Deity.” The anagram of combinations of all versions of the word “Allah” eventually leads to “love.”

He is the One Allah: Allah the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Being. He begets not, and neither is He begotten. And there is nothing that could be compared with Him. (*Ikhlas* 112:1-4)

He is the one who created the universe out of nothing; He governs, regulates laws and ensures a natural order and harmony flows throughout the creation. He is the only One who is perfect and impeccable. Nothing else is truly perfect other than Him. Allah is most compassionate towards man, a dispenser of grace. (*Baqarah* 2:143)

My grace overspreads everything. (*A`raf* 7:156)

Your Sustainer has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy. (*An`am* 6:54)

Our Sustainer is He who gives unto every thing [that exists] its true nature and form and thereupon guides it [towards its fulfillment]. (*Taha* 20:50)

He is the First and the Last. (*Hadid* 57:3)

His being is eternal, without anything preceding His existence, and without anything outlasting His infinity. He is the source of

love, kindness, and compassion. He is the One who created life out of nothing, decreed a purpose of creation and endowed the creations with necessary means to reach it.

No human vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all human vision: for He alone is unfathomable, all-aware. (*'An'am* 6:103)

Allah is He save whom there is no deity: the One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind: He, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace. Allah is He save whom there is no deity: the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the One with whom all salvation rests, the Giver of Faith, the One who determines what is true and false, the Almighty, the One who subdues wrong and restores right, the One to whom all greatness belongs! Utterly remote is Allah, in His limitless glory, from anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity! He is Allah, the Creator, the Maker who shapes all forms and appearances! His [alone] are the attributes of perfection. All that is in the heavens and on earth extols His limitless glory: for He alone is almighty, truly wise! (*Hashr* 59:22-24)

Allah—there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being. Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave? He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to aught of His knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain]. His eternal power overspreads the heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. And he alone is truly exalted, tremendous. (*Baqarah* 2:255)

Verily, He is closer to him than his neck-vein (*Qaf* 50:16).

He is with you wherever you are (*Hadid* 57:4).

Allah is He who is enough for humans while they are not enough for themselves (*Zumar* 39:36).

Allah intervenes between man and [the desires of] his heart, and that unto Him you shall be gathered. (*'Anfal* 8:24)

His mercy is limitless (*Zumar* 39:53).

He is the light of the heavens and Earth (*Nur* 24:35).

Each and every thing is ephemeral, only He is eternal (*Rahman* 55:27).

He determines every single being's existence (*Mursalat* 77:23).

He reveals guidance upon those whom He wishes (*'An'am* 6:91).

On Him depend all creatures in the heavens and on earth; [and] every day He manifests Himself in yet another [wondrous] way. (*Rahman* 55:29)

He has created everything in due measure and proportion (*Qamar* 54:49).

They aim to extinguish Allah's light with their utterances: but Allah has willed to spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to all who deny the truth. (*Saf* 61:8)

And as for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds, We shall most certainly efface their [previous] bad deeds, and shall most certainly reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did. (*'Ankabut* 29:7)

Allah does not resemble any of His creations. What the creation envisages in his/her mind is not Allah because the human mind is finite and limited, while Allah is infinite and limitless. A finite and limited mind cannot comprehend the infinite and limitless One.

Servitude is due only to Allah as He is the only One worthy of worship. Allah has rights over His creations, including worshipping Him alone. Therefore, servitude to and worshipping of any one else is a violation of Allah's right. Logically, being servant of Allah entails not being a servant of any of His servants.

What is the difference between the concepts of Allah in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism?

The concept of Allah in Judaism is anthropomorphic, i.e. God has human attributes. He allegedly acts like a human sometimes and features qualities of a human. For instance, He "regrets" destroying humanity with a typhoon (Genesis 6:5-7); He "impregnates" Sarah (Genesis 21:1-2); He "wrestles" with Jacob (Genesis 32; 22-32); He talks "face to face" with Jacob (Genesis 32:30); and He becomes "tired" and "rests" (Genesis 2:3). Whereas the Qur'an says that "His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on Earth, most exalted and tremendous is He" (*Shuraa* 42:4), "there is nothing like unto Him" (*Shuraa* 42:11), and "No human vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all human vision" (*An'am* 6:103).

According to the Torah, Yahweh is a "national" god of the tribe of Israel (Genesis 17:8), whereas in the Qur'an, "Allah is the Lord of all mankind" (*Nas* 114:1) and "the Sustainer of all the worlds" (*Shu'ara'* 26:164).

The concept of God in Christianity, on the other hand, is theomorphic, i.e. a human being has allegedly assumed divine attributes. This is a point on which the Christian doctrine of divinity is similar to doctrines of ancient polytheistic cultures such as those of Egypt, Mesopotamia or India. The divine nature of Jesus is strongly advocated for in Christianity. However, the Qur'an considers this as a slander to Jesus who is presented as only a prophet of Allah (see the Qur'an Ma'idah 5:117). The Qur'an strongly rejects the ideology of theomorphic approach in Surah Al-Ikhlâs:

"Say: He is Allah, unique, inimitable and one. All creatures are in need of him while He is in need of no one. He begets not, and neither is He begotten"

(*Ikhlâs* 112:1-4)

How does the Qur'an describe Allah?

What attributes of Allah does the Qur'an dwell into?

Allah's defining attribute is that of infinite Mercy and every act of His is infused with His boundless Compassion and Grace:

"He alone is truly Forgiving, Loving and wants to be loved by his servants" (Buruġ 85:14).

Allah is He save whom there is no deity: the One who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind:

"Allah is He save whom there is no deity: the Supreme Sovereign, the Holy, the One with whom all salvation rests, the Giver of Faith and Safety, the ultimate Determiner of what is good and true and Definer of what is false, the Compeller (whose will is carried out in every circumstance), the One to whom all Greatness belongs! Utterly remote is Allah, in His limitless glory, from anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity!" ('Alī`Imran 3:2)

He is Allah, the Creator, the Maker who shapes all forms and appearances! His [alone] are the attributes of perfection. All that is in the heavens and on earth extols His limitless glory: for He alone is almighty, truly wise.

"Allah—there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being. Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth. Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it be by His leave? He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to aught of His knowledge save that which He wills [them to attain]. His eternal power overspreads the heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. And he alone is truly exalted, tremendous." (Baqarah 2:255)

"Allah—there is no deity save Him, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being!" ('Alī`Imran 3:2)

"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth." (Nur 24:35)

"It is Allah who has created you, and then has provided you with sustenance, and then will cause you to die, and then will bring you to life again. Can any of those beings or powers to whom you ascribe a share in His divinity do any of these things? Limitless is He in His glory, and sublimely exalted above anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity!"
(Rum 30:40)

"O men! It is you, who stand in need of Allah, whereas He alone is self-sufficient, the One to whom all praise is due."
(Fatir 35:15)

"Is not Allah enough for His servant? And yet, they would frighten thee with those [imaginary divine powers which they worship] beside Him! But he whom Allah lets go astray can never find any guide."
(Zumar 39:36)

"He who desires might and glory [ought to know that] all might and glory belong to Allah [alone]. Unto Him ascend all good words, and the righteous deed does He exalt."
(Fatir 35:10)

"And Allah alone comprehends the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth: for all that exists goes back to Him [as its source]. Worship Him, then, and place thy trust in Him alone: for thy Sustainer is not unaware of what you do."
(Hud 11:123)

"Now whoever surrenders his whole being unto Allah, and is a doer of good withal, has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing: for with Allah rests the final outcome of all events."
(Luqman 31:22)

"...He whom Allah guides aright can never be led astray. Is not Allah almighty, an avenger of evil?"
(Zumar 39:37)

What is tawheed (monotheism) in Islam?

The first and foremost criteria anything and everything done in the name of Islam is *tawheed* (monotheism). *Tawheed* can be summarized in the phrase “*La ilaha illa Allah*” — “There is no deity but Allah.” The phrase is also known as “Al-Kalimah al-Tawheed.” This statement is the key to the faith of Islam and the underlying code of existence as such. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad described the spiritual weight of this declaration as “heavier than that of the universe.”

“*La ilaha illa Allah*” is composed of two halves: the first part (*la ilaha*) is the statement of negation: “there is no god,” and the second part (*illa Allah*) is affirmation: “There is only Allah.” The positive and negative polarity in this sentence encompasses all things in the universe. For example, the polarity of a proton and a neutron in the nucleus of an atom, the centripetal and centrifugal forces that keep stars, planets and other celestial objects in their orbits and maintain their synchrony and harmony. In living beings, this polarity manifests itself in life and death. In breathing beings, it is observed in inhalation and exhalation. In the digital industry, the “0” and “1” codes represent this concept. Everything in the universe is part of this cosmic choir that hymns the word of *tawheed* (*la ilaha illa Allah*), including the birth and death of the creation. Confirming *tawheed* defines belonging to the universe. Thus, “*la ilaha illa Allah*” is an invitation to human beings to behave in a morally responsible manner towards the universe, of which they are a part. But, first and foremost, “*la ilaha illa Allah*” is the entry code to *tawheed*.

One who enters the creed of *tawheed* by pronouncing the words “*la ilaha illa Allah*,” he/she pledges that:

- Allah is the meaning of everything that exists. Therefore, disconnecting anything from its Creator means cutting it off from its meaning and the purpose of its creation.
- All things are interconnected and everything is connected with the One; that is Allah.
- There is no aspect of life wherein Allah has no say, and there is no life that does not dependent on Him.
- Allah is one and creations are many.

Belief in polytheism is degrading of the Truth, and deification of the created is degrading of the dignity of being! All tyrants and oppressors are the products of the latter injustice. Eradicating anything from the order of the universe is against the will of Allah, even if they are objects of innocence and beauty or such abhorrent things as atheism.

“And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith (but he did not will)”

(Yunus 10:99)

What is the difference between tawheed in Islam and the Christian concept of the Trinity?

As the very names suggest, the two terms contradict each other. The belief in Oneness of Allah is the basis of Islam, while belief in a tripartite nature of Allah is a clear contradiction to that. *Tawheed* teaches that Allah is absolutely single, infinite and superior over any other entity; He has no partners and no being resembles Him; He has neither begotten nor He begets. Obviously, the concept of trinity speaks to the exact opposite of these teachings.

Every single prophet of Allah sent to people shared the belief in the monotheistic nature of Allah. The concept of trinity was only introduced by Athenagoras some 150 years after Jesus the son of

Mary lived on Earth. The concept was further systematized and institutionalized as the foundation of belief by chief church official Tertullian (160-220) who was influenced by other polytheistic cultures.

According to teachings of *tawheed*, a Muslim cannot pray to anyone but Allah; therefore, Prophet Muhammad cannot be worshipped. On the contrary, the concept of trinity divinizes the personality of Jesus the son of Mary (peace unto him) and legitimizes a Christian's worship of him. It is recorded that Prophet Muhammad has told his only surviving child before his death: "My daughter Fatima! Save yourself from the Hellfire with your good deeds. I swear by Allah, I cannot do anything for you in the Hereafter!"

Further, according to teachings of *tawheed*, Prophet Muhammad's body is not sacred. On the contrary, the concept of trinity sanctifies the body of Jesus son of Mary. The concept of *tawheed* prohibits Muslims from deifying Prophet Muhammad. Doing so would be no different from worshipping idols. The concept of trinity, on the contrary, asserts that failing to recognize a deity in Jesus the son of Mary would disqualify one as a Christian.

What is the essence of servitude to Allah in Islam?

Humans' servitude to Allah in Islam bears three meanings:

1. *Not being a slave of one's own desires*: Islam opposes one's falling slave to their own ego and corrupting desires. Should that happen, that person's reason, will and consciousness would fall as well. The Qur'an describes this state of mind as turning desires into one's deity (*Furqan* 25:43). Thus, being a slave to Allah is refusing to be enslaved by impulses and desires.

2. *Not being a slave of another human*: Islam prohibits enslavement of one human by another human. Those who do so along with those who agree to be enslaved—voluntarily or not—

are equally accountable before Allah. This aspect of servitude to Allah protects humans from their fellow humans' evils.

3. *Not being a slave of worldly matters*: Islam prohibits humans from enslavement to the world, power, money, status or any other matter. The goal here is preventing humans from becoming worldly creatures, which contradicts their purpose of creation. Should that happen, the human would place himself beneath other creatures on the hierarchy of creations.

What is the essence of belief in angels?

Belief in angels comprises the following three aspects:

1. Accepting the fact that existence includes creations and beings that are beyond our five perception faculties' capacity;
2. Accepting the fact that there exists a dimension beyond human comprehension; and
3. Accepting the fact that objects have unseen dimensions beyond dimensions we can perceive.

How does Islam describe angels?

The word "angel" instantly invokes the name of "Gabriel" — the angel of revelation, who is often mentioned in the Qur'an. The archangel Gabriel's task is delivering divine perfect revelations to Allah's prophets on Earth. The angel of revelation is a messenger between the divine source of revelation—the well-guarded divine writ (al-lawh al-makhfooth) and bearers of the prophetic mission. Gabriel delivered the Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad over the period of 23 years; and Prophet Muhammad saw Gabriel in his true shape and nature twice (*Najm* 53:5-18).

Angels are such creatures, who unconditionally and absolutely submit themselves to Allah. The Qur'anic concept of "angels" includes "the metaphysical codes of physical entities," which Allah utilizes whenever He wishes to do so. Allah is involved in the lives of His physical creatures by the means of metaphysical codes, which the Qur'an calls "angels" as well. Prophet Abraham was saved precisely in this way from the fire

Nimrod threw him into. Prophet Moses and those who believed in his prophetic mission were able to cross the Red Sea thanks to that divine intervention. Whatever the true nature of this divine intervention's metaphysic mechanism is, the Qur'an employs the term "angels."

Who is Satan according to Islam?

Islam teaches that Satan (Devil) is not an enemy or a competitor of Allah; rather Satan is a deviant and sinful slave of Allah. The conclusion one arrives at after reading the stories of Adam and Satan in the Qur'an is that both Adam and Satan disobeyed Allah's commands and thus committed sin (*Taha* 20:121). However, Adam realized his shortcoming and repented to Allah and Allah forgave him (*Baqarah* 2:37), whereas Satan adamantly insisted on advocating for his sin of revolting against Allah and was therefore deprived of Allah's divine mercy (*A'raf* 7:12). Islam teaches that Satan knows Allah in His true state and acknowledges Allah's supremacy over anyone and anything; furthermore, Satan swears by Allah's majesty and supremacy (*Anfal* 8:48).

According to the Qur'an, Satan is an enemy and a competitor of humans, and certainly not of Allah. Satan has vowed to apply every effort possible to lead Allah's creations astray from the divinely ordained path and to take as many humans to the Hellfire as possible along with himself (*A'raf* 7:16).

Allah has allowed Satan to continue his existence only to prevent humans from alienating other fellow humans. The reason behind Satan's existence is preventing humans from alienating their own fellow humans. Humans are not immune to weaknesses, which are actually side effects of humans' virtues. One of the weaknesses humans suffer from is a constant search for an enemy. Satan is certainly an enemy to humans. By creating Satan, Allah is sending humans the following message: O humans! If there is one

entity you must alienate from yourself and alienate yourself from it, it is Satan! For Satan is your apparent enemy! (*Baqarah 2:168*).

According to the last revelation, Satan has no power whatsoever over those humans, who have active mind, freewill and clear conscience to be aware of responsibility and accountability (*'Isra' 17:65*). Therefore, if one does end up under Satan's influence, he has no right to blame Satan for that. Allah has given that human mind, will and conscience, which he failed to activate and employ for his own benefit (*Zukhruf 43:36*). Failing to resist Satan's temptations and empty promises does not constitute an excuse (*'Ibrahim 14:22*).

What is belief in heavenly scriptures?

The Islamic belief in divine scriptures includes believing in the heavenly origin of all books that were revealed onto humankind since Adam (peace be upon him). A Muslim cannot be considered a “Muslim” unless he has an absolute faith in all revelations and scriptures, including the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur’an.

Unfortunately, it is a historical fact that we do not have the originals of divine scriptures revealed before the Qur’an. The divine commandments they contain have been subjected to alterations over time; the Qur’an discusses such instances in *‘Ala* 87:14-19; *Ma’idah* 5:32, 45; *Anbya’* and 21:105.

The Qur’an presents itself as a confirmation of “the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein” (*Ma’idah* 5:48). The only way to test the authenticity of whatever is in the previous revelations’ modern iterations is comparing them to the Qur’an. If a passage conforms to what the Qur’an postulates, then that particular passage’s divine revelation can be asserted. However, in case there are discrepancies, then one could conclude that the passage in question has undergone changes and alterations over time since its revelation.

What is the essence of divine revelations?

The term “wahiy” (“revelation”) means “delivering a message to a recipient in a secretive and rapid way without uttering it.”

The revelations are the way Allah communicates with humans.

The revelations are what Allah descends upon humans in response to their prayers ascending to Him.

The revelations are means of communication by the Superior with His subjects.

The revelations are condescension infinite and immortal Allah bestows upon His finite and mortal creations.

The revelations are manuals for humans. The best manual for a device is written by its producer. Similarly, He who created humans provides them with the best manual to live by.

The revelations are a divine project for building humans' character. In other words, the revelations deliver a blueprint, which conforms to the purpose of humans' creation and life on Earth. To be precise, revelations shape humans in the following four ways: 1) imagination by concepts; 2) mind by propositions; 3) personality by examples; and 4) life by its entirety.

What ways were revelations descended by?

The Qur'an says, "by the following three ways" in *Shuraa* 42:51: *"And it is not given to mortal man that Allah should speak unto him otherwise than through sudden [1] inspiration, or [2] [by a voice, as it were,] from behind a veil, or [3] by sending an apostle to reveal, by His leave, whatever He wills [to reveal]."*

What is the purpose of revelations?

The purpose of the revelation is: A human-centric life; a faith-oriented human; a knowledge-based faith, and truth-based knowledge. And the core of truth is, of course, Allah. The revelations save humans from being subjects of time and turn them into commanders of time. The revelations save humans from being horses of life and turn them into riders of life. The revelations relieve humans from being subjects of power and turn

them into holders of power. The revelations turn humans into masters of matter and servants of the worthy Master.

What is the practical value of revelations?

The practical value of revelations is its capacity to save humans from their own vicious egos and corrupting desires as well as enabling their appropriate use of reason and will to their fullest capacities. To ensure this:

1. *The revelation draws boundaries and teaches humans the purpose of creation:* By remaining within those boundaries, the humans are relieved of uncertainties of life, and they feel and enjoy submission to the Supreme Being.

2. *The revelation exposes humans' strengths and weaknesses:* The human sees himself reflected in the mirror of revelations and cognizes himself. He who cognizes himself, knows himself. And he who knows himself, knows his Lord.

3. *The revelation teaches the human about Allah:* There are two ways of learning about Allah: 1) the divine revelations which are literal words of Allah; 2) Allah's great masterpiece—the nature around us. The revelation is not limited to teaching us how to read Allah's words; it also teaches us recognizing His signs in nature. Therefore the Arabic word "âyah" is used both for verses and signs.

4. *The revelation teaches about the unseen phenomena and the Hereafter, which humans are unable to learn employing empiric methods:* The existence of a dimension above and beyond humans' perception (*al-ghayb*) is certain. If one were to speak about this dimension without knowledge, it would be pure speculation. Baseless speculations lead to contradictions, on the one hand, and false beliefs in bogus metaphysics, on the other. The only reliable source of knowledge about the unseen is Allah, for His infinite knowledge encompasses that world, which is inconceivable for humans. Thus, the revelation is a divine source that teaches us reliable knowledge about *al-ghayb*.

What is the Qur'an?

The Arabic word "*Qur'an*" means a book, which is "always read," "has boundless meanings," and whose meaning is "unsurpassable by reading alone."

Thus, *the Qur'an* is a book, whose text was revealed once, but whose meanings are revealed endless times till the end of the world. That is why one cannot say, "I finished reading the Qur'an" in the past tense, for the Qur'an's meanings are not finished by reading its words on paper. The Qur'an is an eternal miracle. As is known, all of the prophets performed miracles, which were dominant in their respective times and locations. The Qur'an's distinction, however, is that it is a "living miracle," which speaks to and about all times and spaces in the world and beyond. The most potent evidence for that is the existence of men and women in various corners of the world, who completely changed their lives for the better thanks to the Qur'an's irresistible logic, eloquence, and meaning. Considering enormous efforts and dedications one must commit to changing their personality, shunning and abandoning bad habits, and altering their way of life in its core, the great miracle of the Qur'an manifests itself again.

The Qur'an is a book with one end in the heavens and the other on Earth. The Qur'an was actually revealed not as a text, but as an inspiration from Allah in the spoken word form, delivered by angel Gabriel, to the reasoning soul and mind of the Messenger of Allah. The divine revelation, imprinted in Prophet Muhammad's mind, was then inscribed on tree bark, paper pieces, and animal skin, and then delivered to the rest of humanity.

What kind of book is the Qur'an?

The revelation of the Qur'an to the reasoning soul of Muhammad the son of Abdullah, who was known in Mecca as the "The Trustworthy," commenced in the year 610. The first revelation took place in the Hira cave on a mountain near Mecca; the rest of the Qur'an was revealed over the next 23 years in the cities of Mecca and Medina until the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632. Allah informed the Prophet and his companions about the impending completion of the revelations by the following Qur'anic verse: "...Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender unto Me (i.e., Islam) shall be your religion" (Ma'idah 5:3).

The Qur'an consists of 114 chapters known as "surahs." The topics and contents of these *surahs* vary depending mostly on events at the time of their revelation. Each verse in a *surah* is called an "âyah" ("sign").

As mentioned above, the Qur'an was not revealed as a holy script, but was delivered as spoken word. Prophet Muhammad had then dictated the descending Qur'anic verses and they were inscribed on physical matters. The Qur'an was collected as one volume shortly after the death of Prophet Muhammad; it is called the "muskhaf."

There are about two billion Muslims in the world and they all read the same Qur'an. Although there are various schools of jurisprudence among Muslims, the book they read and cherish is the same Qur'an.

The revelation of the Qur'an took place in two cities:

1. The Mecca period is the time Prophet Muhammad spent in Mecca since the commencement of revelations till the 13th year of his prophethood. This period is known as time when the Muslim minority was severely oppressed by the polytheist majority. The characteristic feature of *surahs* and âyahs revealed then is the

priority of eloquence over meaning. (To be sure, this does not entail that the revelation was eloquent, but meaningless.) The Meccan âyahs are short and poetic in rendering, and mostly speak of morals and foundations of faith and morals.

2. The Medina period was 10 years, which started with Prophet Muhammad's migration (*hijrah*) from Mecca and finished when he died. Unlike in Mecca, Muslims are the ruling majority in this period, wherein the revelation stresses meaning over eloquence. The Medina âyahs and *surahs* are long and elaborate, and mostly speak of worship and legal matters in Islam.

What are the contents of the Qur'an?

The main topics in the Qur'an could perhaps be classified in the following four broad fields:

1. Morals and behavior;
2. Creed;
3. Prayers and worship; and
4. Rules of individual and collective behavior.

Why does the Qur'an suddenly change topics?

As stated above, the Qur'an was revealed in portions over the last 23 years of Prophet Muhammad's life in Mecca and Medina, responding to events therein. This fact indicates that the Qur'an is not an "untouchable book," but it is a "book, touching upon life." Furthermore, it is a book that speaks to and about events of life; hence, the "book of life."

Indeed, one could be bemused while reading the Qur'an for the first time, for this divine book has no usual "introduction-climax-conclusion" structure. The Qur'an features no such structure, for it was not authored by a human for an isolated purpose. On the contrary, the divinely inspired script responded to Muslims'

day-to-day predicaments, joys, problems, and achievements in two different cities over a timespan of 23 years. The content of the Qur'an and daily life issues reflect each other. Therefore, the Qur'an is just as orderly and complex as the life itself; as colorful as is life; as apparent and mysterious as life is. Finally, the Qur'an is as obvious and full of surprises as our worldly life is.

Having read the Qur'an from the beginning to the end, one arrives at the following conclusion: the link between the revelation and life is the link between a praying person and Allah.

Is the Qur'an the literal word of Allah?

Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains the literal word of Allah the Almighty. Believing so is one of the conditions of the Islamic faith. The basis of this faith rests on its moral equivalent—trust. Muslims have sincere faith that Prophet Muhammad would not have said something was from Allah while it was not so. Muslims see proof for that in his sincere, honest and morally distinct life. The source of an impressive and inspiring life he lived after receiving the revelation was the Qur'an. There is not even a hint of hypocrisy or lie in his entire life. Even his enemies acknowledged him as “Muhammad al-Amin” (“Muhammad the Trustworthy”).

Prophet Muhammad was able to live as “al-amîn” not only thanks to his own virtues, but also because Allah would instantly reprimand him for or show him his mistakes via the Qur'anic revelation, in case such a situation arose. For example, Allah harshly criticizes Prophet Muhammad for frowning upon a blind person for interrupting him during a conversation with lords of Mecca, whose conversion to Islam would benefit the Muslim community and ease their hardships (*Abasa* 80:3-4). When the hypocrites of Medina secured Prophet Muhammad's permission to abstain from joining a Muslim army, the divine revelation

carried Allah's rebuke: "*May Allah pardon thee [O Prophet]! Why didst thou grant them permission [to stay at home] ere it had become obvious to thee as to who was speaking the truth, and [ere] thou camest to know [who were] the liars?*" (*Tawbah* 9:43). Prophet Muhammad is rebuked for hesitating to rule in favor of a Jew in his claims against a Muslim when the former was right and the latter was wrong (*Nisa'* 4:105-107). He was also warned for praying funeral prayers of hypocrites (*Tawbah* 9:84). Also, there were two instances when what he wanted to remain concealed was unveiled by the revelation (*Ahzab* 33:37; *Tahrim* 66:1).

There is another proof that the Qur'an originates from the divine source: the Qur'an does not touch upon very important people, events, and aspects of Prophet Muhammad's life. For instance, while there is an entire *surah* named after and dedicated to Mary, mother of Jesus, Prophet Muhammad's mother is not mentioned even in one *ayah*. Despite the fact Prophet Muhammad had a profound impact on humans' history, the Qur'an does not mention the deaths of such people as his wife Khadija, his uncle and protector Abu Talib, and his son Abraham and other children, who were obviously very dear to his heart. There are many more examples of this kind.

Yet another proof that the Qur'an descended from the Lord of the seen and unseen is that intricacies and details of the world and the universe, which Prophet Muhammad could not have possibly been knowledgeable of, are written in the Qur'an. For example, the constant expansion of the universe (*Dhariyat* 51:47); the sky and Earth were contiguous and separated afterwards, and everything is created from water (*Anbya'* 21:30); Earth is shaped like an egg (*Shams* 91:6); winds pollinate plants (*Hijr* 15:22); and cloud systems bring about rains (*Ibrahim* 14:20). Further, the Qur'an details the lives of prophets of the past and predicts the imminent defeat of the Roman Empire at the hands of the Persian Sassanid Empire (*Rum* 30:2-5).

Yet another proof that the Qur'an originates from the divine source of previous heavenly scripts is that a handful of people, educated by the Qur'an, were able to fulfill one of most significant surges of faith in human history. The revelation of the Qur'an is the driving force behind Islam's existence and its winning of hearts and minds of people throughout centuries. From this perspective, one of the most astounding proofs until the end of the world that the Qur'an is a divine revelation is its unprecedented impact on humans. The Qur'an's impact on its interlocutor is proportional to the latter's belief and faith: the stronger one's faith in the Qur'an, the more impact the Qur'an has on his life.

What steps are taken to safeguard the Qur'an from alteration?

The following precautions were undertaken to preserve and safeguard the text of the Qur'an:

1. *Preserving the revelation in written form:* The very first instance of revelation reads that Allah is "*He who has taught [man] the use of the pen*" (*Alaqa* 96:4-5), which is a subtle indication that the revelation was to be preserved by the use of a pen. Another indication to that effect is also seen in "*Noon. [Consider] the pen, and all that they write [therewith]!*" (*Qalam* 68:1), which is among the earliest instances of revelation.

As is known, the Arab culture of the day was mostly based on oral traditions and almost no written documents were used. Having received the abovementioned instructions, Prophet Muhammad instituted a new tradition of written preservation of documents in Mecca. To preserve the divine revelation in the written form, 42 scribes were engaged in the process over 23 years. From this perspective, Prophet Muhammad was the first person to compile the entire revelation in one volume. On the day of his passing, the entire revelation was compiled into and readily available as one volume.

2. *Preserving the revelation in salâh* (daily prayers): The very first instance of revelation speaks of *salâh* (*`Alaq* 96:10). This fact also indicates that the Qur'an played an equal role with prayers in early Muslims' lives. *Salâh* is like a vessel containing the Qur'an. While it is permissible, indeed commanded, to read the Qur'an outside *salâh*, Prophet Muhammad said no *salâh* can be performed without reciting the Qur'an: "No prayer [is complete] without the Qur'an [i.e. Surah Al-Fatihah]" (narrated by al-Bukhâri). *Salâh* is obligatory upon every faithful. Thus, the Qur'an is preserved in Muslims' prayers. After all, a great number of companions learned the Qur'an by heart by listening to Prophet Muhammad during congregational prayers.

Another aspect of the preservation of the Qur'an in *salâh* is the joint Friday prayer, which was instituted in Medina. Prophet Muhammad delivered around 500 sermons in Medina. The majority of these sermons were about the Qur'an, where he would often recite Qur'anic passages. This is another aspect of the preservation of the Qur'an.

3. *Preserving the revelation in human memories*: The early Muslims would inscribe the revelation on whatever they were able to do so, and then memorize it. Sixteen companions have compiled their own *muskhafs* while Prophet Muhammad was alive. While the content of these copies and the content of today's *muskhaf* are identical, there are differences in the ordering of *surahs*, because every scribe used their own methods.

Prophet Muhammad's contemporaries and companions memorized the Qur'an from cover to cover, which is known as "hifdh," while the person who accomplishes *hifdh* is called a "hâfidh." As history unfolded since the Qur'an's revelation, numbers of *hâfidhs* grew exponentially, thus enabling the passage of this divine book to following generations in its living memory form over the last 1,400 years. Undoubtedly, the number of *hâfidhs* among Muslims of today certainly exceeds hundreds of millions.

Throughout the Middle Ages and to date, no other community has read so much and so often as the Muslims have their holy book, whose first instance of revelation commenced with the command of "Read!"

How was the Qur'an transmitted to the later generations?

Ali ibn Abu Talib, the Prophet's cousin and one of his closest companions, has secluded himself from the world for six months following the death of Prophet Muhammad. In this period, he compiled a copy of the entire Qur'an from the scrolls inscribed with fragments of the divine revelation.

During Caliph Abu Bakr's ruling, the scattered volume dictated by Prophet Muhammad personally was compiled into a book—a *mushhaf*—from documented sources and memories of contemporary Muslims with each verse verified by at least two witnesses as to the authenticity and its location in the book. A committee under Zayd ibn Thabit's chairmanship compiled the Qur'an we have today with its present ordering of *surahs* and *ayahs* during Caliph Uthman ibn Affan's term. Caliph Uthman then made at least four copies of this book and sent them to various political and religious centers of the Islamic world.

Thus, there are several copies of the Qur'an, highly probably issued in the first *hijri* century, in different parts of the world today. There is a copy in Yemen; two copies in Istanbul, Turkey; one copy in Cairo, Egypt; an incomplete Tashkent copy in Saint Petersburg, Russia; and, an incomplete copy in London, the UK. These copies are identical to the millions of officially released copies of the *mushhaf* we read daily, save minor orthographic variances. These difference stem from the fact that the Arabic script does not have vowels; instead, a system of lines and signs above and below consonants was later introduced, which allow for slightly differing reading. The invented system of vowel

sounds leads to minor differences, but absolutely does not alter the Qur'anic verses' meanings.

Is there an order in the current location of *surahs* and âyahs?

There are two types of order: The order of 1) âyahs and 2) *surahs*. Prophet Muhammad directly instructed the current location of âyahs. As the Qur'anic passages were revealed, Prophet Muhammad instructed his scriptwriters to write them in their appropriate locations. Furthermore, he used to read these passages in his daily obligatory and voluntary prayers and in the Friday prayer sermons; his companions would thus learn âyahs in their proper order.

The ordering of *surahs* is classified into two types:

1. *The official ordering*: The current ordering and location of *surahs* in the *muskhafs* was instituted by a committee of companions in the times of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan.

2. *The revelation order*: The chronological order of revelation of the Qur'anic chapters. Several companions maintained private compilations of *surah* and âyah revelations, which differ from each other.

What is the status of reason and mind in Islam?

The Qur'an is a book that requires its readers to reason and employ their minds, which is explicitly stated multiple times throughout its text. There is no other holy script that would encourage reasoning as much as the Qur'an does.

The Qur'an does not use the word "reason" (*al-'aql*) in its noun form, but uses it as a verb, i.e. "to reason" (*ta'qqul*). This fact entails three outcomes:

1. Reasoning is considered existent when it is active and vice versa;
2. The Qur'an attributes a great value to active, actual and dynamic reasoning;
3. The Qur'an does not grant ontological independence to reason and does not make it absolute.

The Qur'an mentions "knowledge" (*al-'ilm*) in 850 instances. Knowledge is certainly linked with reasoning; therefore, any mention of knowledge in the Qur'an, by extension, is a reference to reasoning.

Are there verses about reasoning in the Qur'an?

The Qur'anic approach to humans' reason is perhaps best examined in light of the following âyahs:

"It is He who lays the loathsome evil [of disbelief] upon those who will not use their reason." (Yunus 10:100)

"Verily, the vilest of all creatures in the sight of Allah are those deaf, those dumb ones who do not use their reason." ('Anfal 8:22)

"And most certainly did We overwhelm Pharaoh's people with drought and scarcity of fruits, so that they might take it to heart."

(A`raf 7:130)

"And most certainly have We destined for hell many of the invisible beings and men who have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle - nay, they are even less conscious of the right way: it is they, they who are the [truly] heedless!"

(A`raf 7:179)

"And there are on earth [many] tracts of land close by one another [and yet widely differing from one another]; and [there are on it] vineyards, and fields of grain, and date-palms growing in clusters from one root or standing alone, [all] watered with the same water: and yet, some of them have We favored above others by way of the food [which they provide for man and beast]. Verily, in all this there are messages indeed for people who use their reason!"

(Ra`d 13:4)

"And He it is who grants life and deals death; and to Him is due the alternation of night and day. Will you not, then, use your reason?"

(Mu`minun 23:80)

"Thus clearly do We spell out these messages unto people who use their reason."

(Rum 30:28)

"Did We not grant you a life long enough so that whoever was willing to take thought could bethink himself? And [withal,] a warner had come unto you! Taste, then, [the fruit of your evil deeds]: for evildoers shall have none to succor them!"

(Fatir 35:37)

What is the connection between reason and Divine revelations?

The following âyah interchangeably uses "reasoning" and "listening" to the revelations while conveying words of the Hellfire dwellers: *"Had we but listened [to revelations], or [at least] used our own reason, we would not [now] be among those who are*

destined for the blazing flame!" (Mulk 67:10). This âyah shows that uncorrupted revelation and reasoning can equally lead one to the truth. Just like the Qur'an calls Earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, and day and night âyahs ("signs"), so are called the basic units (sentences) in its chapters.

"[All this have We expounded in this] blessed divine writ, which We have revealed unto thee, [O Muhammad,] so that men may ponder over its messages, and that those who are endowed with insight may take them to heart." (Sad 38:29)

"But when they are told, 'Follow what Allah has bestowed from on high,' some answer, 'Nay, we shall follow [only] that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing.' Why, even if their forefathers did not use their reason at all, and were devoid of all guidance?" (Baqarah 2:170)

"Those who believe, and whose hearts find their rest in the remembrance of Allah – for, verily, in the remembrance of Allah [men's] hearts do find their rest." (Ra'd 13:28)

What is the Islamic point of view of the Old Testament and the New Testament?

The Qur'an asserts that, like the Qur'an itself, both the Old Testament and the New Testament originate from the same divine source. But the Qur'an also maintains that clergies altered both previous scripts and interpreted them in an erroneous manner, thus leading to the loss of their original contents and meanings.

Does the Qur'an speak about Jews and Christians; if so, what is said about them?

The Qur'an speaks about Jews and Christians in a number of instances. The Qur'an distinguishes between those Jews and Christians to be praised and to be chastised. See the following âyahs: *"[But] they are not all alike: among the followers of earlier revelation*

there are upright people, who recite Allah's messages throughout the night, and prostrate themselves [before Him]. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and vie with one another in doing good works: and these are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they shall never be denied the reward thereof: for, Allah has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him. [But,] behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth - neither their worldly possessions nor their children will in the least avail them against Allah: and it is they who are destined for the fire, therein to abide."

(‘Ali `Imran 3:113-116)

"And among the followers of earlier revelation there is many a one who, if thou entrust him with a treasure, will [faithfully] restore it to thee; and there is among them many a one who, if thou entrust him with a tiny gold coin, will not restore it to thee unless thou keep standing over him."

(‘Ali `Imran 3:75)

What is faith in prophets, and how does it benefit humans?

Belief in prophets is:

1. *A belief in Allah's presence in our daily lives:* Allah did not create the Universe and the best kind of creations—humans—and then abandon them. Prophets serve as evidence that Allah did not abandon His creations. Allah is directly involved in humans' history and life, and prophets are one aspect of His engagement.

2. *A belief that Allah guides the humankind:* Prophets are role models. By sending a messenger to humans from amongst themselves, Allah is showing that He trusts humans and that humans are not to be hopeless about fellow humans.

3. *A belief that good people and good deeds are never forgotten or wasted:* Prophets were actively good members of their respective societies. They devoted their lives and souls for the betterment of humans' happiness and expected nothing worldly in return from them. The Qur'an names twenty-eight of them and tells their stories. The message is that good people and their deeds are never forgotten.

What is the practical value of faith in prophets?

Every single prophet is a role model for humans in all places and times, because the stories of the prophets' lives can be related and studied. The calamities that befell them and the achievements they reached can certainly happen again to anyone in any time and space until the world comes to its end. One does not have to travel in time to enjoy the company of prophets of the past. One

only needs to uphold and implement the mission of the prophets in their lifetimes.

What is prophethood and who are the prophets?

Prophethood is a divine window opened for humans. It is also the most unique educational institution that humanity has witnessed. These “professors” never rest or retire. Therefore, prophethood remains the longest lasting voluntary institution in human history.

Prophets were people assigned by Allah to deliver and teach His guidance to humans. They were subject to all laws of physics and physiology like any other human: they were born; they ate and drank; they rejoiced and grieved; they enjoyed good health and fell ill; finally, they died or were killed. Allah tasked them with delivering His message to humans without altering or corrupting it. They were neither paid for fulfilling this task nor did they ask for payment. They never lied about Allah’s words and teachings. They respected the boundaries Allah drew for them. In short, they completely devoted their entire lives to Allah’s cause.

What were specific properties of the prophets?

They were humans, not angels (*Fussilat 41:6*).

They were the best examples of how to live the message they were sent with (*Ahzab 33:21*).

They were truthful and sincere at all times (*Maryam 19:41*).

They were virtuous ones endeavoring hardships of this life (*Anbya’ 21:85-86*).

They asked no payment for fulfilling their task (*Hud 11:51*).

They all propagated one religion and pursued the same goal and creed with difference only in language, method and application (*Ma’idah 5:48*).

What are the things a prophet would not and could not do?

Ask people to worship him (*'Ali`Imran* 3:79).

Escape from the prophetic mission (*Saffat* 37:140).

Deliver the divine message when or how they wanted (*Ghafir* 40:78).

Conceal Allah's message (*Haqqah* 69:44).

Intercede for someone whom Allah does not allow intercession for (*Zumar* 39:44).

Know the time of the end of the world (*Nazi`at* 79:43).

Know the unseen unless Allah made them aware of it (*A`raf* 7:188).

Guide own family members or loved ones to monotheism (*Qasas* 28:56), and

Allowing that, which Allah prohibits or prohibiting that, which Allah allows (*Tahrim* 66:1).

Who is Prophet Muhammad?

Prophet Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca in 571 A.D. and died in the city of Medina in 632 A.D. The family he was born into was part of the respected Hashemite tribe, which administered Mecca. His father's name was Abdullah and his mother's name was Aminah. He grew up as an orphan (*Duhaa* 93:6), because Abdullah passed away before Aminah gave birth to Muhammad and Aminah herself died when little Muhammad was about six years of age. The orphaned Muhammad grew up under the protection of his grandfather, Abdulmuttalib, who was an elder of Mecca. Young Muhammad was engaged in commerce, which took him as far as the lands of Sham (modern day Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine). He was such a reliable and trustworthy man that all of Mecca knew him as "Muhammad al-Amin" (Muhammad the Trustworthy).

His exceptional honesty earned the attention of Khadija, a woman engaged in commercial and business partnership with him. Muhammad later married Khadija, who was already married twice before marrying him. At the time of marriage, Khadija was a 40-year-old single mother of three while Muhammad was a 25-year-old young man consummating his first marriage. The couple parented six children.

After assuming his prophetic mission, Prophet Muhammad spent 13 years in Mecca where he applied every effort to disseminate the Qur'anic teachings despite constant harassments and real dangers Meccan polytheists posed to him and his companions. He spent the last 10 years of his life in Medina where he migrated upon receiving information that polytheists were plotting to assassinate

him. He spent those years in Medina building a model Muslim community and delivering the Qur'anic message to wherever he and his companions could reach. Muslims from Mecca joined the Prophet in his migration and formed a significant community with the Muslims of Medina. This Muslim community spent the first half of the Medina period repelling assaults on and attempts to extinguish their small community. Such attempts caused the battles of Badr, Uhud and Khandaq, to name only the significant ones. In the *hijri* year six, Meccan polytheists and Muslims of Medina signed the Peace Treaty of Hudaibiyya, thereby recognizing the existence of an Islamic city-state in Medina. Coupled with the conquest of Khaybar a year later, the young Islamic state confirmed its status as a new regional superpower. Having victoriously returned to Mecca without bloodshed in the *hijri* year eight, which they were expelled from under the threat of death, and decisively overpowering enemies at the battle of Hunayn, Muslims have eliminated the last traces of military threats to their existence.

Prophet Muhammad died in a room next to a mosque he had built in Medina on Rabi ul-Awwal 11, 10 *hijri* (June 8, 632 A.D.), and was buried therein. At the time of his death, he was 63 years old. His grave is still in Medina and has been available for visiting over the last 1,400 years.

When, where and how did Muhammad learn that he was a prophet?

Before assuming the Allah-ordained prophetic mission, Muhammad did not practice any religions known in the Arabian Peninsula; he fulfilled no religious task; he was not a member of any preacher class; he was not a member of any religious group. He used to withdraw from the moral decay and societal injustice he witnessed. In such times of solitude and seclusion in the Hira cave on a mountain near Mecca, he extensively pondered over the meaning of life and human existence.

The soon-to-be prophet Muhammad was 40 years old when the initial revelation descended upon him in the month of Ramadan in Hira in the summer of 610 A.D. (see: 2:185 and 97:1). The angel of revelations came to Prophet Muhammad with the divine command, *“Read in the name of thy Sustainer!”* (*‘Alaq* 96:1) The first instance of revelation thus speaks about the “knowledge of existence and truth.” Therefore, humans must undertake any endeavors and observations of whatever exists “in the name of the Lord” and must not separate knowledge and reasoning from observation. Just like a masterpiece would not be possible without its master and cannot be invoked without mentioning the master’s name, existence cannot be comprehended independently of its creator and designer, Allah, for existence is one of Allah’s masterpieces. This was the message the initial revelation episode conveyed.

What difficulties did Prophet Muhammad and his companions face in Mecca?

The revelation initially spoke directly to Muhammad and instilled a prophetic character and morale in him. For instance, in one of the initially revealed verses, Allah commands him to remain awake part of nights, pray to and worship Allah, and extensively analyze and deeply ponder over the verses being revealed to him (*Muzzammil* 73:1-11). The next step was encouraging him to become “actively good” by commanding, *“Arise and warn!”* (*Muddaththir* 74:2). Upon receiving this command, he spoke of the revelations to his closest relatives and family. In so doing, he did not add or fall short in delivering the message. The first group of people who believed in the message Prophet Muhammad brought were his wife Khadija, his nephew Ali, Khadija’s slave Zayd, one of his old friends Abu Bakr, Abyssinian slave Bilal, an old citizen of the Byzantine Empire and the freed slave Suhayb Rumi (Suhayb the Roman).

One of the younger people who believed in the prophetic message, Arkam, turned his house into a school for teaching the Qur'an. In the initial years of prophethood, many people heard the Qur'an for the first time and submitted to Allah in Arkam's house. The number of believers was steadily growing, but so was the Meccans' anger with them. The Meccan polytheists' actions toward Muslims could perhaps be summarized in the following points: 1) Silent observation; 2) Ridicule and derision; 3) Slander and assault; and 4) Physical violence and torture. The last part of their resistance to Islam lasted until Muslims left Mecca and migrated to Medina.

Several Muslims whose tribes were not strong enough to protect them died under torture. Unable to endure violence and torture any further, a group of Muslims left Mecca for Abyssinia in the fifth year of the prophetic mission. The Abyssinian authorities granted them the status of refugees and asylum seekers until the *hijri* year seven, i.e. during the 15 years they spent there.

Meanwhile back in Mecca, the polytheists imposed a strict trade embargo on Muslims, which devastated them over the three years of its enforcement. The polytheists hoped the embargo would make them abandon their faith and would render them physically weak and socially abandoned. However, disputes erupted among them and the embargo was officially cancelled in its third year.

All these harsh conditions in Mecca forced Prophet Muhammad to seek other alternatives for Muslims' peaceful existence. Could Taif, a settlement near Mecca, be that option? On the contrary, the city chieftains rejected Prophet Muhammad's call and drove him out of Taif by urging children to throw stones at him and charging dogs at him. That was thus far the hardest day he ever lived: he was assaulted in Taif and was only able to return to his hometown of Mecca under the protection of an allied family or face death. Shortly after this painful experience, a small group

of Medina residents were inspired and moved by his speeches. Just a year later, they returned as a larger group and declared their faith in Allah's oneness and Muhammad's prophethood; they then invited him to move to Medina. Although Prophet Muhammad approved of the migration, he allowed others to do so and remained in Mecca himself. After Prophet Muhammad had stealthily emigrated for Medina, the polytheists of Mecca announced a 100-camel bounty for anyone who would capture him. Prophet Muhammad planned his only option to survive down to its finest details and implemented it in 622 A.D.

What does the initial revelation discuss?

The first instance of revelation conveyed the initial five âyahs of *Surah 96* (The Clot). The addressee of these commanding verses is the first recipient of the revelation—Muhammad. The commanding tone of these verses pursued the goal of personality formation. The initial revelation could perhaps be summed up in the word “knowledge.” The commandment “Read!” means “Learn!” and “Acquire knowledge!” The source of the “Read!” commandment was obvious and the recipient of the commandment was obvious, yet what was to be read was unclear. In situations like this, one is to look into a deeper meaning: “Read everything.” The initial revelation's meaning is the following: “The Universe and whatever is therein are an open book. Then read it in the name of your Lord Allah!” And the following is the language the revelation uses:

“Read in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created man out of a germ-cell! Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One who has taught [man] the use of the pen, taught man what he did not know!”

(‘Alak 96:1-5)

This verse commenced a 23-year-long revelation period, which lasted until the end of Prophet Muhammad's life.

The Qur'an transformed Muhammad, who was a passively good person before the revelation, into an actively good Prophet Muhammad. For that to happen, the Qur'an ordered that he first change himself and form an even better personality:

"O thou enwrapped one! Keep awake [in prayer] at night, all but a small part of one-half thereof – or make it a little less than that, or add to it [at will]; and [during that time] recite the Qur'an calmly and distinctly, with thy mind attuned to its meaning. Behold, We shall bestow upon thee a weighty message [and,] verily, the hours of night the mind most strongly and speak with the clearest voice, whereas by day a long chain of doings is thy portion. But [whether by night or by day,] remember thy Sustainer's name, and devote thyself unto Him with utter devotion. The Sustainer of the east and the west [is He]: there is no deity save Him: hence, ascribe to Him alone the power to determine thy fate."

(Muzzammil 73:1-9)

The third Qur'anic passage encouraged Prophet Muhammad to be active and shun passiveness:

"O thou [in thy solitude] enfolded! Arise and warn! And thy Sustainer's greatness glorify! And thine inner self purify! And all defilement shun! And do not through giving seek thyself to gain, but unto thy Sustainer turn in patience."

(Muddaththir 74:1-7)

One of the initial instances of revelation delivered Surah Al-Fatihah, which every Muslim reads several times in each prayer:

"In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace: all praise is due to Allah alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace, Lord of the Day of Judgment! Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid. Guide us the straight way, the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings, not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray!"

(Fatihah 1:7)

What was the initial reaction to prophet Muhammad's mission?

He used to be passively good before the revelation, which transformed him into an actively good person. While he was a passively good person, the leaders of Mecca highly esteemed him as "Muhammad the Trustworthy," but when he turned into an actively good person thanks to the Qur'an, they called him "a possessed one." The reason behind such attitudes was the fact that he turned from a secluded person, who did not meddle in others' business, into an uncompromising person, who was ready to die for his cause. He has not done any single supernatural or exceptional thing before the prophetic mission, nor had such an event happened to him. If that were the case, it would have certainly been documented and levied against him. However, nobody was able to say so. Instead, they claimed he caused rift between the father and the son and between the husband and the wife using magic. It is easy to understand his enemies' befuddlement, for new Muslims withstood pressure, persecution and even torture but did not give up their new faith. The polytheists of Mecca could only say, "They are possessed by demons!"

Witnessing a relentless and uncompromising attitude, the polytheists devised a four-step plan against Prophet Muhammad and his followers: 1) they ignored and overlooked the new faith group; 2) they ridiculed poor and weak Muslims; 3) the increasing numbers of Muslims forced the polytheists to resort to slandering and harassing them; finally, 4) the polytheists inflicted physical violence and tortures. They fell so low that they would spit on Prophet Muhammad and say slurs. They even went to such an extent as throwing a slain camel's internal organs on Muhammad while he was praying next to the *Kâbah*.

Nonetheless, Prophet Muhammad remained steadfast on the mission he was divinely tasked with. After a short "individual call" ("da'wah") period, he proceeded onto a "collective call" period.

He called the Meccans to saying, “There is no god but Allah! Say so, and save your souls!” The initial group that responded to this call was those who were sincerely and deeply discontent with injustice and inequality in their society: Young people, slaves, women and oppressed ones.

The revelation of *Surah* 53 (The Star), which openly condemned idol-worshipping in Mecca, was the turning point for the polytheists: they launched physical assaults and attacks on the vulnerable members of the Muslim community—slaves and unprotected tribe members. Seeing oppressions progressing, Prophet Muhammad arranged for the departure of a group of Muslims to the lands of Christian Abyssinia then under the rule of a just Christian king. This group remained there for 15 years and was able to return in the year seven *hijri* following the conquest of Fort Khaybar. This conquest was a turning point for the Muslim community of Medina, which guaranteed a safe future.

What does the Qur'an say about Prophet Muhammad?

1. He is a mortal person (*Kahf* 18:110; *Fussilat* 41:6).
2. He is a servant of Allah (*Najm* 53:10).
3. He is a prophet and a messenger (*‘Ali`Imran* 3:144).
4. He has the finest manners (*Qalam* 68:4).
5. He is a mercy to humankind (*‘Anbya’* 21:107).
6. He is the final prophet of Allah (*Ahzab* 33:40).

Why does the Qur'an emphasize the human nature of Prophet Muhammad?

Indeed, the “key” for entering Islam—the two testimonies—includes testifying that Prophet Muhammad is “a servant and a messenger of Allah.” Thus, the second part of the testimony emphasizes Prophet Muhammad’s humanness. Further, Allah

emphasizes the human origin and nature of Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an:

"Say [O Prophet]: 'I am but a mortal man like all of you.'"

(Kahf 18:110)

"And Muhammad is only an apostle; all the [other] apostles have passed away before him: if, then, he dies or is slain, will you turn about on your heels? But he that turns about on his heels can in no wise harm Allah - whereas Allah will requite all who are grateful [to Him]."

(‘Ali ‘Imran 3:144)

This emphasis carries several messages:

1. *Those who love the Prophet and believe in him:* do not poison your faith by deifying your prophet.
2. *Those who believe in the Prophet, but do not see a role model in him:* you cannot say "I cannot emulate him," for he was a human just like yourselves.
3. *Those who see humans as hopelessly sinful:* Allah places trust in humans, for humans are so good that Allah chooses all of them as His viceroys and chooses exceptional ones as His envoys.

What was the fundamental mission Prophet Muhammad fulfilled?

The core mission Prophet Muhammad had to fulfill was serving as an ambassador of Allah, who delivered the divine revelation to him. This ambassadorship includes the following six articles:

1. *Prophethood:* Receiving the divine guidance of Allah to the people (*A`raf 7:157-158*).
2. *Message:* Delivering the divine guidance without adding or leaving out even a minor detail (*Ahzab 33:40*).

3. *Beautiful example*: Being an example and a role model for believers (*Ahzab* 33:21; 2:143).

4. *Delivery and da'wah*: Calling people to accept the delivered divine guidance (*Shu'ara'* 26:214).

5. *Teaching*: Teaching the divine message to humanity by living according to it (*Baqarah* 2:151).

6. *Explaining*: Explaining the divine message to humans in details (*Nuh* 16:44).

Who was he sent to?

He was sent to all of humankind (*Anbya'* 21:107), for human beings are the recipients of the Qur'an (*A'raf* 7:158). The Qur'an employs such terms as "O mankind!" and "O children of Adam!" thereby addressing each and every human being. The true globalization in humans' life commenced with Prophet Muhammad's mission.

Prophet Muhammad was a pacifist in Mecca; why did war replace peace when he migrated to Medina?

The orientalist, who use this ungrounded allegation, point at battles and fights that took place in the Medina period of Prophet Muhammad's mission. In order to prove this allegation's ingenuity, let's analyze each and every single battle Prophet Muhammad participated in:

The battle of Badr was fought for defense purposes because the Meccan polytheists were plotting to attack Medina. To be sure, the number of assaulting soldiers was three times larger than defending force.

The battle of Uhud was fought for defense purposes because the Meccans were marching onto Medina to retaliate for their defeat at Badr. The battle took place near Mount Uhud about 6 miles north of Medina.

The battle of Trench was fought for defense purposes because all polytheist allied tribes besieged Medina. The Muslims of Medina dug a deep trench around the city. The polytheists were not able to continue siege for much longer and retreated soon thereafter.

The expedition to Khaybar: the Khaybar residents made a pact with Meccan polytheists and violated their pact with Muslims. Medina has therefore dispatched troops to besiege the oasis. Khaybar realized that they could not withstand the siege and voluntarily submitted the oasis to Muslims.

The conquest of Mecca: This event was planned for cleansing the center of Islam and the host city to Kâbah, Mecca, from polytheism and saving its residents. As is known, the conquest was achieved without shedding even a drop of blood. Prophet Muhammad instantaneously demoted a troops commander for shouting, "Today is the day of revenge!"

The battle of Hunayn was the last standoff between Muslims and all the rest of the allied tribes on the Arabian Peninsula. According to a well-known scholar of the topic, Professor Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, the total number of losses from both sides in all these battles was around 200 persons.

It is also incorrect to argue that the Qur'anic encouragement for forgiveness and tolerance is limited to the Mecca period. It is a historical fact that Medina Jews plotted various intrigues against Prophet Muhammad in particular and Muslims in general. The following âyah orders to be forgiving and understanding toward the Jews despite their plots with enemies of Muslims to assault them, although Muslims and Jews had a non-attack pact:

"Then, for having broken their solemn pledge, We rejected them and caused their hearts to harden – [so that now] they distort the meaning of the [revealed] words, taking them out of their context; and they have forgotten much of what they had been told to bear in mind; and from all but a few of them thou wilt always experience treachery. But pardon

them, and forbear: verily, Allah loves the doers of good.” (Ma'idah 5:13)

The following âyah ordering Muslims to “hold their anger in check” was also revealed during the Prophet’s time in Medina:

“[They] spend [in His way] in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow-men because Allah loves the doers of good” (‘Ali ‘Imran 3:134)

Why is Prophet Muhammad “The last of the Prophets?”

Prophet Muhammad was sent in a time when mankind’s collective conscience achieved maturity. The fact that Prophet Muhammad is the last link in the chain of prophets—in the Qur’anic language, “the Seal of Prophets” (*‘Ahzab 33:40*)—indicates mankind’s procession onto a new chapter of history. The fact that no more prophets will come to humanity indicates that divine guidance is now fully delivered as principles, tenets and doctrines that are recorded in books and other information carriers. This, obviously, is a new phase in human history, which prioritizes a value-centered world to a person-centered one.

Do Muslims worship their prophet?

They certainly do not, for doing so would contradict the very core Islamic teaching of monotheism. If a Muslim worships anybody or anything other than Allah, it would be considered *shirk* (polytheism), one of the gravest sins in Islam. It does not matter whether the person in question is Prophet Muhammad or someone else. Islam teaches humans that there is only one deity rightfully worthy of being worshipped—Allah Exalted and Sublime. In each prayer Muslims perform, they repeat several times the following pledge: “*Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid.*” (*Fatihah 1:4*) Therefore, worshipping anybody or anything other than Allah would be tantamount to alleging their divinity,

which is an attempt to ascribe partners to Allah. Consequently, violating this core principle of Islam will result in one's expulsion from the fold of Islam.

What is the practical evidence of Prophet Muhammad's example to mankind?

Prophet Muhammad not only conveyed the message of the Qur'an to people, but also lived his entire prophetic life according to this divine book. As is known, he is the Qur'an's first recipient and addressee. His wife Aisha is reported to have said, "His behavior and manners were the Qur'an" (related by Ibn Hanbal, 6/91). The Qur'an is the source of the theory of religion, while Prophet Muhammad's life is its practical aspect. The Qur'an shaped that personality in Muhammad that enabled his becoming the practical example. The Qur'an is not a "taboo book," whose content would be inaccessible or unreachable; on the contrary, it is the book of life. The Qur'an is revealed in a manner, which is easily accessible and comprehensible for humans. This content accessibility also translates into its implementability as a lifestyle. Prophet Muhammad's way of life is a full embodiment of this lifestyle.

What do the terms *sunnah* and *hadith* mean?

Islamic scholars call the lifestyle Prophet Muhammad lived the "*sunnah*," which is the embodiment of the Qur'an in his life. (The Qur'an uses the term *sunnah* as well, but only in relation to Allah and has no connection to Prophet Muhammad's lifestyle, which was called *sunnah* by scholars.) The term *sunnah* was initially used to denote the latter 23 years of Prophet Muhammad, i.e. when he was a prophet. *Sunnah* did not initially include the lifestyle Muhammad observed as a human, an Arab or a Meccan. But as centuries unfolded, some of the general aspects of his life were also included into the term's meaning.

"Hadith" is recorded history of Prophet Muhammad's life narrated by his contemporaries on the one hand, and quotes attributed to him, on the other. Because of the time's lax written record practices, some of quotes attributed to him may be authentically so; however, precisely because of documenting issues, some of them may not be his words or may even be outright fabrications.

Thus, *sunnah* refers to "action," while *hadith* denotes "word." Some of the *hadiths* include *sunnah*, while some do not. The Qur'an is the ultimate standard to establish any hadith's authenticity. If a text claimed to be a hadith from Prophet Muhammad does not contradict the Qur'an, the next step is verifying the reliability of those people who are reported in the chain of narrators.

How to differentiate between divinely inspired actions and humanly traditions in Prophet Muhammad's actions?

Perhaps the best way to respond to this question is providing an example: "Is wearing kinds of clothes Prophet Muhammad used to wear a *sunnah*?" The answer is "Did Prophet Muhammad's clothes differ in his pre-prophetic life and thereafter? Did he wear distinct clothes from others around in his society?" The answer to such a question is a definitive "No!" Thus, Prophet Muhammad's attire would pertain to "tradition," therefore, a human action, not a prophetic act of worship.

Is Prophet Muhammad a descendant of Prophet Abraham?

It is accepted among Muslims that Prophet Muhammad is a descended of Prophet Abraham via his son Ishmael whom Abraham had with his wife Hagar. It is noteworthy that Jews who lived in Prophet Muhammad's times also held that opinion. Prophet Muhammad's genealogy is established up to his 21st forefather Adnan (1 century B.C.).

What is the reason for such a high esteem for Prophet Abraham in Islam?

Prophet Abraham is called “The father of prophets,” who rebuilt the *Kâbah* (*Baqarah* 2:127). The Qur’an also calls him “A beautiful example” for emulation just like Prophet Muhammad was (*Mumtahanah* 60:4). The Qur’an maintains that Prophet Abraham was the symbol of an unconditional submission and unshakable faith; he was justifiably “A friend of Allah” (*Nisa’* 4:125).

Are there references to Prophet Muhammad in Christian sources?

The Qur’an states that the Torah and the Bible include glad tidings of Prophet Muhammad’s mission (*A`raf* 7:157 and *Saf* 61:6). The information regarding the Biblical sources can be classified in the following five categories:

1. In the Gospel of John, there are various references to Paracletos who would come after Jesus (Matthew 14:16-17, 25-26, 30; 15:26; 16:12-15, 17). The meaning of this word has been subject to semantic displacement while being translated from the Aramaic language to the Syriac language and then to the Greek language. Those who try hard to reach the original word in the Syriac language found the word *Munhamanna*, which means, “highly praised.” The adjective and noun equivalents of this word are “Ahmed” and “Muhammad” meaning “the one who praises” and “the praised one,” which are the names of the last Prophet. Nejashi, the Christian king of Abyssinia at the time of Prophet Muhammad confirmed finding a description of the last Prophet in Christianity’s own sources.

2. In the Gospel of John, priests and Levites of the time inquired if John the Baptist was the Messiah or Elijah or “that Prophet.” When John the Baptist replies he is none of them, Pharisees question him: “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” (*Fatihah* 1:19-25). Here,

Messiah is Jesus the son of Mary; Elijah is prophet Elias; and “that Prophet” would be Muhammad “the praised one.”

3. In the Gospel of Luke, there is a reference to Eudokia. Efforts to find this word’s original end up in a dead-end. Reverend David Benjamin Keldani, an expert on the Bible who later converted to Islam and chose the name Abdul Ahad Dawood, suggested that the actual meaning of this word to be equivalent to Muhammad (Muhammad in World Scriptures - Volume II)

4. The Gospel of Barnabas was accepted as one of the holy Bibles and recited in the Christian churches till Pope Gelasius declared it a rejected book in the Decretum Gelasianum in 496. The Gospel mentions Prophet Muhammad by his authentic Arabic name. The original text of this Gospel has been through many accidents over history and only its Italian translation dating back to the 14th-16th century remains available. A Spanish copy dating back to the 18th century has also been lost. An edition published by Oxford University based on the Spanish copy was collected and concealed, except for two copies. Due to the wounds it sustained from the Church’s destructive policy against it, only some translated text relating to The Gospel of Barnabas appears in our time. The Church’s current policy toward this Gospel is to disapprove it, claiming its “inauthenticity.”

5. The meaning of the Arabic word “Injeel,” i.e. the word the Qur’an uses for “Gospel”: all research into the meaning of the word “injeel” yields “glad tidings, good news to come.” What would be the good news to come that Injeel has promised? Qur’an answers the question by “Ahmad” (Prophet Muhammad’s other name) in 61:6.

Why cannot one be a Muslim unless He/she believes in Jesus and Moses as well?

The Qur’an teaches Muslims to say, “We make no distinction between any of Allah’s messengers.” (*Baqarah* 2:285) Therefore, although one could sincerely believe in Prophet Muhammad as

Allah's apostle, denying or disbelieving in Moses or Jesus the son of Mary will disqualify him/her as a true Muslim. The âyah quoted above suffices as proof.

If humans sincerely believe in the Lord, then it is illogical that they would believe in some of His apostles and disbelieve in others. Making distinction between Allah's apostles would essentially be tantamount to prioritizing humans' choices over Allah's, which is obviously a big problem. The true faith is not what we humans call "faith," but that, which Allah defines for us as such.

What conclusion is drawn when Jesus' and Muhammad's mothers are compared in the Qur'an?

The answer to the question of "How many âyahs are there in the Qur'an about Muhammad's mother?" is a plain "None!" There is not a single verse in the entire Qur'an about Prophet Muhammad's mother, Aminah. Those who believe in the divine origin of the Qur'an see nothing extraordinary in this matter. Because the Qur'an is a divinely inspired writ, Prophet Muhammad contributed absolutely nothing into its text. From this perspective, we can see that the Qur'an is independent of Prophet Muhammad's personality or private life. Even the most cheerful and mournful events in Prophet Muhammad's life are not mentioned in the Qur'an. For instance, the death of his first wife Khadija... the death of his most beloved uncle Abu Talib, who provided him with protection from enemies... the hardships he faced over the three-year-long economic boycott... the stones thrown at him in Taif... marrying his wives... daughters dying one after another... the birth of his most beloved grandchildren... the birth and just a two-year life of his son Abraham that made him weep...

If there is not a single âyah in the Qur'an about Aminah, how many âyahs discuss the personality and life of Mary, mother of Jesus? The answer is—at least 110 Qur'anic verses! To be sure, there is an entire surah named "Maryam," which has 98 âyahs. Further,

the following âyahs 'Anbya' 21:91; Mu'minun 23:50; Baqarah 2:253; 'Ali 'Imran 3:35-37, Shuraa 42-47; Nisa' 4:156, 171 and Ma'idah 5:75, 110 outside that surah also talk about her. Should we add those âyahs about "Jesus the son of Mary" to this calculation, the mentioning of Mary in the Qur'an grows exponentially.

Why does the Qur'an refer to Prophet Jesus as "the son of Mary"?

There are three messages contained in the Qur'anic term "Jesus the son of Mary" meant for three different groups of people:

1. *Jews*: The Qur'an refutes their slander against Mary, which they based on Virgin Mary's pregnancy. In other words, "She was an example of chastity and the mother of a prophet."

2. *Christians believing in the Trinity*: The Qur'an refutes the "Jesus the son of Allah" claim and establishes that "Nay, Jesus was the son of Mary, a messenger and servant of Allah!"

3. *Romans who exalted men*: By attributing Jesus, who left such a profound impact on history, to a woman, the Qur'an explicitly rejects the male-centered system of patriarchal Rome.

What does the Qur'an say about the reported crucifixion of Jesus?

Discussing consequences Jesus the son of Mary faced, the Qur'an says the following:

"... They did not slay him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so; and, verily, those who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no [real] knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not slay him" (Nisa' 4:157)

The âyah's emphasis shows that the topic at hand is Jews, not Christians, and rejects Jews' claims. If Jesus were indeed crucified,

that would mean the evil overcame the good. The Qur'an refutes such a thesis and shows that Almighty Allah is certainly capable of overpowering the evil-intended subjects of His.

The dogma of Jesus' crucifixion, which was introduced by Paul into the Christian creed, is based on the juxtaposition of spirit and body. The dogma has dualist and gnostic elements that argue that body is entirely bad and impure. At the same time, this thesis firmly places suffering as a prerequisite for salvation. The Qur'an argues that there is no direct link between suffering and salvation. In contrast to the thesis above, the Qur'an teaches believers to pray to Allah saying, *"O our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come, and keep us safe from suffering through the fire."* (Baqarah 2:201)

The Qur'an also refutes Jesus' crucifixion: *"... they did not slay him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so..."* (Nisa' 4:157)

What does the Qur'an say about Jesus' end?

"And [remind those who deny thee, O Prophet, that] never have We granted life everlasting to any mortal before thee" ('Anbya' 21:34)

and

"Every human being is bound to taste death."

(`Ali`Imran 3:185; `Anbya' 21:35, `Ankabut 29:57)

These verses speak about death, by whose laws every single human being abides, since the law of death is a physics and biological law. Nobody—be it a prophet, a respected person, young or aged—is able to evade this law. Therefore, Jesus the son of mortal Mary is not an exception to this exact, unchangeable and universal law.

While the Qur'an includes many âyahs discussing mankind's mortality, the following âyah speaks about the mortality of Jesus specifically and quotes him as saying:

"I bore witness to what they did as long as I dwelt in their midst; but since Thou hast caused me to die, Thou alone hast been their keeper: for Thou art witness unto everything." (Ma'idah 5:116–118)

The phrase *"Thou hast caused me to die"* clearly indicates that he lived among his supporters and died as any other human being. And the following âyah could well illustrate the life Jesus lived after being miraculously saved from crucifixion: *"And [as We exalted Moses, so, too,] We made the son of Mary and his mother a symbol [of Our grace], and provided for both an abode in a lofty place of lasting restfulness and unsullied springs."* (Mu'minun 23:50) The "lofty place" the âyah mentions cannot be the place wherein Mary gave birth to Jesus, as some commentaries to the Qur'an would suggest, because at that time Jesus was not declared a prophet; he was not facing enmity from the sons of Israel; and he was not threatened with crucifixion and death. That is why this âyah is talking about a "lofty place," where Jesus and his mother resided after they were saved from enemies' danger.

Is belief in the Hereafter required in Islam?

It is not only required, but also inevitable. Everything has a soul; this world's soul is the hereafter. What would this world be without the hereafter if not a soulless body? Just like a body stench once the spirit leaves it, so would the worldly life spread unbearable odor without the Hereafter.

One could argue that everything is bipolar: seen and unseen, and moral and material. But one argument is firm: the unseen and moral aspects of anything is much more valuable, influential, larger, stronger, and permanent than its visible and material aspects. Spirit's relation to body, reason's relation to muscles, electricity's relation to cables, and energy's relation to matter are cases in point.

Any belief system based on revelations recognizes the life in the Hereafter as the real life. The worldly life is ephemeral and temporal. Whatever is temporal, it is unstable, impermanent, and imperfect. Every entity has a soul. The world's soul is human beings. The world without the Hereafter would be a body without spirit and soul. The Qur'an calls this worldly life "game and entertainment"; only coupled with the hereafter does this world acquire meaning and purpose.

What is the essence of belief in the Hereafter?

1. *Belief in the hereafter is belief in justice:* Belief in the hereafter is belief in the Recompense Day, when the human being is held accountable before his Lord for every single action, however insignificant, committed during lifetime on Earth.

2. *Belief in the hereafter is a comfort for an active conscience:* No conscience would rest if those who commit injustice and oppression could get away with it and were not held accountable. Holding both good and evil in equal esteem would be tantamount to punishing good-doers and rewarding evildoers.

3. *Belief in the hereafter is belief in human dignity:* The difference between humans and other creatures is the eternal life humans will live after resurrecting from death. If death were the end of humans' life, then they would be no different from the common worms. In such a case, there would be no meaning or sense in pondering over such existentialist questions as "Where did I come from? Why do I exist? Where am I going to?" that only humans are capable of asking.

4. *Belief in the hereafter is belief in the seriousness of this life:* This world is the field for the next life: whoever is concerned about good harvest, they better cultivate soil properly.

What is the purpose of belief in the Hereafter?

Belief in the hereafter is the second requirement in Islam after belief in Allah. The Qur'an refers to these two beliefs together so often that a revelation-inspired reason cannot imagine one existing without the other.

But why is it so? Because if it were not so, there would be no concrete equivalent of belief in Allah in one's life. Abstract belief in Allah can become a realistic moral guide in humans' life only when coupled with belief in the hereafter. The human is responsible before Allah. The foundation of one's consciousness of responsibly before Allah—"al-taqwah"—is precisely this belief. Because only when one believes in the hereafter, when he/she is held accountable for deeds in the worldly life, does "consciousness of Allah" lead him/her to "consciousness of morality" in word and deeds. Responsibility is a conscientious choice, while irresponsibility rests on the opposite pole.

In a world where both the deliverer of water and the smasher of the pitcher are held in the same esteem, there would certainly be no volunteers to deliver water. Similarly, those who live in accordance with boundaries Allah established and those who live listening only to their desires cannot be equal:

“Is then he who strives after Allah’s goodly acceptance like unto him who has earned the burden of Allah’s condemnation and whose goal is hell? – and how vile a journey’s end.” (‘Ali `Imran 3:162)

What are the reward and punishment, and Paradise and Hell in the Hereafter, according to the Qur’an?

The reward in the hereafter is Paradise, while the punishment is the Hellfire. The Qur’an speaks about Paradise in detail. Here are several âyahs:

“But as for him who, after guidance has been vouchsafed to him, cuts himself off from the Apostle follows a path other than that of the believers - him shall We leave unto that which he himself has chose, and shall cause him to endure hell: and how evil a journey’s end!” (Nisa’ 4:115)

“Let it not deceive thee that those who are bent on denying the truth seem to be able to do as they please on earth: it is [but] a brief enjoyment, with hell thereafter as their goal - and how vile a resting-place! Whereas those who remain conscious of their Sustainer shall have gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide: a ready welcome from Allah. And that which is with Allah is best for the truly virtuous.” (‘Ali `Imran 3:196-198)

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

“As for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds – gardens of rest await them, as a welcome [from Allah], in result of what they did; but as for those who are lost in iniquity – their goal is the fire: as oft as they

will try to come out of it, they will be thrown back into it; and they will be told, 'Taste [now] this suffering through fire which you were wont to call a lie!'" (Sajdah 32:19-20)

"[But,] behold, as for those who say, 'Our Sustainer is Allah,' and then steadfastly pursue the right way – upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] 'Fear not and grieve not, but receive the glad tidings of that paradise, which has been promised to you! We are close unto you in the life of this world and [will be so] in the life to come; and in that [life to come] you shall have all that your souls may desire, and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for, as a ready welcome from Him who is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!'" (Fussilat 41:30-32)

"And so, Allah will preserve them from the woes of that Day, and will bestow on them brightness and joy, and will reward them for all their patience in adversity with a garden [of bliss] and with [garments of] silk." ('Insan 76:11-12)

"But whenever he prevails, he goes about the earth spreading corruption and destroying [man's] tilth and progeny: and Allah does not love corruption. And whenever he is told, 'Be conscious of Allah,' his false pride drives him into sin: wherefore hell will be his allotted portion – and how vile a resting-place!" (Baqarah 2:205-206)

"And immortal youths will wait upon them: when thou seest them, thou wouldst deem them to be scattered pearls; and when thou seest [anything that is] there thou wilt see [only] bliss and a realm transcendent." ('Insan 76:19-20)

"[On that Day,] verily, hell will lie in wait [for those who deny the truth] a goal for all who are wont to transgress the bounds of what is right! In it they shall remain for a long time. Neither coolness shall they taste therein nor any [thirst-quenching] drink only burning despair and ice-cold darkness: a meet requital [for their sins]!" (Naba' 78:21-26)

What does the Qur'an say about "eternal salvation?"

Concerning the notion of "eternal salvation," the Qur'an has the following to say to those who believe in the Qur'an and other believing groups:

"It may not accord with your wishful thinking – nor with the wishful thinking of the followers of earlier revelation – [that] he who does evil shall be requited for it, and shall find none to protect him from Allah, and none to bring him succor, whereas anyone – be it man or woman – who does [whatever he can] of good deeds and is a believer withal, shall enter paradise, and shall not be wronged by as much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone. And who could be of better faith than he who surrenders his whole being unto Allah and is a doer of good withal, and follows the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false - seeing that Allah exalted Abraham with His love? For, unto Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth; and, indeed, Allah encompasses everything."

(Nisa' 4:123-126)



EXISTENCE AND THE HUMAN BEINGS

How does the Qur'an describe existence?

There are two types of existences differing from each other by respective distinct natures:

1. *Absolute and infinite existence*: The existence of the Creator. It is a fundamental and essential existence, which has no beginning and no end. It is independent from time and space, because it is He who creates time and location. It is a presence, which exists on its own accord, and its absence cannot be conceived. There is no need to look for philosophical or logical explanations to prove His existence as His existence is proclaimed to human beings through the universe and through their own consciences. Everything that exists is a proof of His existence.

2. *Created existence*: the existence of everything else. The existence of created beings is not essential and depends on the existence of the Creator. The created being exists when Allah wills, where He wills and as long as He wills. The existence of the created being is possible as well as its absence.

What does the Qur'an say about the inception and conclusion of existence?

The beginning or ending of the existence of the Creator is not a subject of discussion, because beginnings and endings are only relevant for beings that are confined to time and space; it is irrelevant for the One who actually created time and space. The Creator of time and location cannot be confined within that same time and location.

Every created being has a definitive beginning, and all creatures that have a beginning will inevitably face an end. The universe and the galaxy that provide lodging for human beings have, like human beings, a life span.

It is an Islamic dogma that only Allah is capable of creating beings from nothing. The first law of thermodynamics proves that humans are absolutely unable to create energy from nothing. Any creation has a limited lifespan. The second law of thermodynamics—the entropy law—is the manifestation of this truth in physics. Not only humans, but energy is finite as well, for it was, too, created. The Qur'an calls that situation in which the final cosmic destination reaches absolute zero, "The Final Hour." There are several âyahs about this time, in which the world will inevitably find its end on a day known to Allah alone.

To conclude: The Creator is the landlord of created beings who are only tenants in existence. According to the Qur'an, Allah is closer to us than our jugular veins. Thus, while Allah is not at a place one could walk to, those who strive toward Him can reach Him.

What is the hierarchal order of Allah, human beings, and nature in Islam?

The ordering of this hierarchy in Islam is as follows: Allah, human beings and then nature. Allah, the "Superior being" is the higher end of the hierarchy, and the world on the lower end is the "inferior being." The duty of humans, therefore, is living a life in accordance with the purpose of Allah's creation under the guidance of the divine writ. As Prophet Muhammad said, "The world is the means and the sowing field for attaining the Hereafter." The Qur'an considers human beings as viceroys of Allah in the world (*Naml* 27:62). In other words, "Allah entrusted humans with Earth, and wants them to protect and develop it." A viceroy is a guardian, who establishes and lives a life based on justice and truth (*tawheed*). This responsibility aims at

“constructing a role model.” Those among humans who realize this responsibility must fulfill it (*Ali`Imran 3:104*).

What is the Islamic point of view on nature and other creatures?

Allah entrusted nature to human beings: it is not our possession and we do not own it. Allah put the nature at the service of human beings to use it for contentment in this world and the Hereafter (*Haj 22:65*).

Are the world and things therein regarded with disapproval in Islam?

The world and worldly things are not considered intrinsically bad and are not subject to disapproval. The world and material items are certainly not satanic or intrinsically evil, as religions affected by dualism and Gnosticism would argue. Allah uses them to test us humans. If a human being wants to pass this test with dignity, he/she should see the world and worldly things as entrusted valuable items, for which they will be held accountable. Therefore, they should not deal with them as if with their own property that they could do whatever they desire.

Having prosperity and wealth is not condemned in Islam; rather attachment to these things is condemned—that is becoming worldly! A human becoming worldly is akin to a horse mounting onto the rider. Worldliness overburdens the human being with ownership, as the horse would overburden the rider, and leads to all kinds of evil acts. In the words of the Prophet, considering worldly possessions as things entrusted to us and avoiding becoming attached to them is known as being a “faqeer.” *Faqeer* is a spiritual state wherein you do not allow your wealth to possess you even if you have the treasures of the entire world.

Why does the Qur'an warn humans against an "obsession to multiply" worldly possessions?

The best way to respond to this question will be the Qur'anic chapter, which speaks precisely about this issue: *"You are obsessed by greed for more and more until you go down to your graves. Nay, in time you will come to understand! And once again: Nay, in time you will come to understand! Nay, if you could but understand [it] with an understanding [born] of certainty, you would indeed, most surely, behold the blazing fire [of hell]! In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty: and on that Day you will most surely be called to account for [what you did with] the boon of life!"* (Takathur 102:1-8)

Who are humans according to the Qur'an?

Every entity has a soul. The world's soul is humans. A world without humans would be a body without spirit and soul. Human beings are a project of Allah. He has equipped the world to be suitable for the purpose of this project. Allah places faith in human beings and if a human being breaks this trust, then Allah can do away with him/her and bring a new creation in their stead (*Ibrahim* 14:19).

According to the Qur'an, the human being is created in the best conformation and placed at the beginning of the road that he will be travelling in order to fulfill the purpose of his creation with his own will and effort (*Tin* 95:4-5).

The human is a craftsman tasked with "constructing on the face of Earth" (*khilafah*). Also, the human "shall be an eye-witness" to his own benefit or detriment on the Judgment Day (*Qiyamah* 75:14). Further, the human is the only creature capable of shouldering the burden of will-reason-conscience, under which heavens, Earth and mountains would not be able to persevere (*Ahzab* 33:72).

Humans become overweening whenever they believe they are self-sufficient, free of responsibilities, and have no boundaries and limits (*Alaq* 96:6-7). Humans are hasty (*'Isra'* 17:11) and can be ungrateful towards their Lord (*'Anfal* 8:26). Whenever humans recognize and cherish values, enrich their inner world with *iyman*, and turn the "righteous deeds" the Qur'an discusses into their lifestyle, only then would they deserve reward in this and the next world (*Tin* 95:4-5).

What is the purpose of human creation?

The creation of humans among other living creatures by Allah's breathing the divine spirit into them and granting them will, reason, and conscience is part of the perfect law of balances, by which Allah rules the universe. The purpose of creating humans is to "test" them (*Mulk* 67:2).

If one were to emerge with the question of "Why did not Allah ask my opinion before creating me?" they would be in a self-contradiction. Would not one have to be first created before Allah would pose that question to him/her? A non-existent entity obviously has no personality. If one is able to say "I," then they exist.

What is humans' value?

Islam sees humans as Allah's masterpieces; the human is "created in the most beautiful fashion" (*Tin* 95:4) among other creations of Allah on Earth; the human enjoyed numerous favors of Allah (*'Isra'* 17:70); the human is a thinking and self-controlling creation granted reason, will and conscience (*Qiyamah* 75:14); the human is Allah's viceroy on Earth (*Naml* 27:62). The human is tasked with up-building the face of Earth. Creator created everything on Earth for humans and created humans for Himself.

What does the Qur'an say about humans?

The Qur'an unveils both advantages and shortcomings of humans, and the holy script characterizes humans as "inherently good" from birth: "*We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam*" (*'Isra'* 17:70). Further, Islam refutes the Christian doctrine of "the original sin" and shows that humans are inherently good:

"Verily, We create man in the best conformation" (*Tin* 95:4-5)

At the same time, the Qur'an informs about weaknesses humans have. For instance, "*Nay, verily, man becomes grossly*

overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient” (‘Alaq 96:6-7). Humans haste toward the bad as if rushing toward the good (‘Isra’ 17:11). Humans enjoy arguing and debating (Kahf 18:54). Humans are capable of ingratitude toward their Lord who bestowed them with so much blessing (Mutaffifin 82:6).

What does Allah expect from humans?

What Allah expects from humans is that they work for themselves, not for Allah. They are expected to apply every effort for their own happiness, not for Allah’s happiness (*Fussilat 41:46*), for Allah has no need of humans, while humans inevitably need Allah (*Fatir 35:15*). Humans are not self-sufficient, whereas Allah is not only self-sufficient but He also sustains the entire universe and whatever is in it (*Zumar 39:36*).

How does the Qur'an describe the first human's creation?

The Qur'anic âyahs on the creation of the first human are spread like pieces of a puzzle. Putting them comprehensively together is left for the reader's knowledge, thoughts, and intellectual capacity.

According to the Qur'an, there was *"an endless span of time before man [appeared, i.e. a time] when he was not yet a thing to be thought of"* (ʿInsan 76:1). The Qur'an teaches that the period of human's creation was not an instant process. The human was created as a result of long processes (*atvâr*) (Nuh 71:14). This long "humanization" process included three stages:

1. *The period of basic state before becoming a human:* The following elements contribute to the process: "dust" (Haj 22:5), "sound-making clay" (Hijr 15:26), "clay like that of pottery" (Rahman 55:14), "clay from an altered black mud" (Hijr 15:28), "clay commingled with water" (appropriate for organic being reproduction) (Saffat 37:11), and an "extract of clay" (Mu'minun 23:12). All these states of soil are not the usual kinds of clay and mud as humans are accustomed to.

2. *The period of a biological state before becoming a human:* "We made out of water every living thing" (ʿAnbya' 21:30). Single-cell entity (*al-nafsu wahidah*) was first created (Nisa' 4:1). The Qur'an uses the name of the first human, Adam, to denote the entire humankind as well (A'raf 7:11). The creation of Adam did not happen suddenly when Allah "said unto him, 'Be' – and he was"; Allah said to Adam, " 'Be!' – and he entered the process of being" (ʿAli`Imran 3:59). Because the present tense verb "fa yakun"

denotes “renewal” (*tajaddut*) and “continuity” (“duration”); further, it denotes all three tenses—past, present and future—at the same time.”

The Qur’an calls the living entity, which came around after these two processes, a “bashar” (*Hijr* 15:28). The “bashar” that became a human later will always keep that aspect of his/her nature. While humans were still *bashar*, Allah chose them among the animate creation to bestow reason, will and conscience (*Ali`Imran* 3:33). The bashar is breathed a spirit into, which made him into human being. This spirit is the gift of mind, reasoning, conscience and will. Angels were then ordered to bow down to this newly breathed human being (*Baqarah* 2:30; *Sajdah* 32:9). The angels then said to Allah, “...Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood...?” Because humans are still *bashars*, since Allah did not breath into them of His spirit yet. The *bashars* are still, therefore, “spread corruption and shed blood.” Given the fact that ancient humans’ blood type was 0, known be carnivorous’ creatures blood type, it is no surprise that *bashar* shed blood before the spirit was blown into them. After the spirit was breathed, the human kind became capable of using mind and reasoning, for example, in naming things (*Baqarah* 2:31).

3. *The period as an embryo in the womb*: This process happens both before and after becoming a human. This is a process common between the humankind and animals to date. This period is discussed in a way that our modern day medicine also confirms (*Mu`minun* 23:14). The Qur’an says each human (*al-insân*) is created from “a drop of sperm intermingled” (*nutfah*) (*Insan* 76:2). According to the grammar rules, the word “*al-insân*” (the human) mentioned in the âyah 2 of the *surah* Al-’Insan (No. 76) includes the very first human being as well.

What does the phrase

“Allah breathed of His own spirit” into Adam mean?

The phrase “*Breathed into him of My spirit*” represents Allah’s engagement in the process of turning *bashar* into *al-insân*. This fact completely refutes claims that humankind came about by accident. The human is not a creation that blind nature would be able to produce out of nothing.

The Qur’anic phrase “*Breathed into him of My spirit*” absolutely does not entail humans carry a portion from Allah within themselves either. The Qur’an does not permit such an interpretation. The phrase in question is a figurative speech whose use is unavoidable when discussing divine actions of Allah. Just like blowing at a fire does not mean one’s part, indeed spirit, migrates into the fire, Allah’s spirit breathed into Adam does not migrate into him or his progeny. Because Allah is al-Samad (*Ikhlâs* 112:2), which approximately means “non-breakable and impermeable” along with “The Uncaused Cause of all beings.”

What does the Qur’an say about spirit and body?

The Qur’an says humans are given very limited knowledge and information about spirit; it orders the Prophet to say the following: “*And they will ask thee about [the nature of] spirit. Say: “The spirit [comes] at my Sustainer’s behest; and [you cannot understand its nature, O men, since] you have been granted very little of [real] knowledge”*” (*‘Isra’* 17:85). This divine âyah speaks to the believing interlocutor that he/she would never be able to fully comprehend spirit and its dimensions. At the same time, this âyah informs humans that they have limited knowledge of anything unseen to them and they must rely on Allah in such matters.

Islam does not claim the human body is bad in and of itself. The Qur’an does not offer the body to perform that, which it is unable to. On the contrary, the body is a vehicle for performing

goodly actions (*al-'amal al-sâlih*), which are the second most important elements in humans that Allah draws attention to after faith in Him. Therefore, the Islamic thought defines the body as “the horse of spirit.” If humans fail to nourish “horses” in a decisive battle over their soul against corrupting inner desires, they would inevitably lose that battle.

Is there a distinct difference between body and spirit?

In the Qur'an, there is no clear-cut difference between spirit and body. The Qur'an does not permit such an interpretation. The conclusion one arrives at from the majority of the Qur'anic âyahs on the topic is the following: the link between spirit and body is similar to the link between reason and brain, meaning and word, and electricity and cable. In short, spirit and body are not two opposites in different poles, but are two aspects of one whole.

Why did Allah order angels to prostrate before Adam?

The angels' prostration to Adam/children of Adam is only a symbolic gesture. The Qur'an informs that stars and trees prostrate as well (*Rahman* 55:6). But in this context the word “prostrate” denotes “an object is content with the role Allah assigned to it.” Each and every animate and inanimate being is tasked with specific functions. The existent being lives through its existence in accordance with that purpose.

Another proof that angels prostrated to Adam/children of Adam (humans) is the fact that nature is submitted to human's will and power (*Haj* 22:65 and *Nahl* 16:12). Humans are, therefore, able to use soil, water, and air; humans can utilize land, sea and sky.

Does the Qur'an discuss the notion of the original sin?

It does not. The Qur'an says humans are created in pure *fitrah* (natural disposition) (*Rum* 30:30). Commenting on this âyah, Prophet Muhammad says, "Each newborn is born in the Islamic *fitrah*" (reported by al-Bukhari and al-Muslim). The "original sin" concept diametrically contradicts the "individual responsibility" principle, which is one of the unalterable and unchangeable laws of moral behavior.

In reality, Satan committed the first sin, not Adam: Satan revolted against Allah's command to prostrate before Adam well ahead of Adam's sin of eating from the forbidden tree. Therefore, if one were to speak of the first sin, then it was Satan who committed it, not Adam. The erroneous doctrine of the original sin, attributed to humans, later caused numerous rifts among humans.

Does the Qur'an say newly born infants bear the original sin?

According to the Qur'an, no child is responsible for his/her father's sins. Humans are born innocent. Further, the Qur'an explicitly informs that every single human being is solely responsible for his/her own sins: "*And no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden; and if one weighed down by his load calls upon [another] to help him carry it, nothing thereof may be carried [by that other], even if it be one's near of kin*" (*Fatir* 35:18).

The Qur'an speaks about great Prophet Abraham's father, who made idols with his own hands and was an idol worshipper (*'An'am* 6:74) and about Prophet Noah's son who died as an denier

of truth, insisting on his rejection of monotheism (*Hud* 11:42-47). Such historical anecdotes speak to the fact that each person is solely responsible for his/her actions and deeds.

What is the purpose of humans' birth and death?

The Qur'an offers the following answer to this question:

"He who has created death as well as life, so that He might put you to a test [and thus show] which of you is best in conduct, and [make you realize that] He alone is almighty, truly forgiving."

(*Mulk* 67:2)

What is "fitrah" (the natural human disposition)?

The term "fitrah" denotes "the natural disposition of a human." The *fitrah* of something is its natural properties and peculiarities acquired at creation. By referring to "the natural disposition, which Allah instilled into man" (*Rum* 30:30), the Qur'an argues that humans are inherently good beings. In a different sense, *fitrah* means something placed beforehand, which we find upon removing its cover. Thus, *fitrah* is precisely what Allah placed in humans—"divine software." Whenever *fitrah* is the topic of a conversation, that congregation inevitably speaks of the Creator and His active and actual intervention in *fitrah*-bearing creations' lives.

Fitrah is one of the keys to understanding the "evil problem" (theodicy). The concept that "Everything is *fitrah*-laden" subsequently brings about the concept of "Everything has a purpose for creation." Using something to fulfill the purpose of its creation is "good," while abusing it or using for other purposes is "evil." The further that object distances from its purpose of creation, the bigger the emanating evil. However, the resultant evil is obviously not a part of the creation purpose, but is a result of misuse or abuse.

Objects identify their creation by Creator with their *fitrah*. An object's *fitrah*, speaking in technological terms, is a "divine format." Simply put, Allah signed each and every one of His creations before "releasing" them. The objects' format bearing the divine signature affords us the opportunity to give names. In other words, *fitrah* is linked with the bounty Allah bestowed on children of Adam, which is "teaching names" of things and objects (*ta'limu'l-asmâ'*). Had Allah not instilled *fitrah* in humans and objects, they would have no personality or identity. If an object is devoid of an identity, we would not be able to give it a name. The following âyahs, which use the word "hue" instead of the word "*fitrah*," eases our comprehension of the matter:

"Hue from Allah! And who could give a better hue [to life] than Allah, if we but truly worship Him?"
(Baqarah 2:138)

"All praise is due to Allah, Originator [the grantor of fitrah] of the heavens and the earth..."
(Fatir 35:1)

What is the link between *fitrah* and *iyman*?

Fitrah does not change; it can only be manifested. One can distance from his *fitrah*; one could even alienate from it. But doing so would not destroy *fitrah*, but only veil it. The Qur'an characterizes such veiling as "disbelief."

Sometimes this cover becomes so thick and impermeable that its bearer's return to his/her natural state and disposition becomes impossible. No human would be able to persist in denial of Allah unless he/she betrays *fitrah*. This is the state of mind and soul the Qur'an calls "locked hearts." One could interpret the word "heart" here as both "*fitrah*" and "conscience" as well.

What are the boundaries of humans' responsibility?

Adam was eligible for Allah's forgiveness because he assumed responsibility for his sins—"Oh my Sustainer! I have sinned against

myself" (A`raf 7:23)—and was subsequently chosen as Allah's viceroy on Earth.

According to the Qur'an, Satan became what he is by not assuming responsibility for choices he made, but attempted to blame Allah for those choices:

"[Satan] said: 'O my Sustainer! Since Thou hast thwarted me, I shall indeed make [all that is evil] on earth seem goodly to them, and shall most certainly beguile them [into grievous error]'" (Hijr 15:39)

"[Satan] said: 'Now that Thou hast thwarted me, I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Thy straight way'" (A`raf:16)

"[Taste suffering through fire] in return for what your own hands have wrought –for never does Allah do the least wrong to His creatures!"
(`Ali `Imran 3:182)

"Goodness is from the Creator, badness is from the creation"

"Whatever good happens to thee is from Allah; and whatever evil befalls thee is from thyself..." (Nisa' 4:79)

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

"And it is not We who will be doing wrong unto them, but it is they who will have wronged themselves" (Zukhruf 43:76)

"As it is, man [often] prays for things that are bad as if he were praying for something that is good: for man is prone to be hasty [in his judgments]" ('Isra' 17:11)

"Now, if Allah were to hasten for human beings the ill [which they deserve by their sinning] in the same manner as they [themselves] would hasten [the coming to them of what they consider to be] good, their end would indeed come forthwith!..." (Yunus 10:11)

"[O Muhammad,] say: 'I seek refuge with the Sustainer of the rising dawn, from the evil of aught that He has created, and from the evil of the black darkness whenever it descends, and from the evil of all human beings bent on occult endeavors, and from the evil of the envious when he envies'"
(Falaq 113:1-4)

"[Since they have become oblivious of Allah,] corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hands have wrought: and so He will let them taste [the evil of] some of their doings, so that they might return (to the right path]"
(Rum 30:41)

What is humans' responsibility regarding guidance and misguidance?

"Verily, We have shown him the way: [and it rests with him to prove himself] either grateful or ungrateful"
('Insan 76:3)

"...Men who have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear..."
(A`raf 7:179)

"... Whoever wills – let him believe; and whoever wills – let him disbelieve..."
(Kahf 18:29)

"[O you servants of Mine! Be conscious of Me,] seeing that for those who shun the powers of evil lest they [be tempted to] worship them, and turn unto Allah instead, there is the glad tiding [of happiness in the life to come]. Give, then, this glad tiding to [those of] My servants who listen [closely] to all that is said, and follow the best of it: [for] it is they whom Allah has graced with His guidance, and it is they who are [truly] endowed with insight!"
(Zumar 39:17-18)

"Now, had it been Our will [that men should not be able to discern between right and wrong], We could surely have deprived them of their sight, so that they would stray forever from the [right] way: for how could they have had insight [into what is true]? And had it been Our will [that they should not be free to choose between right and wrong],

We could surely have given them a different nature [and created them as beings rooted] in their places, so that they would not be able to move forward, and could not turn back" (Yá-Sin 36:66-67)

"Now had We so willed, We could have [continued as before and] raised up a [separate] warner in every single community" (Furqán 25:51)

"Allah grants firmness unto those who have attained to faith through the word that is unshakably true in the life of this world as well as in the life to come; but the wrongdoers He lets go astray: for Allah does whatever He wills" (Ibráhím 14:27)

"...In this way does He cause many a one to go astray, just as He guides many a one aright: but none does He cause thereby to go astray save the iniquitous, who break their bond with Allah after it has been established [in their nature], and cut asunder what Allah has bidden to be joined, and spread corruption on Earth: these it is that shall be the losers" (Baqarah 2:26-27)

What is the concept of destiny in Islam?

The Qur'an unequivocally and explicitly states that Allah is almighty and powerful over anything. Every single being—animated or not—exists and ceases to do so at when fate prescribed by Allah reaches them. Nothing can happen or exist outside the laws of Allah.

He has created everything with laws, rules, proportions and measures. He does not create anything without a purpose and He does not act in vain. This is what “He foreordained everything” means. “Nothing is out of His foreordainment” means every creation is bound to His laws.

Allah has subordinated destinies of all seen and unseen creations devoid of will to laws He established. The revelation calls those laws “the *sunnah* (tradition) of Allah” (*sunnatullah*). Allah teaches the truth and His laws not only in textual verses in the books He revealed, but also in the whole universe itself. In that respect, universe is also a book for the ones who can read (*Fussilat* 41:53). For instance, the destiny a creature devoid of will is subject to is a *sunnah* of Allah. There is no and can be no alteration or inconsistency in the *sunnah* of Allah.

Concerning creations who have will and reason—humans:

1. Conditions and events beyond their will's scope: the human DNA and RNA, the blood type, genes, skin-color and height, for instance, are realms that lie beyond one's will. These, too, come around in accordance with the *sunnah* and destiny of Allah.

2. Conditions and events within their will's scope: Allah granted the free will to human kind as a trust. The will itself is a

destiny Allah prescribed to His creations. Humans are responsible for actions committed willfully. It is Allah who granted will to humans and who will hold them responsible for willful actions. In those situations where humans act willfully, the destiny of choosing confronts them.

Allah Almighty wants humans, the best of creations, to use their will. Thus, there is a link between human actions and His actions, elevating humans' status. From this perspective, the human enjoy the honor of making history with Allah.

Allah granted partial freewill to humans. Whatever and whoever, both seen and unseen to humans, exists in this world does so because Allah destined them to exist. The Lord of the worlds Allah prescribed "static destiny" for creatures without will, while creatures with will are prescribed "dynamic destiny."

Granting will to humans is yet another destiny Allah prescribed. Whenever humans employ will, they act in line with the destiny Allah prescribed. Allah created the human kind in the best mold and He wishes him to use the freewill for everything they can choose. For this reason, He incorporated the free will of human kind into His absolute will. This way, Allah established a tie between His will and the free-willed actions of human beings. He made the human kind an active participant in the life who could choose his own destiny. With this position, human kind has received the honor of being able to influence the time and make history.

The will of Allah is unchangeable and unconditional, while the human will is changeable and conditional. The conditional and changeable will of humans is not parallel or independent to the unconditional and unchangeable will of Allah. The limited will of humans is within the unlimited will of Allah. Therefore, the Qur'an states, "*You cannot will it unless Allah wills*" (*Insan* 76:30).

However, Allah wants humans to wish and to want. Humans are, therefore, responsible for actions committed willfully and

consciously. The Qur'an does not approve of any approach that would claim "the human is forced to accept choices made for him by a different authority," or "humans have no choice," or "humans have no say in their destiny," or "human is like a programmed entity that will perform all what is predestined for him." Such a concept would destroy humans' moral responsibility, which is the basis for moral actions and behavior. If that basis were removed, expecting humans to behave responsibly would be unwise, indeed unjust.

Consequently, there would be no sense in such notions as reward and punishment, and Paradise and Hell. If these concepts were rendered meaningless, then there would be no justification for belief in the hereafter.

Humans make choices using will. The only choice they were not given is whether to have that very will or not. Creator chose to create humans with will. The divine will granted will and reason to humans. Humans face two choices virtually at all times. However, no choice of being a creation with will or without was given to humans. Allah exercised His right to grant and ordain will to humans. Allah made a choice and chose to create humans with will. From then on, the human shall accept and surrender to this will of the Creator, and then prove his acceptance by exercising his freewill. What makes us "human" is mainly the free will. In other words, humans' freewill is a destiny, and humans cannot escape their destiny, their freewill in this case. Making choices is humans' destiny and humans are obliged to choose wisely. From this perspective, any argument that humans have no choice would also mean that humans are devoid of will. This is the interpretation of âyahs stating, *"But you cannot will it unless Allah wills."*

What is the relation the Qur'an builds between freewill and fate/destiny?

"And every human being's destiny have We tied to his neck"

(‘Isra’ 17:13)

"Every human being will be held in pledge for whatever [evil] he has wrought"

(Muddaththir 74:38; also see : 52:21)

"It may not accord with your wishful thinking - nor with the wishful thinking of the followers of earlier revelation – [that] he who does evil shall be requited for it..."

(Nisa’ 4:123)

"Whenever they commit a shameful deed, they are wont to say, 'We found our forefathers doing it,' and 'Allah has enjoined it upon us.' Say: 'Behold, never does Allah enjoin deeds of abomination. Would you attribute unto Allah something of which you have no knowledge?'"

(A`raf 7:28)

"... None does He cause thereby to go astray save the iniquitous"

(Baqarah 2:26)

"...And so, when they swerved from the right way, Allah let their hearts swerve from the truth..."

(Saf 61:5)

"This, because Allah would never change the blessings with which He has graced a people unless they change their inner selves: and [know] that Allah is all-hearing, all-seeing"

(‘Anfal 8:53)

"If you are ingrate – behold, Allah has no need of you; nonetheless, He does not approve of ingratitude in His servants: whereas, if you show gratitude, He approves it in you"

(Zumar 39:7)

"Those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught beside Allah will say, 'Had Allah so willed, we would not have ascribed divinity to aught but Him, nor would our forefathers [have done so]; and neither would we have declared as forbidden anything [that He has allowed]...'"

(‘An`am 6:148)

"Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of Allah! To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes this [self] to grow in purity, and truly lost is he who buries it [in darkness]"

(Shams 91:7-10)

"And they will say: 'O our Sustainer! Behold, we paid heed unto our leaders and our great men, and it is they who have led us astray from the right path!"

(‘Ahzab 33:67)

Any examples of such understanding reported in Prophet Muhammad's life?

As argued above, the Qur'an formed a prophetic personality in Muhammad; understanding of destiny and fate is no exception. On the authority of Abu Khizamah: "I asked the Messenger of Allah: 'O Messenger of Allah! Do you think that the Ruqyah (supplications that are used as a means of treating sicknesses) we use, the treatments we use, and what we seek to protect ourselves with contradict anything from Allah's Decree?' He said: 'They are from Allah's Decree.'" (Reported by imam al-Tirmidhi.)

Throughout his entire life, Prophet Muhammad's freewill was tested. *He treated foreordination of Allah as a responsibility, not an obligation.* Otherwise, it would be simply impossible to explain the efforts he employed his entire life. While he was the perfect example of submission to Allah's decreed destiny, he never ceased to take precautions and/or efforts.

The Messenger of Allah believed in the *servant's responsibility*, not in *obligation of destiny*. He always performed his dues in the best way he could. That is why he first invited his next of kin to share a meal, and then only called them to monotheism. Also, that is why he kept Dar ul-Arqam (the first place of meeting with fellow Muslim in Arqam's house) in secret for three years. That is why he chose Abyssinia as the first country for emigration of poor and weak Muslims. That is why he refrained from violence in Mecca. That is why he started thinking about lands for emigration already in the eighth year of his mission in Mecca. That is why he experienced the unsuccessful trip to Taif as part of a search for a safer place. That is why he drafted and adopted the Pledges of Aqabah with representatives of Medina and received their consent for migration ("hijrah"). That is why he approached *hijrah* as a "project": he meticulously calculated the plan for and considered intricate details of his emigration to Medina. Once there, he drafted the Agreement of Medina with local Jews; he fought at Badr, Uhud, Khandak, Hudaibiyya, performed a belated *'umrah*; participated in the Khaybar event, the conquest of Mecca, and the Mu'ah, Tabuk and Hunayn expeditions; finally, he sent letters to rulers of the empires around the Arabian Peninsula—all these events in his life show that he believed in Allah's servant's responsibility, not Allah-decreed destiny's obligation.

The Qur'an formed Omar ibn Al-Khattab's understanding of destiny and fate. Al-Bukhari and al-Muslim report in their authentic collections of *hadiths* an anecdote: Caliph Omar starts a journey to travel to the lands of Sham to congratulate on conquests and check on Muslim armies there. After some time he learns that plague hit the army. He calls unto others in the expedition with him saying, "I will spend the night on my camel. You, too, do so." The troops commander Abu Ubayda ibn Jarrah asked him: "Are you trying to evade Allah's destiny?" In response, Caliph Omar says, "I wish someone else, not you, would say such a thing! Yes, I am evading from a destiny of Allah to yet another destiny of Allah.

"If you had a herd of camels that arrived at a valley that has two slopes, one fertile and the other barren and you let your camels graze on the fertile slope, you will do so by Allah's Leave, will you not? And if you allow them to graze on the barren slope, you will do so by Allah's Leave, will you not?"

In another instance, a thief was brought before Caliph Omar for judgment. Caliph Omar asked him, "Why did you steal?" The answer the thief gave was a full echo of the way pre-Islamic ignorant people used to understand destiny, which the Qur'an informs us about: "I stole only because Allah decreed so in my destiny!" In response, Caliph Omar said, "I am issuing punishment for thievery, which was, too, decreed in your destiny by Allah." He rules to add one more lash to his punishment. Asked about justification, he says, "For slandering against Allah about His decree."

The Qur'an shaped Ali ibn Abu Talib's understanding of destiny and fate. Let's read an extract from the book *Nahj ul-Balagha*: "A man , told him, 'Inform me of how this journey to the lands of Sham happened in accordance with destiny and fate Allah prescribed.' He said, 'Woe to you! Do you reckon destiny and fate remove humans' freewill? If it were so, would there be any sense in reward and punishment, glad tidings and warnings, commandment and prohibition? Allah would not condemn the sinner and would not praise the good-doer. The good-doer would not be higher in esteem than evildoer; the latter would not be condemned.' Having said these bitter words, Ali ibn Abu Talib informs the inquirer that such a question speaks to the asker's resemblance of pre-Islamic ignorance and polytheism saying, 'What you said are words of those who worship idols, serve Satan, falsely testify, and turn away from truth.'"

Ali ibn Abu Talib knew that when humans are directly involved in decision-making, they have the right to choose; when they are not, humans have to submit to destiny and accept fate. In another situation, he said the following: "Destiny is commanding

obedience and prohibiting revolt, and giving one freedom to choose between doing the good and abstaining from the evil" (see: Subhânî, *Al-Qadha wa al-Qadar*, p. 74).

Those who sieged the house of Caliph Uthman's house claimed, "It is Allah who stoned you." In response to this allegation Caliph Uthman said in a manner similar to that of Caliph Omar's: "You are lying. If Allah were to cast the stones, He would have certainly hit the target."

The Qur'an shaped Abu Musa al-Ash'ari's understanding of destiny and fate. According to Shakhristani, "Amr ibn As asked him: 'Would Allah write something in my destiny and then punish me for doing that?'" Hearing "No" in response, he inquired further. And Abu Musa said, "Because Allah inflicts no injustice upon you."

The Qur'an shaped Abdullah ibn Omar's understanding of destiny and fate. Ibn al-Murtadha writes the following in his book *Al-Tabaqaat*: "Some communities consume intoxicating beverages, commit thievery, and kill one another. Later, they claim they were forced to commit these atrocities, because Allah already knew they would do so. Ibn Omar was informed of this situation, to which he said, 'I praise Allah! Allah was indeed aware of what they would do, but Allah's knowledge did not force them to do so'."

Is there a measure of supremacy among Humans in islam? If so, what is it?

According to the Qur'an, the only measure for one's superiority over another is his/her *taqwah* ("consciousness of responsibility for actions"):

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous (highest taqwah) of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted" (Hujurat 49:13)

What is the Qur'anic approach to the diversity of races?

As is known, the units/sentences of the Qur'an are called "âyahs" (indications or signs). Surprisingly, the Qur'an refers to the diversity of races and languages as an "âyah" as well. According to the Qur'an, the diversity of races, skin-colors, and languages is a natural phenomenon like day and night, and is therefore an âyah for those who think:

"And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are signs for those who know."
(Rum 30:22)

What does Islam say about the diversity of faiths?

Does not someone without faith deserve to live?

The Qur'an clearly and strongly states, "There is to be no compulsion in religion" in the âyah 256 of Surah Al-Baqarah:

"There shall be no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in Allah has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for Allah is all hearing and all knowing."

"And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe"
(Yunus 12:99)

"Say: 'O you who deny the truth! I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship that which I worship! And I will not worship that which you have [ever] worshipped, and neither will you [ever] worship that which I worship. Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine!"
(Kafirun 109:1-6)

PRAYERS AND WORSHIP IN ISLAM

What is the difference between the concept of prayer and worship in Islam and other religions?

Islam teaches praying to and worshipping Allah alone. Nobody—be it a prophet, a scholar, a respected person or Satan—has the right to be worshipped by fellow humans. Thus, worshipping anyone/anything besides Allah would be an infringement upon Allah's right to be worshipped. Islamic prayers are based on sincere intentions. If one starts a prayer with a bad intention, however correct actions and appearance of his prayer are, it will not be accepted. Islamic prayers are not bound to any specific location or building, save for specific acts of worship like *Haj*, which can only be performed at a certain time of year and at certain locales in and near Mecca.

Most Christians fulfill religious rights in churches, while Muslims can offer *salâh* at any clean place. Prophet Muhammad said, "The entire face of Earth is made a prayer place for me" (reported by al-Nasai 42/2). By extension, the entire Earth is a place of worship for his followers at any time and space till the Judgment Day.

In the majority of Christian denominations, a person pertaining to the class of preachers holds prayers. But in Islam, there is no such category or class of preachers. Therefore, any knowledgeable believer can lead other believers in their *salâh*.

Further, there is no specific attire for performing *salâh* in Islam. Because there is no class of clergy, there can be no word of specific clerical attire. In cases when *imams* wear distinct clothes

from the rest of the parish, *imams* wear clothes in accordance with their respective customs.

What is ‘ubudiyyah (servitude)?

What is the difference between worship and ‘ubudiyyah?

Routine and established rituals are called “acts of worship.” But Islamic worship is not composed of rituals alone, neither is a Muslim’s life composed of “ritualistic worships” alone. Because Islam is not a religion of “worship,” but is a religion of “‘ubudiyyah.”

The term ‘*ubudiyyah* means “Servitude to Allah alone.” Allah says in the Qur’an, “*I have not created the invisible beings and men to any end other than that they may [know and] worship Me*” (*Dhariyat* 51:56). The *ayah* apparently suggests, and we see proof in Prophet Muhammad’s life, that believers in Allah do not need and are to avoid establishing the clergy class and such life. Therefore, one’s daily routine activities (including eating, sleeping, working, etc.) turn into worshipping Allah if and when done with that intention. Doing so is possible only when one assumes Allah’s guidance as a template for life. Only Allah the Almighty must be the cornerstone and meaning of the human’s entire life. Whenever he reaches such a spiritual state, their work, eating, drinking and other regular daily activities will become part of their servitude to Allah.

What are concrete acts of worship in Islam?

According to the Qur’an, prayers and acts of worship in Islam are not quantified or limited in number. Abiding by all Qur’anic commands and shunning all Qur’anic prohibitions is actually considered acts of worship. For instance, working honestly to deservedly earn or straightforwardly produce *halâl* (permissible) sustenance is an act of worship.

The following five acts warrant special attention among other prayers and worship acts:

1. *Offering obligatory prayers (salâh)*: A daily prayer bound by time, conditions, and performance acts.

2. *Paying alms (zakâh)*: A purifying financial obligation, which conditions sharing.

3. *Fasting in Ramadan*: Abstaining from food at daytime during one month a year to achieve *taqwah* (consciousness of responsibilities).

4. *Performing Haj*: Visiting the *Kâbah* and getting together in “the first house” a human being built on the face of Earth in Mecca for the common benefit of humankind.

5. *Jihâd*: This term means “applying every psychological and physical effort possible” to increase the known common good among humans (*ma'rûf*) and to decrease the commonly accepted evil (*munkar*) in society.

Each and every act of prayer and worship is meant and instituted for the purpose of regulating humans' lives: *salâh* teaches properly managing time and governing body; *zakâh* teaches managing financial assets; fasting teaches controlling food consumption desires and sexual lusts; *Haj* teaches one managing groups and behavior; *jihâd* teaches managing efforts and energy.

Why is there not a class of priests in Islam?

The Qur'an wants and teaches human to worship Allah directly, for Allah is closer to His servants than their own jugular veins (*Qaf* 50:16). The issue is the human. In other words, the human is being asked the following question: You believe that you know yourself better than Allah who is closer to you than your jugular vein?! Instituting vehicles or introducing intermediaries between humans and Allah stems from the flawed concept that

Allah is remote and distanced from them. Islam completely refutes and uproots this misconception; doing so is an outright act of *shirk* (ascribing divinity to others than Allah). And according to the Qur'an, *shirk* is the greatest sin and greatest injustice.

What is the Islamic viewpoint of priesthood?

Islam neither endorses such a class nor permits it to exist, because doing so would be equal to a futile attempt to steal certain functions from Allah (*Tawbah* 9:31). In Islam, nobody is allowed or qualified to speak on behalf of Allah, even if that is Prophet Muhammad. He is tasked with delivering the message he was inspired by revelation (*Ma'idah* 5:67) and living like any other believing servant of Allah. Nobody is allowed to forgive another fellow human on behalf, indeed instead, of Allah, even if that is Prophet Muhammad. He could only plead with Allah to forgive those who followed his message (*'Ali`Imran* 3:159). Further, in Islam, nobody is qualified to guarantee eternal salvation in the hereafter, even if that is Prophet Muhammad. Allah commands him, "*Say: 'I am not the first of [Allah's] apostles; and [like all of them] I do not know what will be done with me or with you...'*" (*Ahqaf* 46:9). It is recorded that Prophet Muhammad told his only surviving child before his death: "My daughter Fatima! Save yourself from the Hellfire with your good deeds. I swear by Allah, I cannot do anything for you in the Hereafter!"

What is the Islamic viewpoint on cleanliness?

Islam is the embodiment of cleanliness from the beginning to the end in the following way:

Faith is the cleanliness of heart.

Salâh is the cleanliness of morals.

Wudhu is the cleanliness of body parts.

Ablution is the cleanliness of entire body.

Zakâh is the cleanliness of property.

Fasting is the cleanliness of ego.

Haj is the cleanliness of Muslims community of the world.

Jihâd is the cleanliness of efforts and energy.

“Enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” is the cleanliness of community.

Wisdom is the cleanliness of reason.

Tawheed is the cleanliness of creed.

Tawbah is the cleanliness of heart.

Halal food is the cleanliness of food.

Offering sacrifices in Allah’s name is the cleanliness of intentions.

In history of humankind Prophet Muhammad was the first person to maintain oral cleanliness as an act of voluntarily worship. He used to brush his teeth five times a day and called his followers to follow suit. Muslims cleanse themselves with water after visiting the bathroom—a recommendation of their religion. Further, some of âyahs command to “Keep your clothes clean!” (*Muddaththir* 74:4) and “Shun all defilement” (*Muddaththir* 74:5). Such âyahs clearly encourage Muslims to keep their clothes and the body underneath those clothes clean; keeping the body clean includes keeping one’s heart clean and pure.

What is *salâh* (prayer)?

Salâh denotes “a basis to prop something, a support.” The Qur’an uses this term for various purposes: servanthood, worship, prayer, pledge, support, and assistance. Rules and rituals of *salâh* were outlined and established in the Qur’an and Prophet Muhammad’s actions. *Salâh* is obligatory upon every Muslim.

Salâh includes several specific rituals and body movements and positions.

Salâh is “the basis of this religion,” in Prophet Muhammad’s words.

Salâh is a private one-on-one appointment between a human and Allah.

Salâh is human’s honoring of the pledge he made to Allah to worship Him alone.

Salâh is human’s gratitude that Allah taught him and to whom he owes everything.

Salâh is being a servant of Allah, which salvages one from being a slave of another human.

Salâh is an honor; kneeling and prostrating before Allah saves humans from doing so before another human.

Salâh is testimony; the performer of *salâh* holds others witness and is himself a witness. The Muslim mind sees everything around as entities capable of memorizing: the places where *salâh* is offered are witness and the times when *salâh* is offered are witness; the sun, the moon and the stars shining upon that place and in that time are a witness (*Shams* 91:1-4); and waters used for ablution and clean body parts are witness for the benefit of the performer of *salâh* (36:65).

Why do Muslims perform *salâh*?

The purpose of performing *Salâh*, according to the Qur'an (*ʿAnkabut* 29:45), is two-tiered: keeping humans away from various immoral actions (*fahshâ'*) and commonly accepted evil (*munkar*), and remembering Allah and being remembered by Allah (*zikrullah*).

How is *salâh* performed?

There are 12—six external and six internal—conditions of *salâh*.

a) *The six conditions outside salâh*:

1. *Emotional cleanliness*: being clean from the psychosomatic state of spiritual and emotional uncleanness emanating from religious bodily conditions arising after coitus or during females' periods.

2. *Physical cleanliness*: cleaning one's body, clothes and place of prayer from any and all kinds of impurities. The message carried in the obligation of physical/material cleanliness in *salâh* is obvious: maintaining bridges between body and spirit, material and abstract, and physics and metaphysics, and not separating these pairs...

Ablution (*wudhu*) is part of those requirements. *Salâh* cannot be performed without ablution, which is washing those body parts, which are exposed at most times and most often used. According to the Qur'anic teaching (*Ma'idah* 5:6), a proper ablution is: a) washing face (up to ears, hair, and throat), b) washing hands, wrists, forearms, and elbows, c) wiping head with wet hands, and d) washing (or wiping) both feet to the ankles.

One's ablution is rendered invalid if one defecates and/or urinates, and has sexual intercourse (*Ma'idah* 5:6). In cases when water is unavailable, wiping hands with pure and clean soil and stones can substitute (*Nisa'* 4:43). Even this symbolic *wudhu*

underlines the extreme importance of both bodily cleanliness and *salâh* in Muslims' lives.

3. *Covering the body*: Women are required to cover their entire body except for hands, face and feet, while men are required to cover their body at least between navel and kneecaps. Covering one's body shows the importance and value Muslims attribute to their one-on-one meeting with Allah. Covering the body also symbolizes this person is opening his/her soul. Because covering something symbolically means "pulling it back," while uncovering something symbolizes "advancing it ahead." The fact that body is held back and spirit is advanced shows *salâh* is not only bodily movements, but also a spiritual journey.

4. *Facing the Kâbah (qiblah)*: Wherever on the globe, Muslims locate and face the *Kâbah* in Mecca while performing *salâh* (*Baqarah* 2:144). Because the *Kâbah* is the first human-constructed building on the face of Earth (*Ali`Imran* 3:96). The requirement to locate and face the *qiblah* aims at enabling the believer to develop the consciousness of geography and location, and to foster understanding of space and directions. Facing the *Kâbah* during the prayer is facing the humankind's first homeland. This is paying tribute to the first attempt for civilization on Earth. Later, Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael reconstructed the *Kâbah* (*Baqarah* 2:127). Facing the *Kâbah* is a symbolical response to the call of the "father of prophets" Abraham (*Haj* 22:27). While the *qiblah* for body is the *Kâbah*, the soul's *qiblah* is certainly Allah himself (*Baqarah* 2:115). As discussed above, Allah is closer to humans than their own jugular veins (*Qaf* 50:16).

5. *Timing*: Fulfilling the prayer in an allocated period of time. The goal of obliging to perform *salâh* in a certain amount of time aims at teaching the importance and temporality of time. Obligatory *salâh* is performed five times a day; Prophet Muhammad showed us how to perform it daily in normal conditions. In extraordinary conditions—bad weather, traveling, etc.—Muslims can combine

the second with the third, and the fourth with the fifth prayer of the day. To introduce more easiness for extraordinary situations, the two combined pairs can be performed within the two prayers' times.

The location of the sun in the sky establishes the duration of prayer times; if the sun is invisible or does not set at all in some parts of the world, humans' biological clock is used for establishing the duration of prayer times. Doing so leaves not even a patch on the face of Earth without *salâh* at every single hour of the day.

6. *Intention*: This means "performing consciously." It symbolizes a Muslim's consciousness of Allah whom he is about to worship by intending to perform a *salâh*. *Intention* is the reasoning of the heart's worship. That is why Prophet Muhammad said, "Actions are according to intentions."

b) *The six conditions within salâh*:

1. *Takbir*: Starting a *salâh* with declaration of "Allâhu Akbar" ("Allah is Great"). One of earliest âyahs commands, "Glorify your Sustainer's greatness!" (*Muddaththir* 74:3) By declaring "Allâhu Akbar," the person in a *salâh* acknowledges that Allah is greater than any characterization; He is Great; He is the absolute Greatness. When saying the *takbir* the prayer performer raises his hands symbolically throwing the worldly life behind his back. In front, he faces only his Lord. That is the "right path" in Surah Al-Fatihah, which every Muslim recites in every prayer.

2. *Standing (qiyâm)*: Standing on one's feet with the consciousness of standing before Allah (*Furqan* 25:64; *Ali `Imran* 3:191). *Qiyâm* symbolizes one's respect toward Allah. *Qiyâm* is the first half of the Kalimah at-Tawheed, symbolizing *la ilaha* (there is no god worthy of worship) of *la ilaha illa Allah* (there is no god worthy of worship but Allah). It further signifies one's revolt against polytheism, disbelief, and extremism in religion. A praying believer in *qiyâm* is like a mountain that is watered from

top to bottom. Rains watering its slopes descend from clouds, while "rain" for the soil of hearts descends from Allah's throne.

3. Recitation (*qira'ah*): Reading parts of the Qur'an to make a dialogue with Allah by feeling it with heart, comprehending with mind and uttering with tongue (*Muzzammil* 73:4). *Qira'ah* is the Qur'an in *salâh*. *Salâh* is the revelation's body, while revelation is *salâh*'s spirit. A *salâh* offered with the Qur'an is an act of worship with soul blown into: it is alive and livens.

Surah Al-Fatihah is the heart of *qira'ah*. Al-Fatihah "Symbolizes a dialog between the servant and the Lord," as Prophet Muhammad put it. That is why he said "No prayer is a [valid] prayer without Al-Fatihah ." Just like *qiyâm* symbolizes mountains, *qira'ah* symbolizes rain clouds that water the reciter's heart.

4. Bowing (*rukû*): Bowing one's upper body forward while standing on feet (*Baqarah* 2:43). Bowing in *salâh* represents one's refusal to bow before anyone but Allah. It is as if the human is saying with body language that he/she will preserve dignity and honor. The *rukû* represents a social, common submission to Allah, while *sajdah* prostration is the individual submission. Because a Qur'anic âyah commands, "Bow down in prayer with all who thus bow down," yet there is no âyah commanding "Prostrate in prayer with all who thus prostrate." *Rukû* is a body position between *qiyâm* and *sajdah*.

Rukû and *sajdah* together represent the second half of *la ilaha illa Allah*, i.e. "illa Allah" (only Allah is worthy of worship). Thus, *rukû* is saying praises to Allah with body language. That is why upon returning to *qiyâm* from *rukû*, the praying person says, "*Sami' Allahu li man hamidahu*" ("Allah hears him/her, who praises Him").

5. *Sajdah*: Placing one's forehead (frontal lobe)—the body part most distinctly differing humans from animals—on the ground. This posture symbolizes a human message that he/

she is not arrogant before Allah and is fully aware of personal limitations. *Sajdah* is the pinnacle of humility before Allah (*`Alaq* 96:19) and is the highest level of respect.

Allah-conscious soul makes its bearer to get up on feet, then bends to his/her Creator, and finally prostates that body in humility before Allah. Thus, *sajdah* represents humans' humility before and servitude to Allah. Making *sajdah* is complying with Allah's command: "*Prostrate thyself [before Allah] and draw close [unto Him]!*" (*`Alaq* 96:19) Making *sajdah* is a spiritual returning to the state of an embryo in mother's womb by physically emulating it.

Undoubtedly, *sajdah* is a position with a symbolic meaning—humans bow down and prostrate before Allah alone, nobody and nothing else—and high spiritual value. To be sure, there is a physiological dimension to *sajdah* among its other rich connotations. From the anatomy viewpoint, by performing the *sajdah* the human places his humanness on the ground before Allah. To illustrate this point, let's provide an example from early 20th century: A train in motion set a stone flying, which severely damaged a worker's frontal cortex. The worker lost any physical ability to perform bodily functions and lived the rest of his life as an immobile and dysfunctional biologic being. Placing the very symbol of our humanness before Allah in a *sajdah* is the symbol of acknowledgement that we are indebted to Allah with our entire bodily and spiritual being.

6. *Sitting (qa'dah)*: Before one concludes *salâh*, he/she is to sit "before" their Lord, trembling on the inside under the awe and grandeur of their Lord (*'Ali Imran* 3:191). Sitting down normally symbolizes resting after finishing a journey. *Qa'dah* is a symbolical resting just before *salâh* is completed; it is a time for most intense supplication to ask from Allah. Supplication is not only "a brain of worship" in general, but is also a brain of *salâh* in particular.

Saying "Peace and blessings of Allah unto you" (as-salaam 'alaykum wa rahmatullah) concludes *salâh* and symbolizes the end of spiritual journey. You wish peace to all creatures on your

right and left, and thus notify them that you just completed a very intensive spiritual journey. Thus, *salâh* is the indication of your submission to the will and commands of Allah.

Where can salâh be performed?

Salâh can be performed at any clean and pure place anywhere on the face of Earth. According to Islamic teachings, a place of performing *salâh* will testify about it on the Judgment Day. Therefore, every believer must strive to offer *salâh* at as many places as possible.

What is the status of mosques in Islam?

Mosques are considered as “branches” of the main mosque in Mecca—al-Masjid al-Haram with the *Kâbah* in the center. Mosques at any place on Earth are considered “Houses of Allah,” for the real owner of these places of worship is Allah: *“And [know] that all mosques belong to Allah [alone]: hence, do not invoke anyone side by side with Allah!”* (Jinn 72:18) Nobody is permitted to close the doors of a house of Allah to His servants. Nobody is allowed to charge fees for entering mosques. There is no membership required to be able to enter a mosque. In case one seeks refuge in a mosque, nobody is allowed to drive him/her out.

In Islam, mosques are not only places of worship, but a local Muslim community’s heart. The function mosques fulfill resembles that of a heart: collecting circulated blood, purifying it, and pumping it back into veins. The mosque, similarly, collects “spoiled” and “blemished” individuals, purifies them with knowledge and heartfelt worship, and sends them back to the midst of the community.

Why is Friday special in Islam?

The Arabic word “*jumu’ah*” means, “getting together” and is used for “Friday.” The difference between the Islamic Friday

and Jewish Saturday and Christian Sunday is that Muslims do not consider Friday to be “the prayer day of the week.” Another distinction the Friday bears is the noon prayer, which was unequivocally commanded by Allah: *“O you who have attained to faith! When the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation [Friday], hasten to the remembrance of Allah, and leave all worldly commerce: this is for your own good, if you but knew it”* (Jumu`ah 62:9). This commandment shows that there is no “the prayer day of the week” concept in Islam unlike in Judaism or Christianity. The Friday prayer is an obligatory prayer along with other obligatory daily prayers (*salâh*).

What is the Friday prayer?

Fulfilling the noon prayer on Fridays is a divine commandment to all Muslims (Jumu`ah 62:9), which is performed in congregations. The Friday prayer is offered instead of the regular noon prayer, thereby rendering the noon prayer non-obligatory. The most significant difference between the two prayers is that the regular noon prayer includes four units (*raka'ah*), while the Friday prayer is twice as short. The “missing” two *raka'ahs* are compensated for by *khutbah* (sermon), which is a well-known platform for disseminating knowledge.

What is the khutbah (sermon)?

The word *khutbah* is derived from a root for “appealing, speaking.” Some say the *khutbah* is “worship in form of enlightening” and “obligatorily gaining knowledge.” It is the most widespread method of “spreading knowledge” in the world. Allah commands that every adult and conscious Muslim attends such knowledge-gaining sessions until he/she perishes.

The *khutbah* analyzes issues that the Islamic community is facing from the Qur'anic perceptive and enlightens sane and

sober-minded members of that community. Thus, the *khutbah* turns mosques into education institutions; acts of worship become education and lesson; imams are now teachers; finally, parish turns into a body of students.

What is the Islamic approach to other religions' temples and places of worship?

Respect and protection, because Allah says the following in the Qur'an regarding other faiths' places of worship:

"... If Allah had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques - in [all of] which Allah's name is abundantly extolled - would surely have been destroyed"

(Kafirun 109:1-6)

What are the adhân (a call to summon worshippers) and the iqâmah (a call to start prayers)?

The *adhân* is a call to prayer made out loud to summon believers to offer the daily prayers. The purpose of *adhân* is informing believers that the time of a prayer has come. The *adhân* performs a function similar to that of a Sofer sound in Judaism and a bell in Christianity. The use of human voice to call the *adhân* symbolizes its human-originated source and its naturalness. The fact that the *adhân* contains meaningful phrases underlines the purpose of not only notifying people, but also reminding them about foundational values of Islam. The phrases in question highlight the inseparable connection between faith and acts of worship. The *adhân* is not a symbol of authority or power, but it is a call to peace and friendship. The words and phrases in the *adhân* were compiled in Prophet Muhammad's times, and represent the axis of the Islamic creed — *tawheed*:

Allah is great (4 times)

I bear witness that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah (2 times)

I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah (2 times)

Hasten to worship (2 times)

Hasten to success (2 times)

Allah is great (2 times)

There is no god worthy of worship but Allah (2 times)

The *iqâmah* is a concise version of the *adhân* that is recommended before one starts an obligatory prayer either individually or in congregation. The words in the *iqâmah* are the same with those in the *adhân* except for one minor addition: after “*Hasten to success*,” one adds, “*The prayer has begun*” (*Qad qâmati as-salâh*).

What time is *salâh* performed?

There are specific times—the connection points of various parts of a 24-hour period—for performing this or that *salâh*. Doing so saves the human from becoming a broken piece of wood violently thrown from side to side by the tide of time.

1. *Fajr* is performed before sunrise and has two obligatory *raka'ahs* (repeated units in a supplication). The message it carries: “I stand in front of You, o Allah, before the sun rises so the dawn is a witness to my *îymân*!”

2. *Dhuhr* is performed immediately after the sun passes its zenith at noon and has four obligatory *raka'ahs*. Travelers away from home may perform only two *raka'ahs*. The message it carries is: “I make daytime and its greatest sign—the sun—witnesses to my faith in You, o Allah! My relationship with You is my priority, o Allah!”

3. *‘Asr* is performed between noon and evening and has four obligatory *raka'ahs*. Travelers away from home may perform only two *raka'ahs*. The message it carries is: “Despite the busiest time of day and despite my fatigue, I am not missing my divine dialogue

with You, so I stand before You, o Allah! (Those with reasonable predicaments may combine the second and third prayers within their combined time.)

4. *Maghrib* is performed immediately after sunset and has three obligatory *raka'ahs*. The message it carries: "I make stars and sunset witnesses to my faith in You, o Allah!"

5. *'Isha* is performed after sunset's redness withdraws in the sky and has four obligatory *raka'ahs*. Travelers away from home may perform only two *raka'ahs*. The message it carries: "I make the night witness to my faith, for darkness cannot conceal me from You, o Allah!" (Those with reasonable predicaments may combine the last two prayers within their combined time.)

One could say the timing and essence of daily prayers carries the following message: "O servant of Allah! Turn such important times of the day into your witnesses! Be constantly mindful of the place and time you are in! Do not alienate yourself from Allah who gave that time and placed you in that place! Do not put off the remembrance and worship of Allah from your daily agenda, so Allah does not "delete" you from His agenda!"

Who performs *salâh*?

Every sane Muslim who reached adulthood (puberty) must perform *salâh*, because any genuine faith is based on free choice. Obviously, the most important, indeed the foundational, prerequisite for a free choice is one's saneness and reasonableness. Adulthood (puberty) symbolizes "the capacity for responsibility." Those who freely choose to have faith in Allah are responsible to perform *salâh*. And those who are responsible to perform *salâh* are subsequently obliged to perform it.

Who is *salâh* performed for?

Salâh is performed for Allah only! Performing it in the name or for the sake of anything and anyone else beside Allah is the biggest sin possible—*shirk* (polytheism). Islam teaches that the only deity worthy of worship is Allah.

Did Prophet Muhammad institute *salâh*?

Prophet Muhammad did not initiate the performance of *salâh*. The Qur'an speaks about "the past prophets' *salâh*." To be sure, the word "*salâh*" means "prayer" and "servitude"; prayers, obviously, exist since the dawn of humankind's life on Earth. Therefore, there are indications that certain aspects and portions of the *salâh* Prophet Muhammad taught his followers were observed and practiced by previous prophets of Allah as well.

Salâh as "worship" was commanded upon recipients of previous revelations (*Bayyinah* 98:5).

All prophets were commanded to perform *salâh* (*'Anbya'* 21:73).

Prophet Ishmael commanded his native peoples to offer *salâh* (*Maryam* 19:55).

Performing *salâh* is one of the five pledges sons of Israel made (*Baqarah* 2:83).

Prophet Moses was ordered to offer *salâh* immediately after bearing testimony of monotheism (*Taha* 20:14).

Luqman the Wise advised his son to perform *salâh* (*Luqman* 31:17).

One of the two tenets given to Jesus the son of Mary was *salâh* (*Maryam* 19:31).

This information we see in the Qur'an is in fact found in some of the canonical Bibles. For instance, according to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus the son of Mary, accompanied by Peter, James, and John, walked a certain distance and "started saying prayers with

faces on the ground" in his last night (*Ibrahim* 14:32-35). What Mark describes Jesus "threw himself on the ground and prayed" is nothing but that very *salâh* that the Qur'an ordains. This particular prayer is a description of a *sajdah*.

What is zakâh (alms)?

The Arabic word *zakâh* means “purifying” and “increasing.” Alms morally purify the payer and blessedly increase (*barakah*) his/her wealth; hence the term *zakâh*. It is not for no reason that the Qur’an mentions *zakâh* and *barakah* together in over 30 âyahs. According to rational arithmetic, 40 minus 1 equals 39; however, according to faith arithmetic, 40 minus 1 equals 400.

Zakâh is an obligatory payment of 2.5% of one’s wealth to the needy if his/her wealth reaches and remains at a certain amount in a year. The purpose of *zakâh* is not just sharing with needy ones. At the same time, *zakâh* frees a property owner from falling into its influence. The main condition in paying *zakâh* is expecting neither material nor moral gain in return.

According to the Qur’an, paying alms from one’s wealth was not made obligatory to the followers of Prophet Muhammad alone. For instance, the followers of Prophet Moses were also obliged with paying alms (*Baqarah* 2:83).

What is fasting in Islam?

The Qur’an speaks about *infâq* along with *zakâh*. *Infâq* is voluntarily sharing one’s wealth, property, and any other possession with others solely for the pleasure of Allah. The root word “nafaqah” means, “consumed, completed, finished.” In the literature on religion, the term *nafaqah* means “sharing something beneficial with a person needing it and expecting nothing in return.” The fact that the term is used in the transitive form indicates that this act of worship would be rendered invalid unless there is a recipient party.

The Qur'an devotes ample attention to *infâq* and encourages believers to make *infâq*. For instance, in the following âyah, the Qur'an says that *infâq* can lead one to Paradise, while stinginess can lead one to the Hellfire:

"As for him who gives [to others] and is conscious of Allah, and believes in the truth of the ultimate good – for him shall We make easy the path towards [ultimate] ease. But as for him who is niggardly, and thinks that he is self-sufficient, and calls the ultimate good a lie for him shall We make easy the path towards hardship and what will his wealth avail him when he goes down [to his grave]?" (Layl 92:5-10)

The Qur'an presents *infâq* (charity) as an antidote for *nifâq* (hypocrisy). The Qur'an teaches believers to share both in abundance and shortage. The Qur'an clearly shows the contrast between *infâq* and *nifâq*. For instance, it speaks about hypocrites:

"Say: 'You may spend [anything], willingly – or unwillingly, [pretending that you do it for the sake of Allah:] it shall never be accepted from you – for, verily, you are people bent on iniquity!'" (Tawbah 9:53)

In the âyah immediately after the previous one, the real obstacle preventing the acceptance of their *infâq* is explained: *"For, only this prevents their spending from being accepted from them: they are bent on refusing to acknowledge Allah and His Apostle, and never pray without reluctance, and never spend [on righteous causes] without resentment."* (Tawbah 9:54)

In fact, giving for the sake of Allah is actually receiving from Allah, for Allah grants joy from sharing to those who give for His sake. Allah grants them an opportunity to give and to share. Sharing is a good, noble deed. Committing good deeds makes one feel good, which is the first reward for doing good. Thus, being able to do good is a reward in and of itself. Nonetheless, Allah emphasizes many times that He prepared an extraordinary reward for good-doers. If Allah wants you to give something, do so immediately and be unhesitant, for Allah wants to actually give, not to take. Allah

wanted Prophet Abraham to give his son Ishmael; Allah not only left Ishmael with Abraham, but also gave him Isaac.

Is there a moral aspect to sharing?

The Qur'an asserts that there is. This topic is such a priority in the Qur'an that the third revealed passage speaks about it: *"And do not through giving seek thyself to gain"* (Muddaththir 74:6).

The following âyahs further shape and consolidate the moral aspect of *infâq*:

They who spend their possessions for the sake of Allah and do not thereafter mar their spending by stressing their own benevolence and hurting [the feelings of the needy] shall have their reward with their Sustainer, and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. A kind word and the veiling of another's want is better than a charitable deed followed by hurt; and Allah is self-sufficient, forbearing." (Baqarah 2: 262-263)

There is another moral problem the revelation seeks to resolve via *infâq*: "fear of hunger." Hunger itself is a natural condition, although the fear of hunger is a moral problem. While a hungry person could be fed with a piece of bread, one suffering from the fear of hunger could perhaps not be fed from all ovens in the world. The following âyah, which is part of a passage on the moral aspect of *infâq*, directly addresses this issue:

"Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and bids you to be niggardly, whereas Allah promises you His forgiveness and bounty; and Allah is infinite, all-knowing." (Baqarah 2:268)

The ethics of *infâq* include preferably concealing that something was shared with those in need:

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

(Baqarah 2:271)

Is there a connection between *infâq* and prohibition of usury?

Interest is taking and giving nothing in return, while *infâq* is giving and taking nothing in return. Interest allows the wealthy to live on unearned money received from others, while *infâq* is when the haves share their wealth with the have-nots.

The obligatory *infâq* every wealthy Muslim must pay is called *zakâh*. The Qur'an constructs inverse proportionality between the commandment of *zakâh* and prohibition of interest. Because an economic system that bans interest would not be able to reach economic justice in society without mandating *zakâh*. Just like the prohibition of interest represents the "la ilaha" negation in the kalimah at-tawheed, the commandment of *zakâh* represents the "illa Allah" assertion therein. Therefore, the two cannot exist without each other.

If one is unable to give charity in economic hardship, he/she will not be able to do so in economic abundance. The Qur'an mentions the prohibition of interest and commandment of *zakâh* together (*Rum* 30:38-39) and the message here is clear: Strive to increase wealth in your hands not quantitatively by charging interest, but qualitatively by *infâq* and *zakâh*. Because the Arabic term "riba" (usury) does mean, "rise," which increases the amount of wealth, yet kills its spirit, i.e. *barakah*. "Lively" wealth carries its owner, whereas owner carries "dead" wealth. Contrary to *riba*, *zakâh* increases wealth's *barakah*, although it may look as if wealth quantity has decreased.

What is the Islam-mandated requirement on the rich to share wealth with the poor?

The way to understanding and comprehending the concept of *infâq* is paved by looking at wealth from the revelation perspective, which rests on the faith in *tawheed*. The Qur'an repeatedly gives an

explicit answer to the question of “Whom does wealth belong to?” — all wealth in this world belongs to Allah. Well, does not human have share of ownership over that wealth? Indeed, human does share some ownership. However, wealth in humans’ hands is a temporary entrustment by the real owner of wealth — Allah. Because humans are created into this world not to own, but to bear witness. One needs to make wealth witness to his/her faith. This, in turn, shapes the attitude of entrustment toward wealth, not attitude of ownership.

Speaking of wealth, the Qur’an unveils two extremities. One of them is capitalism based on the concept of “absolute ownership,” while the other extremity is “financial ascetics” that shuns anything worldly wealth as sin. Communism treated wealth as not an individual property, but a collective property. From this perspective, both communism and capitalism share the same view on wealth: it is *not a temporary entrustment*, but *a property of its owner*. Arguing whether wealth is an individual or collective property does not change the overall approach to wealth in these two systems.

The Qur’an refutes doctrines of some mystic teachings that treat the world and worldly items as “sin,” “impurity” and other such negative attitudes. The Qur’an teaches believers the following prayer, which leads to balanced approach to dealing with wealth:

“... O our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come...”
(Baqarah 2:201)

With *zakâh* at the cornerstone, the Qur’an provides a eloquently-worded and logically-reasoned justification for all kinds of commandments and recommendations to share wealth with others: “... So that [wealth or spoils] may not be [a benefit] going round and round among such of you as may [already] be rich...” (Hashr 59:7).

What is the connection between *salâh* and *zakâh*?

The Qur’an mentions *zakâh* and *salâh* together in tens of âyahs, for they represent the two wings of servitude to Allah. One of the

wings is the human-Allah relations, while the other is human-human relations. *Salâh* is an act of worship, which is obviously between a human and Allah alone. *Zakâh*, on the other hand, is an act of worshipping Allah taking place between and among humans only. *Salâh* is an expression of human's responsibility before Allah, while *zakâh* is an expression of human's responsibility before other humans.

Who is eligible to receive zakâh?

The Qur'an lists eight groups of people eligible to receive *zakâh* (*Tawbah* 9:60 and *Baqarah* 2:177):

1. Poor people (*fuqarâ*).
2. Poor people concealing their financial hardships (*masâkin*).
3. Freeing people from bondage (*riqâb*).
4. The collectors of *zakâh* (*'âmilîna 'alayhâ*).
5. Non-Muslims, to win their hearts and minds (*al-muallafatu qulûbihim*).
6. Those whose debt exceeds available assets (*ğârimîn*).
7. Expenditures to be covered for the sake of Allah (*fî sabilillah*).
8. Homeless, unsupervised, and stranded, cash-strapped travelers (*ibnu's-sabîli*).

What is taxed with zakâh and what is not?

Monetary and non-monetary wealth that reaches a certain level — *nisâb* — is taxed with *zakâh*. *Nisâb* is an equivalent of about three ounces of gold. Because reason, knowledge, fame, arts, and health are considered non-monetary wealth, they are subject to respective "*zakâhs*" as well; each *zakâh* is paid in the form of the taxed item.

Production machinery, tools, and equipment are not subject to *zakâh*, because *zakâh* aims at preventing the property possessor from covering himself with and indulging in that property and wealth. *Zakâh* is taken from wealth so people do not plan to live off of wealth and not produce necessary items for society's needs.

What is fasting in Islam?

The Arabic word “sawm” used for “fasting” means “holding.” *Sawm* is an obligatory act of worship in Islam, which means keeping oneself from eating, drinking, sexual intercourse and other specific activities from dawn to sunset throughout the lunar month of Ramadan, wherein the Qur’an was first revealed to Muhammad. Doing so allows one to better control corrupting desires and ego, increasing his/her *taqwah* (Baqarah 2:183).

Fasting, thus, means holding oneself in check. Whatever befalls a human, it happens because he failed to hold himself in check. Sin and subsequent punishment rest on one’s inability to hold anger, ego, lusts, tongue and limbs and psychological conditions in check.

Islamic fasting is keeping the body away from food and other worldly pleasures to enrich spirit with fear and consciousness of Allah. The purpose is highlighting the secondary-level priority of the material aspects of one’s life. The top-level priority, of course, is that aspect of life, which reasons, thinks, remembers, heeds, values and separates good from evil.

Why is the body enlivened by abstaining From food in the Qur’an’s “birth month?”

The process of comprehending the true meanings of revelation takes place in our reasoning hearts, not physical bodies. The right path toward the truly correct meanings of the Qur’an can only be walked with feet and legs of our mind and reason, not our physical limbs. Therefore, Ramadan, wherein the Qur’an was first

revealed to Prophet Muhammad, is a month of worship aiming at enriching one's soul and spirit, not body.

Why do Muslims spend the month of Ramadan fasting?

The following âyah on fasting is the best answer to this question:

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

(Baqarah 2:185)

This âyah clearly and unequivocally shows the reason why Ramadan is an exceptional and extraordinary month. The revelation of the Qur'an commenced in Ramadan, which is further supported in the first âyah of Surah Al-Qadr (Destiny).

The Qur'an "was born" in the month of Ramadan, and the night it "was born" in is the Night of Destiny (or Power). The Qur'an speaks about it in the **âyah** 185 of Surah Al-Baqarah (Cow) and elaborates in Surah Al-Qadr: *"Behold, from on high have We bestowed this [divine writ] on Night of Destiny. And what could make thee conceive what it is, that Night of Destiny? The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months: in hosts descend in it the angels, bearing divine inspiration by their Sustainer's leave; from all [evil] that may happen does it make secure, until the rise of dawn."*

(Qadr 97:1-5)

What are the times of starting and breaking one's fast?

The following âyah establishes the fasting start and finish times:

"Eat and drink until you can discern the white streak of dawn against the blackness of night, and then resume fasting until nightfall."

(Baqarah 2:187)

Did Prophet Muhammad institute fasting?

The following âyah contains the best answer to this question:
"O you who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of Allah."

(Baqarah 2:183)

What do those unable to fast do?

In such a case, *"Whoever of you is ill, or on a journey, [shall fast instead for the same] number of other days; and [in such cases] it is incumbent upon those who can afford it to make sacrifice by feeding a needy person. And whoever does more good than he is bound to do does good unto himself thereby; for to fast is to do good unto yourselves – if you but knew it."*

(Baqarah 2:184)

What are the Islamic holidays?

Muslims celebrate two holidays, which were announced as such by Prophet Muhammad: *ʿIyd al-Fitr* (celebrated at the end of Ramadan) and *ʿIyd al-Adha* (celebrated on the last day of the annual pilgrimage, *al-Haj*, to Mecca about seventy days after *ʿIyd al-Fitr*). Both holidays are celebrated in accordance with the Islamic lunar calendar.

The root of the word *ʿiyd* (holiday) is close to the word *maʿād* (the hereafter). Therefore, the two *ʿiyds* Muslims celebrate remind them about the place of eternal happiness—Paradise. The real holiday and celebration only occurs after one reaches Paradise, having lived his/her life in full and unconditional submission to the will and commandments of Allah.

Both *ʿiyds* start with holiday prayers (*salâhs*) for Allah. The difference in this *salâh* from other *salâhs* is the higher number of *takbirs*. These glorifications of Allah clearly state that no happiness is independent from Allah. Muslims are to remember Allah in the times of happiness and are to express their gratitude to Him for happiness. The only source of happiness, healthiness, and joy is Allah, one of whose names is *As-Salâm* (peace, happiness).

Why is takbir a common feature of ʿiyd and funeral (janazah) prayers?

Indeed, the two prayers include more *takbirs* than other *salâhs*. The message here is clear: Humans are to remember Allah in times of both happiness and sadness. Only then would the human realize that both happiness and grief are tests from Allah (*Najm*

53:43). Proclaiming “Allah is Great!” cements the knowledge in one’s mind that only Allah is great.

The goal behind this is teaching believers how to manage themselves in times and situations of happiness and grief, and joy and sadness. Having such knowledge adds wisdom. If one does not control these emotions but falls under happiness’ and sorrow’s control, they would certainly overwhelm and shatter that person. And whoever is overwhelmed by emotions, they are first to lose spiritual independence and be enslaved by corrupting desires.

What are Haj and 'umrah?

Haj is an act of worship intertwining divine symbols (*sha'âirillah*) with circumambulation of the *Kâbah* as centerpiece, which is performed in an established time in the year. It is obligatory upon every physically and financially capable Muslim.

The minor *Haj* is called “‘umrah,” which means “building and constructing.” ‘*Umrah* is an act of worship, which includes fewer points compared to *Haj* and is performed voluntarily at any time in the year.

Both *Haj* and ‘*umrah* include symbols. Each symbol is an indicator and each indicator points at a truth. Symbols enjoy value from truths they symbolize. One could count the following intertwined symbols and truths they point at:

Ihrâm is a two-piece non-sewn and non-decorated white cloth, which male *Haj* performers put on instead of regular clothing to erase any indicators of financial status in social hierarchy. The *Haj* pilgrim is not allowed to commit several acts that he could normally do. For instance, no sexual relations with spouses; no arguing or disputing with other Muslims; they are not allowed to use cosmetics and other items that would beautify their mortal bodies. After all, they are rehearsing the Day of Resurrection. Behold! They donned their shrouds; they arrived at the first place of worship to hold themselves accountable in this life before Allah holds them accountable in the next life.

The *ihrâm* symbolizes the following four concepts:

1. Abandoning the world and all social and financial statuses therein;

2. The shroud every dead believer is covered with;
3. The human dignity and esteem; and
4. Divine boundaries humans respect and do not transgress.

Talbiyyah is the following divine slogan each *Haj* performer pronounces whenever possible after putting *ihram* on: *Labbayk Allahumma labbayk. Labbayka lâ sharika laka labbayk. Inna al-hamda wa'nni'mata laka wa'l-mulk lâ sharika lak* (I respond to Your call, o Allah, I respond to Your call. I respond to Your call, You have no partner. I respond to Your call. Indeed, the praise and grace are Yours as well as sovereignty. You have no partner.) The *talbiyyah* thus represents Muslims' answer to the divine call to have faith and believe.

Staying at the Arafat Mount: This is a required action in *Haj* (*Baqarah* 2:198). Arafat is a landmark location among the pilgrimage locations. Staying in Arafat on the ninth day of the month of Dhul-Hijjah represents a man's straightness in front of his Lord. Arafat is not a proverbial washing machine that will cleanse all the sins of everyone staying there. Rather it is a place for man to recognize himself and to impersonalize his great ancestor Adam who admitted his mistake and repented for it. It is a place to reject the great enemy Satan who insisted on his mistake.

Stopping at Mash'ar is spending the night at a specific location after descending from the Arafat Mount with the purpose of having Allah as witness of their acts of worship (*Baqarah* 2:198); it is also known as *Muzdalifah*. Arafat symbolized the *ma'rifah*, which is recognition by knowledge and senses. Mash'ar symbolizes the *shu'ûr*, which is consciousness with precise differentiation.

Jamarat is the name of several locations where *Haj* performers symbolically cast stones at Satan. *Jamarat* represents a fight one wages against Satan and his/her own inner desires heeding Satan's calls. Each stone a believer casts is meant to crush a bad behavior and/or attitude; the stone caster "puts" his bad habits onto those

stones and throws them at Satan saying, "Here! This suits you better, not me!"

Qurbân is the slaughtering of certain animals with certain features with the purpose of sharing its meat with needy ones for the pleasure of Allah. Thus, the *qurban* represents the closeness and an unconditional submission to Allah (*Baqarah* 2:196). The *qurban* at *Haj* plays a central role in the act of worship of sacrificing animals for the sake of Allah. Those who are not performing *Haj* in Mecca and slaughtering sacrificial animals at home are symbolically participating in the *Haj* proceedings. In any event we must bear in mind that "*never does their flesh reach Allah, and neither their blood: it is only your Allah-consciousness that reaches Him.*" (*Haj* 22:37).

Tawaf (circumambulation) is walking around the *Kâbah* seven times counterclockwise. Circumambulation of the *Kâbah* could perhaps be explained as a physically performed "signature" at the end of a covenant between Allah and humans; it represents voluntarily joining the universal chorus in praising Allah. Everything in the universe—be it small as an atom or large as a galaxy—is in the constant state of *tawaf*. Electrons continuously revolve around the nucleus of an atom in the form of *tawaf*. If electrons stop their *tawaf*, the matter reaches the absolute zero. The human blood symbolizes a *Haj* performer, while the heart is the circumambulated "*Kâbah*." When blood stops "circumambulating" the "*Kâbah*," that human dies. If the moon stops circumambulating its "*Kâbah*," the night's lantern will go out. If Earth stops making *tawaf* around the sun, the apocalypse will happen.

Sa'y is walking and running seven times between the *Safa* and *Marwah* heights near the *Kâbah*, between which Prophet Abraham's wife Hagar and her son Ishmael are believed to have run back and forth, seeking water. Thus, making *sa'y* instills the feeling that the world is a journey and its wayfarers are travelers in it. The *sa'y* represents a life-long effort one has to employ to fulfill the purpose of one's existence.

These seven elements pertaining to *Haj* are actually those seven codes that Allah has adopted for humans' life. So by performing *Haj*, the pilgrims are traveling to receive and accept those codes. Performing *Haj* is joining the universal chorus in praising Allah. Performing *Haj* is offering gratitude to the first place on Earth to host mankind. Performing *Haj* is loyalty to a place, while *sawm* is loyalty to time.

One of the purposes of performing *Haj* is preventing mankind from forgetting about the end of the lifetime journey they are currently upon. At the end of this journey, we will be asked about every single deed and word we committed and uttered throughout our "travel" in life. Those who perform *Haj* are like people who will be standing on the Judgment Day with their deeds placed on divine scales. That is why we figuratively called the *Haj* "the rehearsal of the Judgment Day."

'*Umrah* is a minor *Haj* wherein certain rituals of *Haj* are not performed. For instance, '*umrah* does not include visiting and staying overnight at the Arafat Mount and/or Mash'ar, or slaughtering a sacrificial animal, or casting stones at Satan. There are specific days and times for performing *Haj*, while '*umrah* can be performed at any time of year. One aspect of *Haj* features is the gathering of a portion of the global Muslim community in one place at the same time; '*umrah* pursues no such goal. One cannot individually perform *Haj*, while performing only '*umrah* is permitted and valid. It is reported that the Messenger of Allah performed '*umrah* as an individual act of worship and as part of his *Haj*.

Did Prophet Muhammad perform Haj?

It is a historically known fact that Prophet Muhammad did not perform *Haj* in nine years after *hijrah*, and declared he would perform it in the year 10 *hijri*. This *Haj* was the only pilgrimage he ever performed, and it is known as the "Farewell Haj." While

performing this *Haj*, Prophet Muhammad told his followers, "Learn *Haj* from me!" because *Haj* was performed in the pre-Islamic period of ignorance as well. However, its rituals were all mixed up and its goal was severely altered. Therefore, Prophet Muhammad has reinstituted the *Haj*, which was changed by ignorant tribes beyond recognition.

During this first and only *Haj*, Prophet Muhammad delivered the following sermon near the Arafat Mount where the Namirah Mosque currently stands. Although speaking directly to the present tens of thousands of Muslims, Prophet Muhammad was also addressing the entire humanity to come until the Judgment Day: "O people! Just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust.

"Compensation for bloodshed committed during the pre-Islamic days of ignorance is cancelled. On my part, I give up my claim for compensation for the life of Rabiah ibn Harith.

"Allah has forbidden you to take usury (interest), therefore all interest obligation shall henceforth be waived. Your capital, however, is yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer any inequity. Allah has Judged that there shall be no interest and that all the interest due to Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (Prophet's uncle) shall henceforth be waived...

"O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste.

"I am leaving behind one thing the Book of Allah, and if you hold on to it tightly, you will never go astray. You will be asked about me in the hereafter. What will be your response?"

Everyone said in unison: *'We bear witness that you conveyed the message, fulfilled your duty, and gave goodly advice!'*

And upon this, the Prophet of Allah rose his forefinger and said, *"Be my witness, o Allah! Be my witness, o Allah! Be my witness, o Allah!"*

What is the source of such a high esteem and value for the Kâbah?

The *Kâbah* is the direction, the *qiblah*, which Muslims face while performing *salâh* wherever they are in the world (*Baqarah* 2:144). It symbolizes Muslims' awareness of location and space.

According to the Qur'an, the *Kâbah* is the "first house" (*awwala baytin*), which humankind constructed on the face of Earth (*Ali Imran* 3:96). Allah accepted the first human attempt to erect a building as His own abode and called that house *Baytullah* (The House of Allah). Allah thus assumed ownership of the first human-built house and called it, "My house." Therefore, performing *Haj* does not mean one travels abroad, but travels to the initial homeland of humankind.

Undoubtedly and undisputedly, the *Kâbah* is architecturally the simplest and the most unpretentious construction on the face of Earth. The *Kâbah's* pretention is unpretentiousness itself. The intrinsic specialty the *Kâbah* has is disclosed when it is compared to pyramids and ziggurats that pharaohs and nimrods of the past constructed, claiming "the highest, the largest" status.

The *Kâbah*, which was rebuilt on its ancient foundations by Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael, sends the following eternal message to every heeding soul: Children of Adam cannot worship Allah as He rightfully deserves it, however hard they try. Therefore, children of Adam are to admit their inability to perfectly worship Allah.

The *Kâbah* was destroyed, rebuilt, and renovated for various reasons several times in history. Among very few items remaining from the times of Prophet Abraham is the Black Stone (*al-Hajar al-Aswad*), which is embedded in a corner of the *Kâbah*. Those remaining pieces of *al-Hajar al-Aswad* serve as the starting point for circumambulating the *Kâbah* during *Haj* and *'umrah*.

The *Kâbah* is not located at the highest location in Mecca; on the contrary, it is built at the lowest point with stones and wood; it is a simple structure bearing no ornaments.

The *Kâbah* softens our hearts and prevents their petrification. In fact, its architecture resembles the shape of a heart. The original *Kâbah*'s shape was not a cube, as it may now seem. The foundations of *Kabah* encompassed the current foundation and the oval shaped wall on the side of the current structure. When the current structure and the oval shaped wall are looked at together from a birds-eye view, the overall shape resembles that of a heart.

The *Kâbah* is the heart of Earth; the heart is a human's *Kâbah*. One of the messages emanating from circumambulating the *Kâbah* is the following: Each person is to constantly circumambulate the "*Kâbahs*" of their own and of those around them by loving, caring, respecting, showing mercy, advising, and calling to do the good and forbidding from doing the evil.

The *Kâbah* represents humans' unpretentiousness before Allah. The Islamic culture calls the location the *Kâbah* stands on "The center of Earth." It is believed that the entire world's spiritual nutrition originates here.

Who is encouraged to visit the Kâbah?

The entire humanity is invited to visit the *Kâbah*:

"... Pilgrimage unto the Temple is a duty owed to Allah by all people who are able to undertake it..."

(*Ali 'Imran 3:97*)

The commandment issued for Prophet Abraham reads,

"I proclaim thou unto all people the [duty of] pilgrimage."

(Haj 22:27)

The call to *Haj* is also a call to firm and unconditional submission to the will of Allah. Those, who sincerely answer the call and haste toward Allah with "Allahumma labbayk!" ("I respond to Your call, o Allah!"), rightfully deserve the title of "Muslim."

What is udhiya (sacrifice)?

Udhiya (also known as *qurbân*) is the slaughtering of certain animals to please Allah and the distribution of the meat among needy ones in accordance with the standards and examples shown by the prophets and practiced by financially capable Muslims.

Only physical property can be a *qurbân*. The message herein is clear: preventing the worldly items, which Allah granted humans, from distracting the inferior recipient from remembering and thanking the Superior Giver.

The *qurbân* embodies the teaching of “Do not become too attached to the world!” When one faces the dilemma of “Do I own my property or am I part of it?” the given concept enables us to choose the first part. In Islam, humans actually own what they give away, not what they possess. When one realizes that the possession Allah granted is only a temporary entrustment, only then they are able to voluntarily part with it and become the true owner of that possession by giving it away for the cause and pleasure of Allah.

The wisdom of offering sacrifices to Allah is part of respecting the “hierarchy of beings” (“*al-maratibu al-wujood*”). Speaking about the sacrificial animals, Allah says in the Qur’an He has “made them subservient” to humans’ needs (*Haj* 22:36-37). In other words: The human is on a higher rank on the hierarchy of beings. We know that throughout history the human turned this hierarchy upside down and worshipped animals; the Apis cult in Ancient Egypt is a case in point. The Lord of the worlds created everything on Earth for humans and created humans for Himself. Thus, the *qurbân* is the human’s gratitude to Allah for appointing him a special status in the hierarchy of beings.

Every time humans alter the hierarchy order, calamities befall them. Any such deviation ends with the “creation” of false deities and represents disrespect toward the hierarchy of living and non-living beings ordained by Allah. If said hierarchy’s order is distorted, one can say the human is brought to the sacrificial altar. From this perspective, by offering *qurbân* to Allah, humans not only realize their duties before the Lord of the worlds, but also clearly see their own high esteem and value compared to other living beings.

Did Prophet Muhammad institute offering sacrifices?

According to the Qur’an, the practice of offering sacrifices in the name of Allah is as old as the humanity itself:

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

The Qur’an uses the adjective “*qurbân*” (“drawing closer”) to name the sacrifices made by Adam’s two sons for Allah (*Ma’idah* 5:27). They wished to get spiritually closer to Allah by sacrificing that, which they have grown and produced with their own hands. While Abel sacrificed the most valuable portions of his possessions for Allah, Cain offered the least valuable items among his possessions. This shows that Abel loved Allah more than anything else, while Cain loved his property more than anything else. Furthermore, because Abel was conscious that Allah entrusts humans with worldly items, he was an *owner of such possessions*; on the contrary, Cain was *part of such possessions* due to his attitude that worldly items are humans’ property. Abel was able to give up and sacrifice, for he owns wealth. On the other hand, Cain was unable to give up and sacrifice, because he was a slave of wealth.

Allah wanted to uproot the tradition of sacrificing humans practiced in ancient cultures. Allah is sending that message via the

father of prophets, Prophet Abraham: "Animals are sacrificed via slaughter. Allah has subjected them to human service. That is the purpose of their creation. Humans, too, can sacrifice themselves by devoting their lives to servitude to Allah." From this perspective, each act of worship and every prayer that Allah wants from humans, which are written in His book, can be considered sacrifices for the sake of Allah. That is why the Messenger of Allah said, "*Salâh* is a sacrifice" (see: Ibn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, 14746). Of course, such sacrifices are not limited to *salâh* alone: giving alms, fasting, performing *Haj* and any other act of worship that brings us closer to Allah is a "*qurbân*."

During the farewell Haj, Prophet Muhammad came to the place of sacrifices and slaughtered sixty-three animals with his own hands. He has done so as gratitude to Allah for each year of his life. He has eaten the sacrificed animals' meat and drank soup made with the meat of those animals. By doing so, he refuted the "blessed animal" notion, which *jahiliyyah* (the era of pre-Islamic ignorance) came up with and produced no justification for (*Ma'idah* 5:103). Those who lived in *jahilliyyah* and persevered on it (by shunning Islam) created false deities, because they "inherited" the mindset of the People of Thamud who first declared a camel "Allah's camel," then deprived it of food and water; the Thamud were destroyed for their sin.

What is the purpose of offering sacrifice?

The purpose behind the act of sacrifice is the consciousness of responsibility: "*Never does their [slaughtered animals'] flesh reach Allah, and neither their blood: it is only your Allah-consciousness that reaches Him.*"

(*Haj* 22:37)

While an animal is actually sacrificed, what does "your Allah-consciousness reaches Allah" imply? Just like a living being has spirit, actions that humans commit, too, have spirit, which is consciousness. While a sacrificed animal's flesh or blood does not obviously reach Allah, one's *taqwah* to slay this animal for Allah's sake alone is the consciousness in question.

What is jihâd?

This term denotes “applying every psychological and physical effort possible.” The Qur’anic use of the term “jihâd” cannot be diminished to only mean “holy war,” for it is not the precise meaning the revelation intends to ascribe to this word. As is known, the Qur’an uses the word “qitâl” (“war”), which is different from *jihâd*. The Qur’an only allows waging *qitâl*, not *jihâd*, even in cases of utmost self-defense necessity (see: Haj 22:39 and Baqarah 2:216).

Jihâd can also denote “human’s extraordinary effort for Allah’s cause.” The following âyah, which allows waging “jihâd” (effort, striving), was revealed in the Meccan period of prophethood when no wars or battles were waged by Muslims nor were they permitted by Allah to do so for self-defense, and it precisely illustrates our point: *“Do not defer to [the likes and dislikes of] those who deny the truth, but strive hard against them, by means of this [divine writ], with utmost striving (jihâd)”* (Furqan 25:52). It is extremely important to note that the “weapon” for waging *jihâd* here is not arms or weapons, but “this divine scripture.”

According to the Qur’an, the main prerequisite for a permissible war is not the opponent’s religion, but their attack and assault (Baqarah 2:190; Mumtahanah 60:8-9). If Allah willed that everyone on the face of Earth believed in Him, having them do so would be indeed easy for Him: *“And [thus it is:] had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe?”* (Yunus 10:99) Allah let humans to freely and consciously choose to have faith (Kahf 18:29). Allah does not force humans to

believe in Him, but urges them to do so by the means of prophets and Holy Scriptures (*‘Ali’ Imran 3:110*). The goal of lawful wars is not exterminating those who are not Muslim. According to the Qur'an, such a war is only permissible “until there is no more oppression” against faith (*Baqarah 2:193*).

To be sure, resisting and fighting one's own inner desires and corrupting wishes are also a *jihâd*.

Is jihâd equal to war?

No, they are not. According to the âyah 78 of Surah Al-Haj, “jihâd” is “commanded” irrespective of time and space, whereas in the âyah 39 “wars” are only “permitted to wage” pursuant to conditions.

Jihâd cannot be limited into the notion of “war.” For instance, “O prophet! Strive hard [wage *jihâd*] against the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites, and be adamant with them. And [if they do not repent,] their goal shall be hell - and how vile a journey's end!” (*Tahrim 66:9*)

This âyah proclaims *jihâd* not only against deniers of truth, but also against hypocrites. As is historically known, there was no war waged against hypocrites who reared their heads in Medina. Let alone declaring war, Allah harshly reprimanded and strongly criticized His Messenger for being too lenient toward the leaders of hypocrites (*Tawbah 9:84*).

What Is “enjoining the right and forbidding the evil?”

The Qur'an calls the universally accepted good deeds and attitudes “al-ma'ruf” and calls the universally rejected bad deeds and attitudes “al-munkar.” The revelation does not only command believers to enjoin the good, but also demands that they strive to ensure that the good reigns in their society. The revelation does not only forbid the evil, but also urges believers to keep others from committing evil actions. Here are several âyahs in this regard:

“And [as for] the believers, both men and women – they are close unto one another: they [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto Allah and His Apostle. It is they upon whom Allah will bestow His grace: verily, Allah is almighty, wise!”

(Tawbah 9:71)

“You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in Allah...”

(‘Ali ‘Imran 3:110)

“They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and vie with one another in doing good works: and these are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they shall never be denied the reward thereof: for, Allah has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him.”

(‘Ali ‘Imran 3:114-115)

“The hypocrites, both men and women, are all of a kind: they enjoin the doing of what is wrong and forbid the doing of what is right and withhold their hands [from doing good]. They are oblivious of Allah, and so He is oblivious of them. Verily, the hypocrites – it is they, they who are truly iniquitously!”

(Tawbah 9:67)

Does Islam encourage Muslims to become missionaries as in Christianity?

It does not. Missionary organizations are institutions under churches’ patronage. Because there is no church in Islam as an institution, there are no missionaries as such.

However, there is calling to monotheism (*da’wah*) in Islam, which is different from Christian missions. In Islam, Muslims call people to Allah and His religion: *“And who could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellow humans] unto Allah, and does what*

is just and right, and says, 'Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to Allah?'" (Fussilat 41:33) In contrast to this call, missionaries call fellow humans to join their respective churches. After all, Paul argued, "The Church is salvation." On the contrary, the Qur'an does not offer humans guarantees of salvation just for joining the ranks of Muslims. On the contrary, it speaks in the following âyah to Muslims, Jews, Christians and Sabians saying,

"Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve." (Baqarah 2:62)

In a different âyah, which carries a similar meaning, Allah says: *"Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians – all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve"* (Ma'idah 5:69)

What is da'wah (call to Islam); who and what does one make da'wah to?

"And who could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellow-men] unto Allah, and does what is just and right, and says, 'Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to Allah?'" (Fussilat 41:33)

"Say [unto them, O Prophet]: 'I have only been bidden to worship Allah, and not to ascribe divine powers to aught beside Him: unto Him do I call [all mankind], and He is my goal!'" (Ra'd 13:36)

"O our Sustainer! Behold, we heard a voice call [us] unto faith, 'Believe in your Sustainer!' - and so we came to believe. O our Sustainer! Forgive us, then, our sins, and efface our bad deeds; and let us die the death of the truly virtuous!." ('Ali 'Imran 3:193)

“O you who have attained to faith! Respond to the call of Allah and the Apostle whenever he calls you unto that which will give you life; and know that Allah intervenes between man and [the desires of] his heart, and that unto Him you shall be gathered.” (‘Anfal 8:24)

“But if they turn away, say: “I have proclaimed this in equity unto all of you alike; but I do not know whether that [judgment] which you are promised [by Allah] is near or far [in time]” (‘Anbya’ 21:109)

How is da’wah carried out?

“Call thou (all mankind) unto thy Sustainer’s path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner – for, behold, thy Sustainer knows best as to who strays from His path, and best knows He as to who are the right-guided.” (Nahl 16:125)

“But [since] good and evil cannot be equal, repel thou [evil] with something that is better – and lo! he between whom and thyself was enmity [may then become] as though he had [always] been close [unto thee], a true friend!” (Fussilat 41:34)

“And no reward whatever do I ask of you for [this da’wah]: my reward rests with none but the Sustainer of all the worlds.” (Shuàràa 26:109)

“Just as thou canst not lead the blind [of heart] out of their error; none canst thou make hear save such as [are willing to] believe in Our messages, and thus surrender themselves unto Us.”

(Naml 27:81)

What is the status of Jews and Christians according to the Qur’an?

The Qur’an grants Jews and Christians a special status compared to other faith systems, by calling them “The Peoples of the Book” and recognizing the divine source of their later altered scripts.

The Qur'an grants a special status to Jews and Christians, which Arab polytheists are not given, despite the fact Prophet Muhammad emerged in that region and the Qur'an itself is in their language. The Qur'an allows Muslim men to marry Jewish and Christian women and makes their food (slaughtered animals included) lawful for Muslims (*Ma'idah* 5:5).

Is there a special kind of da'wah for Jews and Christians described in the Qur'an?

It does. But this *da'wah* does not call them to abandon one affiliation and assume another. On the contrary, this *da'wah* urges Jews to follow Moses' teachings and Christians to follow Jesus' teachings. Because, according to the Qur'an, Moses and Jesus were prophets who called unto monotheism and worshiping Allah alone, and prohibited polytheism. After all, the Qur'anic call is the same *da'wah* to monotheism, to which all of the previous prophets called unto:

"Say: 'O followers of earlier revelations! Come unto that tenet which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall not ascribe divinity to aught beside Him, and that we shall not take human beings for our lords beside Allah.' And if they turn away, then say: 'Bear witness that it is we who have surrendered ourselves unto Him.'"

(*'Ali `Imran* 3:64)

PROHIBITIONS

What is shirk (polytheism) in Islam?

Polytheism (“shirk”) is defined as ascribing an aspect of divinity to anyone or anything beside Allah. From this perspective, *shirk* is equal to ascribing partners/equals to Allah. Such a deed, obviously, contradicts the very core concept of monotheism in Islam and is the biggest sin in Islam. If Allah wishes, He may forgive any sin even if the sinner does not repent; however, *shirk* is never forgiven without sincerest repentance (*Zumar 39:53 and 4:48*). Because *shirk* is seen as a betrayal of Allah’s love toward His creations, namely humans.

The opposite of *shirk* is *tawheed*. The term *tawheed* means, “ascribing any and all divinity to Allah alone and ascribing no partners to Allah.” Obviously, the two terms are antonyms and one cannot exist where the other is present.

Islam teaches that worshipping anything and anyone beside Allah is an act of *shirk*, be it an angel, a holy spirit, a prophet, a saint, an esteemed person or a star, Earth, etc. The only address for prayers and worship is Allah. Worshipping other(s) beside or instead of Allah would be equal to appointing oneself a divine being. There is a clear concept in hierarchy and subordination: The enforcer of a task is superior, while the tasked one is inferior. Contrary to this notion, one’s ability to select a “god” renders that person the master of that very “deity.” In Islam, this is called “appointing one’s own god,” which essentially means worshipping one’s own ego. Simply put, such people deify their own desires and dreams (*Yunus 10:66*). Thus, any kind and form of *shirk* is a transgression of one’s boundaries.

Imagining one has the ability to appoint their own divinity and then worship it is a paradox in and of itself, which will inevitably lead to the destruction of human's spiritual integrity.

As mentioned above, ascribing Allah's divine qualities to others than Him is an act of *shirk*. Ascribing perfectness and flawlessness is an act of *shirk*, for only Allah is flawless and perfect. Therefore, the Qur'an thusly warns those who say "Jesus is the son of Allah":

"Indeed, [by this assertion] you have brought forth something monstrous, whereat the heavens might well-nigh be rent into fragments, and the earth be split asunder, and the mountains fall down in ruins!"

(Maryam 19:89-90)

Polytheism (*shirk*) is a shackle Satan locks on humans' spiritual freedom. Any kind or act of *shirk* is an attempt to render Allah's trust in people moot. Any kind and form of *shirk* makes a human being a slave to another fellow human, or to a matter, or to his/her own ego.

What does the term "shirk" envelop?

Claiming that an individual or a group, an organization or an institution is capable of wielding divine powers, which belong to Allah alone, is an act of *shirk*. The Qur'an clearly defines any tangible or intangible "authority" ascribed as a "partner" or "equivalent" to Allah in establishing divine laws and/or rulings as "taghut" (adversarial). Because only Allah is Allah. He is the only Entity worthy of worship; everything and everyone else has the right to worship Him, not to be worshipped. Attempting to steal this or that quality of His does not divinize the attempter. Doing so only blemishes that person's humanness, because one claiming divinity had to have tarnished his/her humanness first. The only party secure from any imaginable damage in such a situation is clearly Allah:

“Allah is He save whom there is no deity: the Sovereign Supreme, the Holy, the One with whom all salvation rests, the Giver of Faith, the One who determines what is true and false, the Almighty, the One who subdues wrong and restores right, the One to whom all greatness belongs! Utterly remote is Allah, in His limitless glory, from anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity!” (Hashr 59:23)

Ascribing flaws or imperfectness to Allah is an act of *shirk* as well. This kind of *shirk* includes ascribing human qualities to Allah. The heinous illusion that Allah has flaws speaks to the deficiency of the beholder. Unless someone like this corrects his/her vision, they will not be able to see what they are looking at in its true shape and essence. Every single magnificent name of Allah—“*al-asma al-husna*”—mentioned in the Qur’an speaks to His perfectness. One goal of the *al-asma al-husna* is making humans aware of Allah’s qualities and powers; the other goal is making those very humans aware that they will never reach perfectness in qualities and powers Allah granted them.

When prayers are directed at Allah alone and when He alone is worshipped then one can say this is a prayer and worship; ascribing partners to Allah in prayer or worship is indeed an act of *shirk* and such objects are clearly powerless idols.

Why is shirk prohibited in Islam?

Shirk is ingratitude toward Allah (*Quraysh* 106:1-4), because it is an infringement on Allah’s right to be worshipped alone. Any and all forms of *shirk* cultivate and support the concept of “a remote Allah.” When the human thinks he cannot reach Allah without an intercessor, *shirk* thrives! All the while Allah is closer to him than his jugular vein.

Shirk is one’s invention of lies about Allah: “*And who could be more wicked than one who invents [such] a lie about [a message from] Allah?*” (Saf 61:7)

Shirk renders one's efforts and attempts vain: "... If thou ever ascribe divine powers to aught but Allah, all thy works shall most certainly have been in vain: for [in the life to come] thou shalt most certainly be among the lost" (Zumar 39:65)

Shirk deprives one of Allah's mercy and grace: "Do not set up any other deity side by side with Allah, lest thou find thyself disgraced and forsaken" ('Isra' 17:22)

So, *shirk* can be seen as the demise of a human's internal unity and integrity. *Shirk* undermines the spiritual dynamism and destroys inner energy. *Shirk*, obviously, cannot inflict any harm on the Lord of the worlds. On the contrary, *shirk* destroys only that person who commits this heinous crime. Therefore, *shirk* is a moral schizophrenia, which destroys humans' ability to comprehend and maintain balance between feelings and thoughts, spirit and body, tangible and intangible, and soul and mind.

Shirk weakens such people in comparison to those objects that are being ascribed divine features. For instance, if one believes in the bad omen of the number 13, he/she is likely to have nightmares in a hotel room No. 13. That is the kind of negative impacts *shirk* could inflict on humans. The Qur'an qualifies *shirk* as "the greatest oppression" (*Luqman* 31:13).

What is dhulm (oppression) according to Islam?

In the Islamic teachings, the word "dhulm" is used as the antonym for the word "justice." Whatever is unjust, it is oppressive. Justice is giving one what he/she rightfully deserves, while oppression is depriving one of it.

Violence is absolutely prohibited in Islam in however small amount or insignificant form. The Qur'an commands every believer to be just toward each other and the environment (*Nuh* 16:90). Allah also says the following in the Qur'an:

"Never do I do the least wrong unto My creatures!" (Kâf 50:29)

There is no single justification for oppression in Islam. There is absolutely no benefit to the religion or the state, to the individual or the society; hence the prohibition of oppression of anyone by anyone. In the Qur'an, Allah says, *"Never would We destroy a community unless its people are wont to do wrong [to one another]"* (Qasas 28:59). This is why Islamic scholars and thinkers argue that "States fail not because of disbelief, but because of oppression."

What is disbelief in Islam?

Who is considered a “non-believer”?

The Arabic term “*kufr*” means, “conceal,” and the term “*kâfir*” means, “a concealer.” In other words, any kind of disbelief, blasphemy or atheism is equal to concealing the blessings of Allah with the cover of ignorance.

Kufr is covering one’s own conscience, because it always insists on doing the right action and thinking righteous thoughts. To silence conscience’s voice, a disbeliever covers it with an invisible curtain. This is what *kufr* means.

In the religious texts, *kufr* is defined as “Rejecting any or all truths in the Qur’an, which humans are required to believe in.” There are two conditions for that:

1. This truth is delivered to such a person in an explicit, unequivocal and understandable manner; and
2. Said person openly and clearly rejects the truth and refuses to believe in it after having received the truth, which the revelation orders to believe in.

When these two conditions are met, such a person is a *kâfir* and his/her actions are *kufr*. Henceforth, not every non-Muslim is a *kâfir*; however, every *kâfir* is a non-Muslim.

What is hypocrisy and who is called a hypocrite?

Islam sees hypocrisy as a more “faith morals” problem than a “faith” problem. Hypocrites are those who emulate believers, but have no sincerity in either faith or rejection. In short, hypocrites are

envious of sincerity and faithfulness. The prohibition of hypocrisy is an encouragement of humans to be as they look and look as they are. According to the Qur'an, hypocrites are in a worse position than even deniers of truth (*Nisa'* 4:145).

What is the Islamic ruling on homicide or manslaughter?

According to the revelation, intentionally killing an innocent person is equal to killing all of humankind (*Ma'idah* 5:32). Therefore, if one kills a fellow human, he/she:

1. Killed a masterpiece of Allah and claimed divinity by taking life.
2. Violated humankind's rights by killing one of them.
3. Turned into an enemy of his/her kind by killing another human and manifesting his/her potential to inflict such an irreversible damage.

Along with attributing the highest degree of value to human life, Islam also provides means to protect it against those who infringe upon it. Islam allows fighting back to preserve and save one's life. However, one must know his/her boundaries in self-defense. Even the âyah allowing self-defense wars warns Muslims "Do not commit aggression, for verily Allah does not love aggressors" (*Baqarah* 2:190). Allah does not forbid Muslims from showing kindness and behaving well toward those who do not fight them and/or drive them out of their homes, because "verily, Allah loves those who act equitably" (*Mumtahanah* 60:8). Thus, Islam prohibits homicide (manslaughter), except in self-defense wars and enforcement of death penalty for killing an innocent human.

What punishment does Islam enforce for homicide or manslaughter?

There are two types of punishment for killing innocent people willing and intentionally: 1) he/she will be punished in the hereafter for infringing upon Allah's right (*Nisa'* 4:93); 2) a punishment in

this world for infringing upon a fellow human's right for life. The punishment enforced in this world is an equivalent of said crime—death (*Baqarah* 2:178). However, the victim's next of kin have the right to forgive the killer, should they wish to do so (*Baqarah* 2:178). But if they wish to enforce said punishment, they must not “exceed the bounds of equity in retributive killing” out of vengeance (*'Isra'* 17:33). Doing so would clearly be a transgression of boundaries Allah has established for humans.

The Qur'an aims at comforting three consciences as far as criminal justice is concerned:

1. Victim's conscience;
2. Society's conscience; and
3. Culprit's conscience.

While other legal systems take the first two points into consideration, Islam is the only system to include the third point as well. But, of course, before a culprit's conscience can rest with the thought of enduring a deserved punishment, an actively good conscience is to be there in the first place.

The worst punishment Islam provides for in this world is the death penalty for those who kill innocent people without the right to do so. But because the death penalty is an irreversible punishment, Prophet Muhammad instructed not to enforce it in not-clear-cut cases.

Why is pork prohibited in Islam?

Consumption of pork is forbidden in Islam per a prohibition in the book of Allah. A Muslim must not consume pork unless he/she faces the threat of death from starvation. (*See the Qur'an Ma'idah 5:3; Baqarah 2:173; Ma'idah 5:3; 'An'am 6:145; and Nahl 16:115*). While most of the prohibitions and factors necessitating them are explained, this particular prohibition does not provide one. But, first of all, one should not forget that our religion is a religion of unconditional submission to Allah. Therefore, the reason behind some prohibitions might simply be a test of a servant's submission to Allah's will. However, this possibility does not prevent pondering on the reason for this particular prohibition.

Islam forbids the consumption of pork but does not seek to eradicate the species from Earth. On the contrary, pigs have been created for a purpose just like all other creatures. The purpose of the pig's creation could perhaps be classified into two categories:

1. The physical, bodily purpose: Pigs are fantastic scavengers and they have been assigned the task of removing waste from Earth.
2. The moral or spiritual purpose: The ban on consumption of pork falls under this category. What is actually forbidden through this prohibition is piggish behavior.

One of the obvious causes for prohibiting pork is health concern related to this animal. This finding, upon which both Muslim and non-Muslim scientists and scholars agree, is material necessity that cannot be overlooked or ignored. One could also argue that there is a moral necessity for prohibiting pork consumption: one of the reasons behind the prohibition in question is "turning into

a pig-like” person. As is known, pigs represent “irresponsibly boundless” species in the animal world.

We are what we eat. The moral message here to the believers through the prohibition of pork is “Do not be unbridled in your behavior or become a person lacking moral restraints.”

- Failure to choose one’s words wisely is piggishness of the tongue.
- Loss of control and the capacity to be led by one’s emotions amounts to emulation of pigs emotionally.
- Acting purely on impulse and doing whatever one wants is piggish behavior in activity.
- Lack of ability to control one’s behavior is another form of piggishness and leads to corruption of moral values.

Of all the animals, pigs embody boundlessness and unbridled behavior in their characteristics:

a) Excessive eating: Pigs are omnivores and are gluttonous by nature. They are unselective about what they eat. Pigs will eat more or less anything they come across, including feces, other animals, and all forms of garbage.

b) Unlimited reproduction: Pigs are amongst the most fertile of mammals. Larger pig litters can reach up to fourteen piglets, and boars reach puberty at six months of age.

c) Limitless mating: Pigs are not jealous and protective of their mates and will mate in an unbounded manner.

Thus, the message to believers carried in the pork prohibition is “Know your boundaries.” Using improper words, allowing emotions to overwhelm, and doing whatever comes to mind is one’s lack to recognize boundaries in speech, feelings, and behavior, respectively. So, the real message given to the believers through banning pork is “O human being! Do not lose your moral boundaries, lest you come to resemble a pig.”

Why does Islam prohibit alcohol and other intoxicating substances?

Islam prohibits any substance that induces intoxication. The Qur'an calls alcoholic substances one of "loathsome evils of Satan's doing" (*Ma'idah* 5:90). All of the commandments and prohibitions in Islam rest upon the following five entrustments that Allah ordained upon humans:

1. Protecting life: homicide is prohibited and punished (*Ma'idah* 5:32).

2. Protecting reason: any and all intoxicants are prohibited (*Ma'idah* 5:90).

3. Protecting religion: Polytheism and atheism are prohibited and punished for in the Hereafter.

4. Protecting progeny: Fornication and adultery are prohibited and punished (*Nur* 24:2).

5. Protecting property: Thievery is prohibited and punished (*Ma'idah* 5:38).

Alcohol, narcotics and their derivatives violate the sanctity of one's reason and mind. Undoubtedly, sound reason is the foundation of one's sincere and conscientious faith.

Prohibition of alcohol and narcotics is considered to be a means of protecting humans' dignity as well. There are no sizes—big or small—of prohibitions. To understand this Islamic principle, it suffices to remember the following rule: The end of the road leading to alcoholism and dependency on narcotics starts with that first drop of alcohol and the first "high." Islam

prohibits consuming that first drop and that first shot of a needle in particular, and consumption of these hazardous substances in general.

There is also a moral dimension to the prohibition of such substances that blur one's mind and reason—alcohol, narcotics and the like: "O humans! You are the slave of that, which you became dependent on! Such dependency demolishes your honor and dignity. You are created not to be dependent on and enslaved by your dreams and desires, but you are to serve your Lord Allah! The real freedom is the ability to control desires and vicious passions. O human! Beware of alcohol and narcotics and intoxication they induce! Be not intoxicated by property and money! Be not intoxicated by power and recognition!"

What criteria does Islam use to prohibit the consumption of certain foods?

There are two criteria in Islam regarding foods and staples:

1. Permissible and impermissible (*halâl* and *harâm*), and
2. Pure and impure (*tayyib* and *habîth*).

The issues of *halâl* and *harâm* pertain to religious studies, while *tayyib* and *habîth* are part of natural sciences (e.g. medicine and chemistry).

Islamic scholars do not search for justification for permissible items, but do study justifications for prohibited items. If there is no proof that something is prohibited, then it is deemed permissible. The Qur'an is very strict about prohibiting that, which Allah permitted and vice versa: "*Who is there to forbid the beauty which Allah has brought forth for His creatures, and the good things from among the means of sustenance?*" (A`raf 7:32) *Harâm* items are certain and obvious; therefore, the Qur'an is tenfold sensitive about the prohibition (making *harâm*) of those items that are *halâl* for consumption (An`am 6:140). The Qur'an qualifies announcers of

something *harâm* while it is *halâl* as “Those who are bent on denying the truth attribute their own lying inventions to Allah” (*Ma'idah* 5:103).

As discussed above, only Allah declares what is permissible and impermissible for His creatures' consumption (*Yunus* 10:59-60). Prophet Muhammad, with all his virtues and righteousness, is not able to prohibit the permissible even for himself, let alone others. There was a situation when Allah chastised Prophet Muhammad for prohibiting himself from consuming a permissible food, and Allah did not permit him to do so even unto himself alone (*Tahrim* 66:1).

According to the Qur'an, declaring a *harâm* item, action or food now *halâl* is obviously not allowed; but declaring that which is *halâl* is now *harâm* warrants a tenfold attention. This is a foundational cornerstone in Islam. Because “Allah wills that you to have ease and does not will you to suffer hardship” (*Baqarah* 2:185).

Islam does not practice “food blessing” as it is observed in Judaism, for there is no entity to bless food “on behalf of Allah.” Food and staples' presence and availability, after all, are mercy and kindness of Allah upon the humankind.

The Qur'anic system of values prioritizes *moral* items over *material* ones. For instance, the revelation attributes more value to the Hereafter over the worldly life, the spirit over the body, faith over deeds, and intentions over acts of worship. In other words, the moral “food” for soul is given high priority than material food for body. The Qur'an considers the nutrition of mind with malicious knowledge more of an issue compared to nutrition of the body with toxic food. The number of *ayâhs* on the purification of heart vastly exceeds the number of *ayâhs* on the purification of body.

Why is the Qur'an so meticulous about food?

The energy a human's body gains by consuming *harâm* food always seeks *harâm* ways of expression. In other words, energy

accumulated thanks to impure food spoils one's will, mind, and consciousness. The consumption of permissible and impermissible foods are not equal in terms of leading to righteous actions. If one unintentionally commits sins sometimes, they must see whether food they are consuming is permissible.

Foods contribute to the formation of attitude and character much more than we could imagine. Good food helps generate good morals and behavior. And just like pollutants spoil the environment, so does impure food entering body spoil humans' organs and deeds.

To be sure, it is possible to spoil pure sustenance. For instance, grapes are a clean and permissible sustenance, but if they are turned into wine, *halâl* becomes *harâm* (pure turns into impure). The following âyah, therefore, warns not to soil that, which is pure:

"And [We grant you nourishment] from the fruit of date-palms and vines: from it you derive intoxicants as well as wholesome sustenance – in this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who use their reason!"
(Nahl 16:67)

Consuming permissible and pure foods will raise a nation above other nations of their time. As we learn from Quran, one of the reasons for the Children of Israel to raise above all nations of their time was consuming permissible and pure sustenance (*Jathiyah* 45:16).

Why are animals slaughtered in the name of Allah in Islam?

According to the Qur'an, any animal slaughtered for the sake of and/or with the name of "divine" humans or objects is *harâm* and must not be consumed (*Baqarah* 2:173).

The Qur'an recommends invoking Allah's name upon slaughtering an animal (*Haj* 22:36). This divine instruction could

be interpreted as “Respect life, even if it is an animal’s.” Only Allah gives life and He is the owner of life. Therefore, humans can take life only in the name of and with the permission of Allah who gave that life. The *basmalah* phrase uttered upon slaughtering an animal—“In the name of Allah, Most Merciful and Most Compassionate”—can be understood as asking Allah’s permission to allow taking one of His creation’s life.

At the same time, the *basmalah* establishes a connection between the Supreme Creator and the creation, for food is a creation and the Creator is Allah. Those who establish connection between food and its Source have no difficulty offering gratitude. And those who sever that connection experience not even a hint of gratitude. This is the essence of slaughtering animals with and in the name of Allah. At the same time, saying the *basmalah* is also a gratitude one offers to Allah for providing that food as sustenance (*Haj 22:28 and 22:34*).

What are fornication and adultery in Islam?

Islam defines any physical and sexual relationship out of wedlock or out of marriage (in case of singles) as adultery. The Qur'an prohibits any kind of adultery and fornication, and qualifies it as a breach of moral boundaries (*'Isra'* 17:32). The Qur'an does not only prohibit adultery, but also commands "*Do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse*" (*'Isra'* 17:32) to prevent Muslims from even getting into a situation, which could potentially lead to adultery (fornication). Prohibiting such unlawful acts introduces norms, rules and regulations into otherwise disorderly and unlawful male-female relations. The ban also introduces a distance between unrelated opposite sexes, lest their feelings soil under such unlawful relations.

What is the punishment for fornication and adultery?

Any kind of unlawful sexual act is considered sin in Islam, because whoever commits it, he/she does so in violation of Allah's prohibition and transgressing a boundary He has set. In case such an act is committed in people's presence or awareness, it is not only a sin, but also a crime.

One is to sincerely repent before Allah for the sin of fornication (adultery) while he/she is still alive if they want to be forgiven (*Zumar* 39:53). If someone stands before Allah on the Judgment Day with the sin of fornication (adultery) he/she did not repent for, Allah may cleanse him/her by forgiving if He so wills, or Allah may cleanse him/her by punishing if He so wills. According to Islamic teachings, the Hellfire will touch a human only if he/she

bears a sin to be cleansed. And the phrase “if He wills to forgive” does not entail an arbitrary act from Allah; divine forgiveness in question depends on said sinners’ good and bad deeds committed during his/her lifetime on Earth (*Qari`ah* 101:6-9).

The following Qur’anic âyah—“... the adulteress and the adulterer – flog each of them with a hundred stripes...” (*Nur* 24:2)—directs Muslims’ actions in the event of an act of adultery (fornication) was explicitly and irrefutably established and confirmed by four witnesses (*Nur* 24:13). Just like the Qur’an establishes a punishment for unlawful sexual intercourse, it also establishes a harsh punishment for slandering one committed that awful sin (*Nur* 24:4).

What does the Qur’an say about homosexuality?

The Qur’an calls homosexuality “extreme” and “transgression” (*fâhishatan*), and qualifies it as a kind of adultery (*Naml* 27:54). The transgressed boundary and violated norms are *fitrah* and creation. Because the sexual passion Allah granted humans with is primarily meant for continuing human progeny. Homosexuality, obviously, contradicts this fundamental purpose; therefore, homosexuality contradicts humans’ *fitrah*. Anything that contradicts or does not conform to the human *fitrah* is *fakhshâ* (transgression). Like anything else that contradicts the *fitrah* and purpose of creation, homosexual relation is an anomaly, which is obviously *haram* (impermissible).

What is the Islamic ruling on slander?

Slandering damages the victims' dignity, honor and respect. But slandering does not only hurt the slandered persons. On the contrary, it is an assault on mutual trust and security in society. The Qur'an says this assault is both a sin and a crime that must be punished (*Nur 24:4*). And whoever commits the sin of slandering, he/she will be deprived of Allah's mercy on the Judgment Day (*Nur 24:23*).

What is the ruling on backbiting?

The Qur'an explicitly prohibits backbiting commanding Muslims not to *"allow yourselves to speak ill of one another behind your backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would loathe it!"* (*Hujurat 49:12*)

In other words, backbiting and gossip are "moral cannibalism." Eating a dead and rotten flesh would only hurt the consumer, not the consumed, obviously. Therefore, backbiting only hurts the backbiter, not one gossiped about. Gossip and backbiting inflict two-dimensional damages:

1. Damage to human-to-human relations: gossip and backbiting sever relations between and among humans, and hurts the trust in each other, and
2. Damage to Allah-and-human relations: gossip and backbiting only occurs when the gossiped about person is absent. But even if that person cannot hear the gossip, Allah is All-hearing and All-knowing.

Why does Islam prohibit usury?

Interest is earning money from money without producing anything, i.e. *ribâ*, and Islam prohibits *ribâ*, and commands to pay alms (*zakâh*).

Interest is taking and giving nothing in return, while *zakâh* is giving and taking nothing in return. Interest deteriorates the borrowers' financial situation, and consolidates the rich ones' finances, while *zakâh* financially supports the needy. Charging interest amounts to exploiting one's labor, while *zakâh* is sharing one's bread with other brethren. Interest increases the quantity of property but destroys its quality, while *zakâh* consolidates its property although seemingly decreasing quantity. The "reward" for usury is punishment in the Hereafter, while sincerely given *zakâh* will yield esteem and reward in the hereafter (*Rum* 30:39).

Thus, the justification for prohibiting interest on money is actually a prohibition of exploitation of labor and underserved earnings, while encouraging creativity, labor and production.

The Qur'an warns that one declares "war with Allah and His Apostle" (*Baqarah* 2:279) in cases of usury, while other prohibitions—hence, sins—are not described in such a harsh language.

Why does the Qur'an define usury "a declaration of war against Allah?"

In the Qur'anic language, anything that humans possess is referred to as the property of Allah. For instance, the Qur'an says the *Kâbah*, a holy shrine entrusted to people, is "Allah's House"

(*baytullah*); Earth, also entrusted to humans, is “Allah’s Earth” (*‘ardullah*); a camel that was entrusted to a group in the past was “Allah’s camel” (*nâqatullah*).

The same language, subsequently, qualifies a violation of any human’s rights as a violation of Allah’s rights. That is why the Qur’an states that interest on money, which is a clear violation of society’s monetary rights, is “a declaration of war against Allah.”

Interest on loaned money is considered a violation of humankind’s rights, for any interest-based process or operation praises exploitation and degrades labor. This outcome, in turn, devalues humans’ honest labor in other people’s eyes and elevates the status of money renters. It is obvious that such status quo propels financial gain and diminishes mercy and compassion. In such a situation, a desire to hoard and collect worldly items trumps creativity and labor, which certainly is a collective loss for humanity.

The prohibition of interest money is aimed at curbing humans’ “desire to hoard.” The Qur’an relates unspeakable horrors one could face in the Hellfire, should they be invested by and fall victim to their desire to hoard worldly materials:

“You are obsessed by greed for more and more until you go down to your graves. Nay, in time you will come to understand! And once again: Nay, in time you will come to understand! Nay, if you could but understand [it] with an understanding [born] of certainty, you would indeed, most surely, behold the blazing fire [of hell]! In the end you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty: and on that Day you will most surely be called to account for [what you did with] the boon of life!”

(*Takathur* 102:1-8)

Why does Islam prohibit gambling?

Gambling is one of the vices explicitly prohibited in Islam (*Baqarah* 2:219). (The Arabic term for gambling—“maysir”—denotes “easy earning.”)

The prohibition of gambling resembles the prohibition of interest and usury: Gambling is disrespect and dishonor to human labor. Similarly, gambling is an act committed by individuals, which inevitably leads to moral decay and corruption, thus infringing upon the wider society’s right. Gambling is a source of many issues in the society including break out of families, exploitation of human labor, addiction and murders. Any sort of gambling is an insult to labor and laborers. Therefore, the sin of gambling can be considered as a moral threat toward those who highly value and esteem labor.

Does Islam practice absolution of sins?

The concept of “relieving one of sins” practiced by Christians does not exist in Islam. After all, there is no “preachers class” or “church” in Islam, which would oversee or administer the process. Consequently, there is no process or conditions for “confession” in Islam, because there is nobody (nothing), no vehicle, no interceder or institution between each individual human and his/her Lord Allah. No church, no pope, and no cleric is capable of or qualified for relieving humans’ sins, for only their Lord and Creator Allah alone is rightful to do so.

The only way one can be relieved of sins is sincerely repenting directly to Allah.

What is repentance -tawbah and istighfar- and how is it offered?

Tawbah means “turning back” and signifies tuning one’s inner self along the straight path after an act of deviation. *Istighfar* could be translated as “Asking Allah for forgiveness in a way that a committed sin is never recorded as such.”

Tawbah and *istighfar* are a two-step action to get closer to Allah: *tawbah*—“denouncing the wrong”—is the first phase, while *istighfar*—“finding the right”—is the second phase.

In short, the Qur’anic teaching concerning sins is the following: No one is to think that he/she committed a sin bigger than Allah’s mercy. There are two more sins, which emanate from and greater than a committed sin:

1. Being unconscious and oblivious towards one's sins, and
2. Thinking a sin is unforgivable.

Being unconscious and oblivious of one's sins is the worst sin. Thinking a committed sin's gravity is larger than Allah's mercy is equal to losing hope that Allah would forgive him/her. According to Prophet Muhammad's words, Allah's mercy toward humans is stronger than that of a mother toward her infant child. The following Qur'anic âyah beautifully describes Allah's divine mercy: "[Thus speaks Allah:]

Say: 'O you servants of Mine who have transgressed against your own selves! Despair not of Allah's mercy: behold, Allah forgives all sins –for, verily, He alone is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!'"

(Zumar 39:53)

The condition for an acceptable repentance is sincerity and cordiality. The intention and commitment not to return to committing a sin is the cornerstone for forgiving that sin.

Who forgives sins according to Islam?

There is no authority or a class of pastors in Islam that would be capable of forgiving one's sins. Islam teaches that only Allah the Merciful forgives sins of those whom He wishes. Whatever their situation or status, no single Muslim, including Prophet Muhammad, is ever authorized to relieve a fellow Muslim of his/her sins. The Qur'an commands Prophet Muhammad directly and other Muslims by extension to acknowledge the fact that *"there is no deity save Allah"* and subsequently *"ask forgiveness for thy sins and for [the sins of] all other believing men and women"* (Muhammad 47:19).

Prophet Muhammad was not able to forgive sins of those who followed his call; he could only ask Allah to forgive their sins ('Ali Imran 3:159). To be sure, in case a person he prayed for did not deserve forgiveness, even Prophet Muhammad's appeals to Allah would not result in the former's acquittal (Tawbah 9:84).

Thus, Islam teaches that only Allah forgives His servants' sins. Consequently, every single Muslim, whether a man or a woman, is to recognize their sins in front of Allah alone and is to appeal to Allah alone to forgive them. Only Allah does not take advantage of His servants' sins; any other human being could exploit a fellow human's shortcomings or sins to their own benefit.

Are one's sins forgiven for believing in the prophethood of Muhammad?

Unlike in Christianity, no, they are not forgiven for doing so. A belief in the prophecy of Muhammad is only one of the pillars of faith in Islam. Being a Muslim does not mean attaining faith alone, for it is only one required half. The other half is committing "good deeds." The Qur'an states in tens of verses that those who "attain faith and do good deeds" are on the path of salvation.

Is it true that everyone, including prophets, will be accounted for their deeds?

Yes, it is true. On the Judgment Day, everyone will be held accountable and responsible for actions and deeds committed, words uttered, and intentions conceived in this life. In the Qur'anic words,

"Thus, [on Judgment Day] We shall most certainly call to account all those unto whom a [divine] message was sent, and We shall most certainly call to account the message-bearers [themselves]"

(A`raf 7:6)



FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE

What is the position of women in Islam?

The Qur'anic viewpoint regards gender as a part of humanity and does not focus on it separately. Both males and females are considered to be essential elements of life as stated in the following âyah:

"O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, Allah is all-knowing, all-aware." (Hujurât 49:13)

Being a woman or a man does not define one's supremacy over the other. Both genders have equal opportunity to seize eternal salvation:

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

Further, being a woman or a man does not confer superiority or privilege in and of itself. The Qur'an emphasizes that the road to eternal salvation is equally open to both genders: *"I shall not*

lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors [in My way], be it man or woman: each of you is an issue of the other/each of you are parts that complete each other." (‘Ali ‘Imran 3:195)

In the Qur'an, women and men are not dealt with based on the concept of gender "equality", but rather they are seen as equivalents. Women and men are thus accorded mutual rights and responsibilities: *"In accordance with justice, the rights of the wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husbands'] rights with regard to them."* (Baqarah 2:228)

Does the Qur'an allow beating one's wife?

This is a common misconception. The only verse regarding this issue is âyah 34 in surah 4: *"Men shall take full care of women with the bounties which Allah has bestowed more abundantly on the former than on the latter, and with what they may spend out of their possessions. And the righteous women are the truly devout ones, who guard the intimacy (even in the absence of their husband), which Allah has [ordained to be] guarded. And as for those women whose ill-will (and disloyalty /immoral conduct) you have reason to fear, admonish them [first]; then leave them alone in bed; then beat them; and if thereupon they pay you heed, do not seek to harm them. Behold, Allah is indeed most high, great!"*

"Fadribu-hunna" translated "then beat them" above, derives from the root verb "daraba." The verb *daraba* means to turn away, to shun, to separate or to avoid someone, as well as "to beat." There are many instances of its use in the Qur'an. For example, it is used with the following meanings: to journey (*daraba fi al-ard*), to hit a rock, to strike, to stamp, and to condemn. The verb *daraba* can also be used to denote an act of separating two things from each other as in the example of "daraba ad-dahru baynana."

The Qur'an also describes multiple instances when one human being beats or strikes another, but the verb *daraba* is never used.

For example: in “slap in the face” (*Dhariyat* 51:29) the verb used is “sakkat,” or in “strike with fist” (*Qasas* 28:15)—“wazakâhu,” or in “beat down branches” (*Taha* 20:18) — “wa ahushshu,” or in “cut his life-vein” (*Haqqah* 69:46) “qataa” is used. The verb “daraba” is used to denote the actions of angels in 8:50 and 47:27 but not for the actions of human beings. It is also important to note that verse 4:34 does not refer to the regulations between all men and women, but it only regulates the conduct between a husband and a wife who are bound by marriage.

According to Al-Tabari, verse 4:34 was revealed following an incident when Habibah bint Zaid came to consult the Prophet after her husband slapped her face. The Prophet wanted to allow Habibah to slap her husband’s face with the same severity as retaliation. But at that point the above verse was revealed whereupon the Prophet is reported to have said: “I wanted one thing, but Allah has willed another—and what Allah has willed is the best.” It is remarkable to see that the Prophet’s verdict regarding the situation was for the wife to slap the husband with same severity as had been used against her, and Allah did not approve his verdict.

If one still prefers to interpret the multi-meaning verb “daraba” as “beating” in the context of verse 4:34, then they have to consider the following facts. The act (of beating) takes place between a husband and a wife, and not between an ordinary woman and an ordinary man. The Qur’an guides the counterparts mentioned in the verse to a better and more humane conduct than that which prevailed in society at the time of the divine revelation. We can understand from the circumstances, which precipitated the revelation of the verse, that it appears to address the type of husbands for whom wife-beating is the first thing that comes to mind when a conflict arises in marriage. The verse proposes more humane methods of dealing with conflict as a first resort.

One of the recommended ways is “to leave the woman alone in the bed.” However, this method can only be a punishment in

case of polygamy, otherwise it would also be a punishment for the man himself. Therefore, the purpose of the recommendations listed in verse 4:34 is to prevent men from wife beating in the patriarchal Arab society of the time, whose initial response to an offending spouse was violence. The Messenger of Allah never allowed this and nor did he ever hit a woman. "Could any of you beat his wife as he would beat a slave, and then lie with her in the evening?" (See al-Bukhârî, (67) Nikâh, (93). The prophet intensely detested and forbade beating women (see Abu Dawood, Nasâi, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal).

It is historically evident that the Prophet reached the brink of divorce himself, but he never thought of beating any of his wives. Allah advised him to divorce them in a fair manner (*Ahzab* 33:28-32), but he was never advised to beat them.

If we put verse 4:34 in context and understand it in the light of the conduct of the Prophet, then we need to interpret the verb "daraba" as "to separate" and not "to beat." To conclude, the Qur'an tells husbands to distance from their wives if they are disloyal or display immoral conduct or have a persistently intolerable manner.

What is the nature of permissible relationships between a man and woman?

According to the Qur'an, the relationships between a man and a woman are not based on gender and sexuality but on personality and humanity. The boundaries of the relationship between an individual man and an individual woman are set by the following verse, in which the Qur'an considers first-degree relatives as members of a family, and prohibits marriage between them:

"Forbidden to you are your mothers, and your daughters, and your sisters, and your aunts paternal and maternal, and a brother's daughters, and a sister's daughters; and your milk-mothers, and your milk-sisters;

and the mothers of your wives; and your step-daughters—who are your foster children—born of your wives with whom you have consummated your marriage; but if you have not consummated your marriage, you will incur no sin [by marrying their daughters]; and [forbidden to you are] the spouses of the sons who have sprung from your loins; and [you are forbidden] to have two sisters [as your wives] at one and the same time - but what is past is past: for, behold, Allah is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.” (Nisa’ 4:23)

Islam, however, does not prevent relationships between women and men suitable for and available to each other for marriage. But it strives to prevent these relationships from becoming poisonous and takes a number of precautions to prevent lustful desires and seductive impulses from corrupting relationships between eligible men and women. Thus Islam brings in a reasonable distance between the sexes to protect and maintain mutual respect. The key measures that are defined in order to not exceed the limits of legitimate relationship are:

1. The command of not coming near adultery (*‘Isra’* 17:32) thus providing a buffer zone in which adultery may not be committed – and may not even be approached;
2. The command of lowering gazes (*Nur* 24:30-31) thus prohibiting men and woman looking at the opposite sex lustfully, as uncontrolled gazes would allow the relationship between men and women to spiral out of control; and
3. The command of “hijab” (Muslim women’s dress code, covering body from head to toe), which involves both genders with a special emphasis on women (*Nur* 24:31; *Ahzab* 33:59). This topic is covered in more detail below.

Why do Muslim women cover their entire bodies?

The verse about *hijab* in the Qur’an reads as follows:

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms [in public] beyond what

may [decently] be apparent thereof; hence, let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms. And let them not display [more of] their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' Sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their womenfolk, or those whom they rightfully possess, or such male attendants as are beyond all sexual desire, or children that are as yet unaware of women's nakedness; and let them not swing their legs [in walking] so as to draw attention to their hidden charms And [always], O you believers - all of you - turn unto Allah in repentance, so that you might attain to a happy state!"

(Nur 24:31)

The body parts, which "may (decently) be apparent" are the face, the hands, and the feet. Those who choose to cover these parts of body (face, hand and feet) do so as a cultural norm and traditions; it is not a Qur'anic command.

The extent of feminine charm and beauty is rendered personal in Islam and ought to remain private and not displayed in public. There are two main reasons for this are:

1. To prevent the abuse of women by putting her personality before her femininity.
2. To include women in wider society, who are excluded by the prevalent tradition.

The contrary stance (that of encouraging display of beauties) would turn a personality-based relationship into a gender-based relationship. The purpose of *hijab* is to protect the morality of the woman, the man and the society. In summary:

1. A woman: *Will not display private aspects of her femininity (defined above) in public.*
2. A man: *Will not interact with the opposite sex in sexuality-orientated and exploitative manner*
3. Society: *The relationship between men and women is placed on respectful and healthy grounds.*

The noun “*khimar*” (*khumur*, pl.) refers to the headscarf. The root of this noun also forms words such as “*khamr*,” which is used to describe intoxicants and carries the meaning of concealment, to cover and something which clouds or obscures the intellect. The commonality between “*khimar*” and “*khamr*” is that they both point to the head. By contrast, “*kufr*” also means to conceal or cover something. But it derives from a different root, since it refers not to the head but to the heart.

The *khimar* (head-covering) was customarily used by free Arabian women before and after the advent of Islam. In pre-Islamic times, it was worn as an ornament and was let down loosely from top to over the wearer’s back. It was not used to cover the breasts or cleavage. Thus the statement “let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms” instructs women to extend the covering to include their necks and bosoms.

What is the status of the family in Islam?

Islam considers the following three elements essential in order to establish wellness of society as a whole.

1. *The construction of the personality;*
2. *The construction of the family; and*
3. *The construction of the society.*

The etymology of the word “family” (“*âila*”) is that of an element with multiple fragments that cannot remain standing if one of its pieces is pulled away. The geometry of the family does not consist of two parallel panels [||] but of two planes that lean on each other [∪]. The family is the womb in which the personality is nurtured and it forms the building block of the structure of society.

According to the Qur’an, a woman and a man are two halves that are incomplete without each other. These two parts constitute

a whole only when they come together. The two halves cannot substitute one another. The Qur'an uses the term "zawj" (a couple or a spouse) for both the woman and the man who constitute the two fundamental elements of a family. Like a pair of shoes, they are a pair but not equal. Wearing shoes in reverse is both bad for the foot and for the shoe itself.

The Qur'an invites men and women to act responsibly:

"O mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate ('zawjaha'), and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of Allah, in whose name you demand [your rights] from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily, Allah is ever watchful over you!"

(Nisa' 4:1)

The Qur'an emphasizes that women and men are not opposites ("azdad") of each other, but are "azwaj"—a couple. Answering the question of why humans are created in two genders, the Qur'an states so that "you may dwell in tranquility with them." This purpose can only be fulfilled with "love and kindness": *"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect."* (Rum 30:21)

The Qur'an assigns a responsibility to the leader of a family to make a continuous effort to prevent themselves and their loved ones from straying towards the way that leads to the hell-fire:

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

(Tahrim 66:6)

Two families are held up in the Qur'an as examples to mankind—the family of Abraham and the family of Imran: *"Behold, Allah raised Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham and the House of Imran above all mankind":*

1. The family of Abraham: This family consists of Abraham, his wives Hagar and Sarah, his children Isaac, Ishmael and his nephew Lot. All of these people are exemplary characters whose faith has been tested and who withstood the test (*Saffat* 37:100-105, 83-113).

2. The second family consists of Imran, his wife Hannah, and their daughter Mary and her son Jesus. Zachariah, his wife Elizabeth and their son John are also included in this family (*‘Ali`Imran* 3:35-55).

The Qur’an also considers the faithful as parts of a big family. Furthermore, it considers the entirety of mankind as part of a human family and refers to them as “O son of Adam!” It aims at preventing people from being enslaved by fellow human beings and seeks to bring mankind together on the common ground of servanthood to Allah alone.

What is the Islamic viewpoint on polygamy?

The advice in the divine revelation is monogamy under normal circumstances: *“If you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then [only] one – or [from among] those whom you rightfully possess”* (Nisa’ 4:3). However, polygamy is permissible in exceptional circumstances, such as during times of war where the number of widows and/or orphan girls who need to be taken care of is disproportionately large (Nisa’ 4:3).

In the pre-Islamic society, no limitations were set on a man’s right to marry or on the number of wives he wanted to marry. Men used to marry as many women as they wished, looking after those they liked and abandoning the others. They invented unlawful and inhumane treatments in order to use women as they wished.

“Allah has indeed heard the words of her who pleads with thee concerning her husband, and complains Unto Allah. And Allah does hear what you both have to say: verily, Allah is all-hearing, all-seeing. As for those of you who [henceforth] separate themselves from their wives by saying, ‘Thou art as unlawful to me as my mother,’ [let them bear in mind that] they can never be [as] their mothers: none are their mothers save those who gave them birth: and so, behold, they but utter a saying that runs counter to reason, and is [therefore] false. But, behold, Allah is indeed an absolver of sins, much-forgiving: hence, as for those who would separate themselves from their wives by saying, ‘Thou art as unlawful to me as my mother,’ and thereafter would go back on what they have said, [their atonement] shall be the freeing of a human being from bondage before the couple may touch one another again: this you are [hereby] exhorted to do – for Allah is fully aware of all that you do. However, he who does not have the wherewithal shall fast [instead] for

two consecutive months before the couple may touch one another again; and he who is unable to do it shall feed sixty needy ones: this, so that you might prove your faith in Allah and His Apostle. Now these are the bounds set by Allah; and grievous suffering [in the life to come] awaits all who deny the truth. Verily, those who contend against Allah and His Apostle shall be brought low even as those [evildoers] who lived before them were brought low after We had bestowed [on them] clear messages from on high. And [so,] for those who deny the truth there will be shameful suffering in store"

(Mujadila 58:1-5)

In pre-Islamic society, one of these inhumane treatments constituted pronouncing an arbitrary oath known as "dhihar" on one's wife. (*Dhihar*: an insult proffered by a husband upon his wife which likens the wife to some prohibited female relation of his and thereby is used to divorce the wife). The iniquitous custom of *dhihar* was condemned and abolished by the Qur'an (see Surah Al-Mujadilah, 2-4). The Qur'an stands against this practice by requiring men who divorce their wives using *dhihar* to undertake redemptive action. In another words, *dhihar* is no longer considered a divorce as in pre-Islamic times, but is now seen as a reprehensible act, which must be atoned for by sacrifice and redemption (see Surah Al-Mujadilah, verses 1-5).

Why was Prophet Muhammad polygamous?

1. The Prophet's polygamy was not due to human desire or lust. If it had been so, he would not have married 40-year-old Khadija when he was only 25. Khadija already had three orphan children and had been married twice before she wed the Prophet. The Prophet's monogamous marriage to Khadija lasted twenty-five years until Khadija's death. How would those who claim the Prophet's marriages were conceived due to lust explain why he spent twenty-five years of most fervent years of his life in a monogamous marriage with a woman who was already a mother of three and fifteen years his senior?

2. The Prophet's polygamy had nothing to do with his prophethood. If it did, he would not have remained single for two and a half years after Khadija's death and he would have not waited to marry Aisha until after the migration to Medina (*hijrah*).

3. The Prophet's polygamy stems from his responsibilities as a leader. All of his marriages in Medina were motivated by compassion and were part of his mission, not a result of lust.

When we examine the status of the women Prophet Muhammad was married to, we have a better understanding of the purpose:

Sawdah bint Zam'ah was the first woman whom Prophet Muhammad married after Khadija's death. Sawdah was 50 years old at the time and had 6 children, her husband had died and she needed a safeguard. Prophet Muhammad provided this through marriage.

Aisha bint Abu Bakr was the only virgin whom Prophet Muhammad married. Although some reports suggest she was married to him in her young age, other reports indicate that she was a fully formed young woman in her late teens at the time of marriage.

Hafsah bint Umar al-Khattab was a 22-year-old widow when she married Prophet Muhammad. Her husband was martyred in the battle of Uhud and the Messenger married her in order to give solace to her and to honor her father Umar, a close friend and companion of Prophet Muhammad.

Zaynab bint Khuzaymah had three marriages before she wed Prophet Muhammad. She did not have any children. Her second husband died in the battle of Badr and the third died in the battle of Uhud.

Umm Salamah was a widow who had been married more than once in the past before she married Prophet Muhammad. She had five children from her previous marriages. Prophet Muhammad married her because she had become homeless with four young children in her care.

Zaynab bint Jahsh was a 36-year-old widow when she married the Messenger of Allah. The Prophet asked Zaynab to marry Zayd ibn Haritha (her first husband) in the past. Zaynab married Zayd ibn Haritha not to let Prophet Muhammad down. She turned down all marriage proposals until the age of 35.

Juwayriyah bint Harith was a prisoner of war whose husband died in a battle against Muslims. The Prophet's marriage to Juwayriyah was undertaken to establish ties of kinship and as a gesture of goodwill to her tribe. The marriage was used to invite her people to Islam.

Umm Habibah was a 38-year-old widow with children at the time of her marriage to Prophet Muhammad. Her husband left Islam and later died, leaving her alone with her children. The Prophet married her out of compassion and again as a gesture of goodwill to her family who were heads of their tribe.

Safiyyah bint Huyay was a widow with two previous marriages. She was the daughter of the chief of the Jewish tribe Banu Nadir. She was captured in a war and subsequently emancipated.

Maymuna bint Al Harith married Prophet Muhammad when she was 36 years old. She had been married twice before. The Messenger of Allah married her in Mecca whilst he was performing an *'umrah*, once again as a gesture of goodwill to the people of Mecca.

Rayhana bint Zayd was a widow and a prisoner of war at the time of her marriage to the Messenger. She became a Muslima, and her conversion led her tribe to embracing Islam.

Maryam al-Qibtiyyah: Muqawqis, the vicegerent of Byzantine in Egypt, sent Maryam to Prophet Muhammad. According to several sources, she accepted Islam on her way to Medina. The Messenger of Allah married Maryam and she gave birth to a son.

Taking all the information above into consideration, it becomes obvious that Prophet Muhammad's polygamy was not a result of lust but was undertaken out of compassion and as a means of invitation to Islam.

What is Islamic viewpoint on other religions?

First, it is necessary to understand the Islamic viewpoint on diversity in order to understand its position regarding other religions. Many passages in the Qur'an underscore the diversity of humankind. Islam qualifies religious diversity as part of Allah's will (*Rum* 30:22). The Qur'an teaches that Allah purposefully created a world of diversity and made each of us belong to one human family, without any inherent superiority of one over another. Another example is *Surah* 35 (The Originator), which discusses the existence of magnificent harmony of the created beings despite their diversity. According to this *surah*, diversity is richness. According to the whole of the Qur'an, targeting any race, color or language of human race means targeting the will of Allah.

In the Qur'an, as much importance is given to the diversity and plurality as to the oneness/unity of the Creator. Thus the Qur'an gives these two messages when those are put in context:

1. Any contrariness/contraposition to the principle of Allah's transcendental oneness and uniqueness produces *shirk*; and

2. Any contrariness/contraposition to the principle of diversity and plurality of the created beings produces "*dhulm*." (*Dhulm* is used interchangeably for cruelty or unjust acts of exploitation, oppression, and wrongdoing, whereby a person either deprives others of their rights or does not fulfill his obligations towards them.)

Islam sees the diversity of religions on Earth as part of Allah's will. Allah does not expect Muslims to force everyone in the world to become believers. This is stated in the Qur'an clearly: "*And if*

thy Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Wouldst thou (Muhammad) compel men until they are believers?" (Yunus 10:99)

Thus, according to the Qur'an, dreaming of a world without diverse religions would be tantamount to opposing Allah's will. Allah protects different religions' places of worship through defending some people by means of others. The Qur'an says:

"For had it not been for Allah's repelling some men by means of others, cloisters and churches and oratories and mosques, wherein the name of Allah is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down"

(Haj 22:40)

What is the Islamic viewpoint on living together with representatives of other religions?

Let us find answers from the history and geography of Islam:

1. History did not witness discrimination or any other degrading behavior toward religious minorities in those locations, which Muslim armies conquered. This benevolent behavior includes those offshoots from Islam, which put up a severe opposition to rulers, including Yazidis in modern day Turkey, Druses in Lebanon, Sikhs in India and Baha'is in Iran, to name only a few. On the contrary, numbers of Muslims were brought down to zero in Spain following their 800-year-long existence there; Sicily followed suit later. Furthermore, no single Muslim was to be found in just two days after the Crusaders set foot in Jerusalem on July 15, 1092. To be sure, there were scores of Christians and Jews living in Jerusalem at the time under the Muslim rule.

2. There is no single fact either in history or in modern times whereby non-Muslims would be denied access to their temples in Muslims-ruled lands and countries. There were eight fortress cities built in the history of Islam, including Basra, Kufah, Cairo and Kairouan. Muslims erected these cities on plain fields where

no foundation was laid before. It is a historical fact that religious minorities lived in these cities and were able to practice their religions in respective temples. The following words of Amin Maalouf, a Christian litterateur from Lebanon, confirm this claim: "If my forefathers were Muslims in a country conquered by non-Muslim armies, and not Christians in a Muslim army-conquered country, I do not believe they would enjoy peaceful life in their towns and villages for 14 centuries with their faith protected by the rulers."

3. The Qur'an guarantees non-Muslims' ability to exercise their rights even in Muslims-ruled countries (*Ma'idah* 5:43, 47). The Qur'an talks about Jews, Christians and Muslims:

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

(*Ma'idah* 5:48)

This verse, therefore, not only approves of and encourages representatives of different religions to live in the same environment, but it also guarantees respect for their rights and liberties.

IN PLACE OF AN EPILOGUE

"Had We bestowed this Qur'an from on high upon a mountain, thou wouldst indeed see it humbling itself, breaking asunder for awe of Allah..."
(Hashr 59:21)

"And if all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas yet added to it, the words of Allah would not be exhausted: for, verily, Allah is almighty, wise. [For Him,] the creation of you all and the resurrection of you all is but like [the creation and resurrection of] a single soul: for, verily, Allah is all-hearing, all-seeing"
(Luqman 31:27-28)

