

Introduction To Islam - Part I

What Is Faith?

Entering into Islam is only possible with faith. It is not possible to consider someone a “Muslim” if that person does not believe in the principles that are brought by the Qur’an¹.

In Islam, faith is innate. God created each person with a potential that is to be fulfilled through full belief in the Supreme Might. When belief fully in a supreme being cannot be reached, the person is left with a void, a sense of emptiness. Historically, people and civilizations have always been in search of something to believe in, and when that something could not be found, they produce false gods, knowingly or unknowingly. Today, it simply contradicts with their indulgences, thus they have turned their backs on true belief. (See also various New Age movements).

With regard to reaching faith, abstract thinking, whether developed or not, is an important factor. Perhaps because of this reason, according to Islam, faith is a degree that can only be reached by rational people. In the Qur’an, the people who do not believe are always invited to use their minds, and generally disbelief is considered a consequence of one’s inability to use his mind properly. “Ulul al-bab” (The owners of secrets), which is found in the Qur’an as the “owners of the mind” does not quite have the same connotation as the positivist mind-frame that is generally accepted. The word “Lubb” (Lobe) has the meaning of mind, which is mentioned quite often in psychology today. The mind and heart are found within the concept of “Lubb.” A faith that remains in the mind alone and is not felt in the heart is a faith that cannot be turned into practice.

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What Are The Articles Of Faith (‘Aqidah) And Dogmatic Theology (Kalam)?

‘Aqidah is the Arabic word for articles of faith, particularly the Islamic faith. ‘Aqidah states clearly what a Muslim should believe in. ‘Aqidah is the plural form of ‘aqidah, which literally means to bind or tie; thus, ‘aqidah is the articles of faith to which Muslims must absolutely be bound to.

Kalam (dogmatic theology) is the branch of Islamic Studies that thoroughly discusses the articles of faith in Islam and supports these principles through various comparative studies. It seeks to prove the articles of faith.

The difference between Kalam and ‘Aqidah is the following: ‘Aqidah defines what a Muslim believes in, whereas the main objective of Kalam is to defend ‘Aqidah. Throughout the history of Islam, Kalam has always emerged whenever cultural conflicts have arisen.

Kalam, however is not what’s responsible for making a person believe; it is through one’s heart that faith is derived. Kalam simply tries to iron out whatever suspicions might arise in one’s mind.

Kalam differs from Islamic Philosophy in that the verses of the Qur’an are taken as the basis for belief. The struggle is simply in the mind’s efforts to understand these verses. In Islamic Philosophy, however, the basis for belief is reason and logic, and revelation is somehow fitted into this. Because of this, Islamic theologians have condemned some Islamic philosophers and called them disbelievers.

The road to submission may be different for each person. There may be a conflict in the mind between conviction and intelligence (the fact that whether it is possible or not is argued separately).

If a person selects conviction, he has indeed surrendered by choosing the road of 'Aqidah and Kalam. On the other hand, if one prefers using his intellect over conviction, but does not reject conviction (if he does, then he is considered a disbeliever), then he has obviously chosen to submit himself to Islam through philosophy; philosophy becomes more prominent than resignation for that person. (Here, it is obvious that what the majority of people refer to as intelligence is not pure intellect, it is in fact the way of thinking of their particular era.)

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The Principles Of Faith (Iman)

The three fundamental principles of faith, upon which the religion was established, are belief in Allah, the Afterlife, and His Messenger.

There is no judicial opinion in the topics of belief and worship (here, judicial opinion refers to reasoning and establishing rules according to that). In other words, do people decide that angels must exist through reasoning? Did Allah send prophets and through those prophets did He announce His own existence, the existence of the Angels, the Afterlife and Hell?

All the principles of faith and practice in Islam depend on the information that Allah conveyed to us through his prophets. The existence of Allah, the order He established, His creation of all things, the existence of the Afterlife, resurrection, and all other similar topics are brought to us through conviction. We are informed as to how we shall serve Allah through conviction as well. Whether we are going to choose how we are going to serve Allah or Allah is going to declare that, is a significantly important parting of the ways. Every human being is obliged to answer the following questions honestly and precisely:

Does Allah Exist?

Yes there is a God, but can we say that I do not need His mercy and contentment? Are we going to achieve his mercy by behaving according to our own will or by taking what he demands from us into consideration? The fact that the first Muslims believed before the Qur'an before it had even been inscribed, simply as a result of their trust in Prophet Muhammad (pbuh*) should never be forgotten.

Resignation

Neither our Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), nor his companions argued about any information that came to them from the level of Haqq². I believe that we need to return to this. There is resignation. You only present, you do not argue. In the sense of the individual, there is resignation while in terms of declaration, there is presentation. Who is making the presentation is as important as what is told in that presentation. The fact that the first Muslims believed before the Qur'an before it had even been inscribed, simply as a result of their trust in Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) should never be forgotten.

Abu Bakr³ believed in our Prophet without any hesitation. With regard to him becoming a Muslim, our Prophet said "Everyone wanted to think when I told them about the revelation; only Abu Bakr

accepted it as soon as I told him.” This resignation of Abu Bakr was continuous. After the Miraj (Night Journey), there were people who abandoned the religion. However, Abu Bakr said “I believe that every day an angel comes to him from above, why shouldn’t I believe that one day he would go up to the sky? If he said it, then it must be true.” This is a great resignation resulting from the trust he felt in Prophet Muhammad. If Abu Bakr only believed things that Prophet Muhammad claimed which made sense rationally, then he might not have believed that the Miraj took place. However, his trust in the Prophet (pbuh) is the faith he had in his morality, character and statements of truth. Today, in order to solve the problems we have with Islam and reach the level of resignation which Abu Bakr possessed, we need to know Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) very well.

Today, we are reading a Book called the Qur’an. Who said that it was the Qur’an? Who said claimed that it was Allah’s revelation? Prophet Muhammad did, didn’t he? Did we hear Gabriel telling him these? We believe in the Qur’an because we trust him. Some scholars (Orientalists) who carry out studies about Eastern disciplines establish institutes to find faults in the prophecy of Prophet Muhammad. Their intention is clear; if they can break the trust that Muslims have in their blessed Prophet, then they have won the battle and penetrated the Islamic world.

Thus, knowledge of Simyah (Appearance) and the Sirah (biography of Prophet Muhammad) is critical. The first priority in Islamic education should be to read the sirah of the Prophet, because everything else will be built upon this knowledge. In doing so, there will not be room for hesitation in regards to the Prophet in our minds, and the acquired knowledge about him as a person and a prophet can be conveyed to others.

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Qur’an And Sunnah⁴

What are the positions of the Qur’an and Sunnah, apart from each other? In the Qur’an, we have the basic principles of Islam, both regarding worship and in morality. Whereas in the Sunnah, we are told how such principles will be practiced in everyday life.

In fact, the Sunnah can establish principles as well. If there exists a hadith from our blessed Prophet about a matter that is not mentioned in the Qur’an, then it becomes a source for us. With the authority given by Allah, the blessed Prophet of Islam was a law maker as well. Because, in tens of verses of the Qur’an, Allah states that he has given the Prophet such authority by saying that believers should do what the Prophet orders them to do.

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* *Pbuh* – (Peace And Blessing Be Upon Him)

¹ The Muslim Holy Book - Scripture

² Certainty

³ Companion of the Prophet Muhammad and first Caliph

⁴ Actions, Commands And Approvals Of The Prophet Muhammad

Introduction To Islam -Part II

Polytheism / Creating Alternatives For Allah

In the Qur'an, the oneness of Allah is mentioned more than the existence of Allah. According to the Qur'an, the existence of Allah for humans is so indispensable and natural that expressions of astonishment are used for those who do not believe that.

Atheism (denial of God) is something that is developed as a reaction against religion. Nowadays, the new joiners of atheism select deism (accepting God, refusing religions); which is a more cautious standing. Since I have realized that this choice of theirs is an emotional reaction resulting from their personal touchiness, I found the situation quite tragic.

Should we direct our resentment resulting from the religionists of our personal history towards our religion? I believe a person that is developed mentally and personally should be able to separate memories from beliefs. Doesn't the fact that a person that takes the negative memories he has experienced as the basis for determining his beliefs (or disbeliefs) shows that, in fact he is not freed from an egoist point of view? Actually, the self of the person enjoys interpreting those memories in a way that is going to cause denial.

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Most people do not believe. Also, the majority of the people that believe cannot do so without creating alternatives for God (acting as polytheists) (Yusuf surah 106). Even though a person succeeds in reaching the belief in the existence of God despite all internal and external obstacles, why does that person create alternatives for God (act as a polytheist)?

Can this distortion is the result of filling the emptiness that is resulting from not knowing Allah with all his attributes with one's own imagination or with the effect of the heritage of thinking that has been evolved through the effects of the traditions of polytheist religions that has come subconsciously throughout centuries?

If polytheism is resulting from not knowing Allah as needed, then the knowledge of Esmā'ül Hüsna (the most beautiful names of Allah) is a splendid preventer of polytheism.

As mentioned by Erich Fromm, another reason of polytheism happens to be; "the fact that people cannot acknowledge a God that is transcendent, that cannot be observed, seen, experienced and talked about, profoundly enough to internalize God in the daily life."

The rebellious attitude that men take on against the negativities of life and the fact that men do not want to see any flaw or deficiency in themselves happen to be one of the routes that take them to polytheism. Because of that, the awareness of servitude is significantly important. Man is deficient. He is in need of the Creator. And life is a test.

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When you want to be perfect and flawless, if you believe in Allah, you pray and request the things that look good to you insistently. Sometimes, when the answer is late (according to you) resisting for an emergent solution and insisting on the results to be the way you wanted make you look for alternative ways. Generally, when we take a step towards the roads that looks as if they are going to give us the opportunity to reach our wishes from a shortcut (making a vow in tombs, applying to fortune tellers, and healers who claim to cure by breathing, and etc.) we enter into a road to polytheism, God forbid.

Another comment was made by Seyyid Kutup. According to him, instead of believing in a divine might that has an unquestionable authority among him, man prefers to believe in a god that he creates and controls which he finds to be much more comfortable. If I decide on what kind of a god I will believe in and the rules that god is going to set, there is nothing I need to obey that is against the self of mine. In fact, this is the same with saying "There is no God".

Why would a person become polytheist? Why should he constantly create new gods? And what are the various appearances of this throughout history? A study about the factors that lead people to polytheism should be done with a multidisciplinary point of view by benefiting from the data of psychology, Sufism, history, sociology, economy, and other social sciences.

In "Psychoanalysis and Religion," Erich Fromm says: Today, what we classify as psychiatric disorders are the same with the rituals of polytheist religions of history. He says, what we see as an extensive addiction to mother and father today was the cult of ancestors in past and fixations, obsessions and many other problematic behaviors happen to be the reflection of the rituals in past to our day."

In other words, people should know that when they become polytheists, their souls is / will be sick. The weakening of belief; belief in oneness is at the basis of mental health disorders (we should not say that someone first became a polytheist then became sick, because people can have mental health disorders even if they believe).

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Every person has a tendency within to become polytheists. These are actually the holes in our personality. The problem is the fact that they are not closed with a conscious belief.

A study should be conducted about symbols. No symbol is innocent. The basis of polytheism is symbolization.

Is Persuasion Necessary In The Matter Of Belief?

I believe that the person who is telling Islam should not have a purpose like convincing his addressee. When the first aim of telling people Islam becomes convincing them, there is a danger that the things that are going to be told can be shaped in a manner that the addressee will want and can adopt. The destruction (the alteration by the human hand) of celestial religions happened mostly because of this reason throughout history.

Furthermore, while the individual tries to convince himself in the matter of his beliefs, he may deviate to gloss (gloss: forcing the meaning so much that it may go beyond the limits of wording) to satisfy his mind (or his self/ego).

Edgar Alan Poe once said; "I do not feel the need to convince anyone since I am already convinced." I am impressed because I also believe that the attempts of persuasion in relationships with people are in fact resulting from the fact that the questioning of those people in their inner worlds has not yet finished.

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A person who believed with a mind and heart at peace should not feel the need to show effort to convince when he is making declaration. After all, "declaration" means announcing, not convincing.

Especially, when we attempt to convince our self/ our ego under the effect of uneducated incentives, gloss or indirect denial that is done with various wordplays becomes unavoidable. When we read the Qur'an from beginning to end, does our self like all information, every order within the Book? No. If our belief is more prominent than our emotions, then we completely accept the content (by leaving the comprehension of some provisions to time) of our book as a whole (resignation), exactly as it is; if not, we either abandon religion, or, if we are not that brave, we gloss religion in accordance to our perception and emotions.

Does Someone Who Does Not Perform The Practices Lose His Faith?

Most of the people also include practice into faith. After counting the principles of faith, they include the condition of living in accordance to these principles as well. When you say this, a person that does not live the rules of religion is assumed to be faithless. Yet, that is not the case. Someone, who believes in the principles of faith (the six musts that we know from creed), is a Muslim. If that person does not live in accordance to these principles and does not comply with the principles of living that are declared by the Book, then he becomes a sinner Muslim. If he shows effort to comply with these principles, then he strengthens his faith.

Because of this, tenets do not mention practice. The concern of tenets is only to believe. Living is the subject of fiqh, morality and Sufism. Tenets tell the lowermost step of Islam from which one cannot come down any lower. In other words, the moment you come down any lower than that, you abandon religion. For instance, not believing in angles makes you abandon religion but not practicing does not make you abandon religion.

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Believing is enough for being a Muslim. A person does not abandon religion because he does not live the rules of religion. However, if that person mocks with these rules, despises them and considers them as unnecessary, then that person abandons religion. This is an obvious requirement of intelligence. A person shows respect to the principles that he claims to exist. Being disrespectful towards those principles is the result of not believing. However, from time to time, we may not obey the principles that we believe in and consider as necessary. We pay the price of that as well. This is the situation of a Muslim that lacks practice. By reason practice is a compulsory result of belief;

however, in the case of its deficiency, that person does not abandon religion. The Prophet has a hadith about this; “No Muslim commits adultery as a Muslim”. This means, when a person performs behaviours that Allah forbids fiercely, that person put his Muslimism on hold, as if he has hit the pause button.

According to what psychology tells us, in order for a thought to be transformed into an action, emotions should be added to it. Probably, because of this reason, in the hadiths of our Prophet, the necessity that belief should be nourished with love is emphasized insistently. The hadiths stating the fact that if the love of Allah and the Prophet is not placed above all other loves, one cannot really believe is the expression of this truth from another angle.

Thus, a solid religiousness is established upon a solid character. The greatest guarantee of religiousness is character. The stronger the person’s willpower the more honest and braver that person is; the stronger that person’s faith become. Cowardice is a great obstacle in practice. People become polytheists and steal because of cowardice and anxiety disorders. Because he does not feel secure, he constantly felt the need to do something for himself. However, an exceptional morality and character is not a guarantee for that person becoming Muslim sooner or later.

It is not possible for everybody to pull away by refusing the prevalent and establishing a new life.

In some cases, an individual may believe in every condition of the tenets of Islam, but in terms of belongingness he cannot define himself as a “Muslim.”The incident that our Prophet performed the funeral prayer of the Emperor (Necaşi) of Habesh in Medina, when he heard his death is quite interesting and it sets light to this topic for us. The Emperor lived as a Christian, carried a cross on his neck all his life, and while he accepted the prophecy of our prophet and the message he brought, he did not live his life in accordance to that. Thus, he did not have resistance against the society he was in.

It is not possible for everybody to pull away by refusing the prevalent and establishing a new life. Or we could not have declared or reached enough to have people make this decision. In the tenets of Islam the principle is the following; “When you see a presage in someone’s faith, dominate his faith not his curse”. This means, with regard to faith, you need to follow a road where you can keep people in the circle of faith as much as possible. He drank, he committed a sin; and thus he abandoned religion. There is no such thing.

However, whenever a person says “I am not a Muslim” clearly and unmistakably, then at that case, that declaration is accepted as the basis. Just like we do not have the right to tell “no you are not” to someone who says “I am a Muslim”, it is not possible to treat someone who keeps on saying “I am not a Muslim” as a Muslim.

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Introduction To Islam -Part III

Personal Problems Should Not Affect Beliefs

Reading the Qur'an can result in mental discord regarding a certain subject. A ruling on a certain matter may contradict our egos. Certain memories or past experiences may cause a sudden loss of faith. No matter what the excuse, we may very well be able to convince ourselves that we have no need for God. Regardless of our current circumstances, perhaps our souls do not want to take on the burden of religion. If we are not ready to make an effort and to struggle to reach the truth, we become susceptible to the loss of or decrease in faith. This is a common problem when there is a lack of information or knowledge. When the topic is religious beliefs the situation becomes much more serious since religious beliefs dictate the values by which we live our lives. These basic values are the starting point and major determinant of our preferences, world-views, personalities and behaviour.

Should these beliefs be able to be moulded and adapted as we wish or should they come from the truth? One's basic beliefs can be determined either by submitting to the universal truth or by tailoring the truth in order to suit oneself. A person who selects the first option builds his own being in accordance with this universal truth. In contrast, those who pursue the other option should be prepared to be disappointed at any time since the truth will not change according to a person's wishes. The Holy Creator, who created the universe, did not just abandon us in this area of existence. It is evident that people who deny the Creator's existence imprison themselves in a cell of loneliness which is, in fact, from a psychological and philosophic perspective, a form of torment.

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From the first day of our creation, our Creator, who has never abandoned us or left us alone to face this monumental truth which is beyond our understanding, informed us about the existence of an indefinite and profound truth through the messengers that he has chosen. Also, because of the Creator's confidence in us and the value he has given us (in contrast to the non-human beings), he left the decision of whether or not to submit to the truth to us. Commonly, memories or experiences are used as excuses for not following the divine truth or a person's own perception of happiness and tranquillity is preferred over Allah's; this is an egoist approach.

Sometimes, because it becomes difficult for us to follow the commandments of the religion, we prefer to be consoled with the comforts of the material world. Interpreting Allah's religion ourselves, without taking the Qur'an into consideration, or insulting Allah or His Messenger will prevent us from experiencing Allah's mercy on Judgment Day. If we are presented with a divine revelation that is difficult to accept, we should approach this manner in this way, saying to ourselves, "I cannot comprehend this, but it must be true since Allah said it." In this way, we are not changing Allah's words or denying them or pretending they do not exist. Even if a person does not fulfil certain

duties, if he accepts that these duties are conferred on us by Allah and confesses to not fulfilling them, he is still a Muslim. However, if a person starts to, like a god, distinguish between right and wrong, the ontological connection with religion shuts down.

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Is There Only One Way To Live Islam?

The truth can be compared to an enormous crystal which everyone looks at from a different angle. Some people may look at it as a whole while others, for a variety of reasons, may only be able to see a portion of it and believe that that portion is actually the whole crystal. There is only one truth; however, each of us does not convey the message of this truth with the same strength. For example, the companions of the Prophet, who were able to see and spend time with him, were able to convey the truth in a more convincing way. Based on this, it is clear that there is not a single standard way to convey the truth; there are differences, and unless a person denies Haq (the truth), he is within the circle of truth.

The differing degrees in which one implements Islam into his life can be visualized using a staircase. Some people are at the top of the staircase while others are at the bottom. They are united by the fact that they are all on the staircase. While climbing the staircase, we are following those who are more towards the top. This analogy can be applied to the level one implements the practices of Islam into his life.

Hassan ibn Thabit, one of the companions of Prophet Muhammad, was a great poet, and whenever someone attacked the Prophet in a poem, he would respond on behalf of the Prophet. He requested permission from Prophet Muhammad to not participate in the Battle of the Trench so he could stay behind with the women. He is still referred to as the "Poet of the Prophet" and there are reports that Prophet Muhammad gave him one of his sweaters as a present. Even though the Prophet advised the women not to join the army, some women from Medina, after hearing that the Prophet's army had been defeated in the Battle of Uhud, grabbed all weapons they could carry and ran to the battlefield and the Prophet did not criticize their response.

These stories indicate that society is composed of a variety of different people, all of which are needed, such as soldiers, writers, housewives, and artists. While these people have different characteristics, experiences and lives, as long as they accept Haq, they can be considered as part of the circle of Islam.

To correctly understand and interpret Islam today, detailed knowledge of the first years of Islam is necessary. The concepts and practices that are difficult to understand in today's world were implemented for a purpose at that time. Understanding the details of the Prophet's life helps to make such things easier to understand. Following such a study, it becomes evident that there is room in Islam for a variety of different people, both those who are strong as well as the weak. All of these people have the ability to be good Muslims. Being a good Muslim means submitting to Allah and not following any other way other than the way of Allah and His Messenger.

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The Qur'an: A Book For Every Age

The Qur'an is the direct word of Allah. This includes both its words and the meaning of the verses in this holy book which is the last revealed word of Allah. The Qur'an was sent by Allah to humanity via Prophet Muhammad who is the one who carried, revealed and provided guidance and examples of how to implement the words of Allah. The miracles of this book can be categorized into two main branches: language and meaning.

With regard to its use of language and wording, the Qur'an is a miracle. It by far surpassed the works of the master poets of its time. During that period, when literature and poetry were at a peak, even people who did not believe in the Qur'an accepted its literary achievements. This then begs the question of why one who admires the literary aspects of the Qur'an does not believe in its veracity. However, being impressed by the literary beauty of the Qur'an does not necessarily make one believe. In order to submit to Allah and the words in His book, one must also purify himself and his soul from arrogance, addiction to material items; in short, from all negative feelings. One should endeavour to place Haq, the truth, above all other selfish desires.

In addition, the Qur'an is a miracle with regards to its meaning. Centuries after it was revealed, the remarkable features of the Qur'an have become even more magnificent. As time passes, man slowly deciphers the secrets of the universe. Thus, the meanings of some of the phrases and verses in the Qur'an have just been grasped. Particularly the verses which explain scientific facts could not be understood using the knowledge that mankind had accumulated at the time when the Qur'an was revealed. Recent scientific discoveries continue to reveal the miracles in the Qur'an which was sent to humanity fourteen centuries ago.

As opposed to all other creatures, Allah, who created beings out of nothing, created the human being with the freedom to make choices. However, in order to prevent the negative consequences of this freedom, Allah did not neglect to guide humanity. The Qur'an, which Muslims believe is the

direct word of Allah, does not just contain the truth; it also details the natural laws of the universe, thus making the Qur'an universal.

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The fact that the Qur'an is universal means that it is valid in all times and places. Even if some of the realities of the laws of the universe do not please us, this does not change the fact that they are all true. Whether we want it to or not, the universe continues to exist within the realm of those rules. The same applies to the Qur'an as well. It also reflects the past (starting from the first moment of creation), the present, and the future (after the annihilation of the world) using clear, vivid and precise wording. However, it leaves the choice of whether to comply with this truth to individuals.

Claiming that the main ideas and the expressions in the Qur'an belong to a certain period of time, or, in other words, saying that the Qur'an is a historical and thus out-dated manuscript is an attempt by human beings to make room for themselves. Such a claim is a means to favour the relative truths that have been reached using the limited brainpower of humans rather than the universal truths of the Qur'an which must be more important than personal pleasures and indulgences. Placing oneself before everything means that the truth will be shaped based on one's own opinions in which case the actual truth is brushed aside.

Sometimes, especially in societies which are not ruled by Islamic law, a law or ruling stemming from the Qur'an may seem impossible to apply due to the limitations of individuals as may be the case when inheritance is distributed in accordance with religious rulings in a family where the rights and responsibilities were not formed based on religion. In such cases, instead of ignoring the rule and considering it to be an inapplicable historical ruling, a fatwa (non-binding legal interpretation of the Sharia) that is specific to the conditions of today can be applied as this will both prevent the individual from being victimized and avoid any attempts to not follow the provisions of the Qur'an.

Islam is the only religion in the world with a holy book that has not been touched by the human hand. Acknowledging this is not only the duty of Muslims but also of humanity as a whole. Objecting to the universality of the Qur'an just because it does not comply with our self-imposed borders and picking and choosing from the Qur'an in order to fit into these borders is definitely going too far.[1] Many people complain about the decline of Islam and religion and society while at the same time trying to mould Islam and the Qur'an in a way that suits this age. This paradox, which stems from the fact that people do not want to or will not let themselves submit to the will of Allah, results in a dilemma. For these reasons, it is crucial that the Qur'an not be interpreted in such a way that the meanings of the verses go beyond what is accepted by the majority of scholars.

In the Qur'an, even the anecdotes which seem to be purely historical have a deeper meaning. A successful reading and interpretation of such anecdotes results in examples and guidance on many

of life's important issues. Touching upon the issues of the unchanging nature of human character, social interaction, the characteristics of atheists and believers, the reasons that lead to people swearing, etc., many anecdotes in the Qur'an actually provide up-to-date examples on problems that are still relevant today. A person who is more knowledgeable about the Qur'an and hadiths tends to try to process them, implementing what is learned from them in his life, whereas a person with little or no knowledge tends to ignore such things. Of course, the approach a person takes towards the Qur'an is important as well. How two people read and interpret the same verse can be very different. One may read it trying to find approval for his behaviour while the other may read it with the goal of comprehending Allah's timeless message; these two people will obviously have quite a different understanding of the religion.

Moreover, the provisions revealed were sequenced in such a way so society could easily and properly implement them, making the provisions that were to be revealed next easier to accept and understand.

The Significance Of The Order Of Revelation

The Qur'an was not revealed to Prophet Muhammad all at once. Rather, it was revealed over a period of twenty-three years a little at a time. Sometimes just a verse was revealed while at other times several verses, or a surah, were revealed together. One of the reasons for this method was to actualize the divine inducement or guidance that fulfilled the needs of the society based on the incidents that had occurred. Another reason was to slowly prepare society for the provisions next to come.

Examples of this include the prohibition of drinking and interest as well as the ritual prayers (Salah), which was the first religious obligation placed on Muslims. Performing the ritual prayers can be viewed as the core of the religion which facilitates the implementation of other practices and the actualization of religion in one's personal and social life. A person who starts to perform the ritual prayers properly and gives importance to the prayers is usually more willing and prepared to implement the other religious practices.

After the introduction of the ritual prayers, other provisions were slowly revealed so that the mental and emotional training necessary for faith, commitment to Allah and the Prophet, a sense of belonging to the Muslim society and belief in the afterlife as the major motivation for life continued. Thanks to this training, the small community around the Prophet, his companions, reached a level where they accepted all the information relayed to them by Prophet Muhammad, which had come from Allah, and the practices that were necessary to implement this information.

Moreover, the provisions revealed were sequenced in such a way so society could easily and properly implement them, making the provisions that were to be revealed next easier to accept and understand. Before interest was prohibited, provisions related to social justice, such as zakat (charity), lending without intending to make a profit (qardul hassan), etc. were placed within the society in a fully-organized system. Similarly, before adultery was prohibited, marriage was made

easier and the rules regarding the proper relationship and behaviour between males and females were taught and adopted as religiously necessary. These rules were accepted as the natural consequence of religious belief.

Thus, this method should be taken into consideration in the duty of inviting others to Islam (da'wah), which is also the responsibility of Muslims. Of course, there is also a sequence that should be followed during the process of educating someone; such a process is an essential condition in every type of education. It is obvious that mentioning the provisions of Islam and encouraging the implementation of the practices to someone whose faith is not properly placed, has doubts about the truth of the Qur'an, does not trust the Prophet's explanations of the Qur'an, or who considers afterlife to be a vague possibility will not be very effective.

The life of Prophet Muhammad and the order in which the verses in the Qur'an were revealed and how these topics were explained by the Prophet should be taken into consideration and used as instructive material when performing da'wah. After all, it is neither possible to comprehend Islam nor to accurately present Islam to others without knowledge of the details of the life of Prophet Muhammad.

Muhammad Hamidullah's book Introduction to Islam is an essential piece which provides a helpful and systematized outline of Islam useful for both those learning Islam as well as those teaching it. This book was written for the purpose of introducing Islam to Western societies. Regrettably, today Introduction to Islam is also used in Muslim countries where knowledge of Islam is lacking. In his book, Hamidullah first explains the life of the Messenger of Allah of Islam as without having knowledge of the life of the Prophet (Sirah) it is not possible to fully comprehend the interpretation of the Qur'an, Islamic law or the hadith. Without this knowledge, information about the religion would have no context. In order to give this information some context, it is necessary to be familiar with the life of the Prophet, how each verse was interpreted and put into practice and how these practices should be observed in daily life.

In the introduction, Hamidullah discusses about the institution of the prophecy throughout history and draws attention to two points:

All the prophets emphasized that they personally did not create anything and had been sent by Allah.

Throughout history, various battles threatened to erase the divine messages sent by Allah. This is true for all the prophets before Prophet Muhammad. The messages they carried disappeared and their experiences were mixed with myths and stories created by humans.

When discussing the prophets, these two facts should not be forgotten. Again, looking at the history of religion, it is evident that due to their communication with Allah, some prophets accepted as messengers between men and Allah were idolized throughout history. Awareness of this incident in the history of prophecy can prevent it from happening again.

As Muhammad Hamidullah states in his introduction, all aspects of religious life stem from three basic principles: God, the Prophet and belief in the Afterlife. While learning about Islam, teaching the religion, and inviting others to it, sound knowledge of these principles is key.

[1] For more information on this and related topics, the topics of Modernism and Islam and the Modernist Interpretations of the Qur'an should be examined.

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Introduction To Islam -Part IV

Incorporating The Practices Of Islam Into Daily Life

In a Muslim's daily life, it is important when with family or friends, to pay careful attention to the planning of worship, doing charity, and demonstrating good behaviour as a means of education. For example, when making plans to go out with children, thinking out loud about where and when the ritual prayers will be performed and narrating how it is important to not leave the house without performing wudu (ablutions) will definitely impact children. Doing these things without fear and narrating the thought stream out loud may help some people learn. This type of behaviour should not be looked at as a way of showing off or as hypocrisy. Even if this is the case, it is better to do good than to do nothing. Such actions may be beneficial for the one who hears them or witnesses the action. This can be viewed as another way to do good as the one who does this is going to be rewarded just as much as the one who witnesses this action and implements the practice as a result. This is in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet.

Each morning the ritual prayers need to be planned, preferably out loud if others are nearby. Leaving the duties of worship to the mercy of the flow of daily life is not sufficient because without solid plans you become subject to the plans of others. As people often use the excuse of not being able to perform their prayers because their wudu has been invalidated, trying to maintain wudu at all times makes worship easier.

Also, being at one with your thoughts, beliefs and practices and carrying them everywhere, and with pride, is one of the most essential principles for good psychological health. In this way you are saying "this is me, this is who I am". Said with a sense of soft determination – not imposition – this will sooner or later create respect. What is important here is the fact that worship and kindness, religious duties, and the things forbidden by the religion of Islam become part of our personality. Naturally and sincerely, our beliefs become integrated with our personality.

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Marriage

The general purpose of all the rules and recommendations in Islam related to marriage is to encourage marriage. Moreover, one of the reasons why getting divorced is relatively easy in Islam is to protect the institution of marriage. It is as if the system is organized in a way that makes marriage more attractive. Everything from distributing inheritance to family life to the rules which regulate the relationship between men and women strengthens the attraction to the institution of marriage. The strict prohibition of adultery is only possible since marriage and divorce are made easy.

While in Islam marriage is certainly an attractive prospect, at times it may be against the desires of the individual. Continuing a marriage may become a burden and create inconvenience for that person. However, in order for humans to protect their biological, psychological and social health and for the perpetuation of society, people must prefer marriage.

A look at the general history of humanity shows that throughout history the human race has always had the idea of a creator. History explains that if this perception of God does not match up with the biological needs of humans, societies will eventually disappear. Therefore, when the creator and the ruler are not the same, human nature conflicts with social regulations and either causes degeneration in society (as is happening today) or that society is destroyed.

The harmony between human nature and the social rules is essential for social peace and tranquillity. When the preferences, incentives, rewards and sanctions of a society are such that they enhance the positive aspects of human nature and divert the deficiencies and shortcomings towards the good, it becomes possible to live without a contradiction between human nature and religious beliefs. However, this is rarely achieved in its entirety. What is important is that the majority of society realizes this dream.

When looking at the issue of harmony in the institution of marriage, it is obvious that the practices common today are in favour of unlimited sexual liberty, i.e. against marriage. For instance, biologically sexual desire reaches its peak between the ages of eighteen and thirty-three. Yet, today, the average age of marriage is thirty. A society that accepts this is tacitly approving of adultery. For one committing adultery, getting married at age thirty is completely normal. However, marriage at the age of thirty is late for someone does not commit adultery.

It is beneficial to keep the following in mind with regard to the concept of marriage: in Islam, marriage is not an obligation. If, having married, you believe that you made a mistake, the marriage does not have to continue. Islam does not set an obligatory age for getting married neither are there any financial conditions required for getting married. Getting married is not an individual duty; rather, it is a social responsibility.

Getting married should be made easy otherwise the chance of succumbing to adultery increases. Marriage becomes a religious duty for a single person about to commit adultery. It is sunnah (a usual practice) for someone not threatened by adultery to get married and it is forbidden for someone to get married if the probability that that person will torture his or her spouse is high. The choice of which formalities or ceremonies accompany the marriage are left up to common practices with simplicity being preferred.

The fact that people today evaluate and judge some of the historical practices, and particularly the marriages of Prophet Muhammad, using their own level of understanding and knowledge is because they use their own sense of pleasure, satisfaction and morality as the basis for the subject of marriage (just as they do with other topics).

The knowledge of this issue means understanding the upper and lower limits of the topic. Within these limits, the practices which differ in each society and era are met with tolerance by religion. The fact that people today evaluate and judge some of the historical practices, and particularly the marriages of Prophet Muhammad, using their own level of understanding and knowledge is because they use their own sense of pleasure, satisfaction and morality as the basis for the subject of marriage (just as they do with other topics). What is interesting is that according to this perception, adultery is understandable and accepted, while it is considered abnormal for a young adult who is ready and willing to get married at a young age.

Just as is the case for every subject in which Allah has given us guidance, in the case of marriage, either Allah's religion is submitted to or it is rejected and denied. Alternately, it is accepted but not implemented. Of course, one is free to adopt whichever attitude they wish; however, changing the words of Allah must be avoided.

The Degrees Of Living Islam

The next duty of a Muslim who believes in all the pillars and articles of faith without making any exceptions and with total submission is to perform the religious duties and avoid the behaviour which has been forbidden. When submission to Allah and his guidance increases, complying with these rules becomes easier. Nevertheless, the role of willpower, as a step between belief and practice, should not be forgotten.

Willpower is related to personality and the performance of the Islamic religion is mostly left up to the willpower of the believer. Trying to fulfil religious duties despite all their difficulties significantly strengthens willpower. That is because willpower can only be strengthened with exercises related to the principles of behaviours. After regularly fulfilling the religious duties, one should aim to enhance morality, self-discipline and perform the Sunnah practices. The highest degree one can reach with regard to one's faith is Ihsan, or perfection or excellence. Ihsan means living as if you can see Allah. The believer who has reached this level demonstrates their faith in both deed and action.

In conclusion, there are two definitions of good: that of society and that of Allah. When evaluating ourselves or someone, it is critical to pay attention to which principles of goodness are being used.

The Concept Of Goodness

Can someone who denies the rights of Allah over him and disrespects the divine through revolting but is respectful and courteous in his daily relationships be described as a "good person"? This person may be kind, polite, thoughtful, etc. but can he or she be referred to as "good"? Is he or she a good person in the eyes of Allah?

Another example: the manager in an office causes his employees great distress while at work due to his unfairness and deception. Yet, at night, he dresses up and dines in elegant restaurants and has sophisticated taste. He attends a wide variety of cultural activities from concerts to exhibitions. He is a gentleman. Can this man be described as good?

On the other hand, a street vendor who is slightly rude and does not know anything about art or fine dining never treats his customers unfairly or tries to cheat them. He chases after customers who overpay by just 50 cents. Which of these men is good?

"...A good and virtuous man is someone who believes in God, the day of Afterlife, the angels, the Book (Qur'an) and the Prophets, shares his belongings he loves (for God's sake) with relatives, orphans, the poor, people left on the road/street, beggars and people under oppression (for saving them), performs ritual prayers thoroughly, gives alms, keeps his promises when he has given one, and who is patient during boredom, illness and fiercest times of war. Here are the true ones (in their beliefs, the goods they do and the way they worship)"(Baqarah 2:177)

In this verse, the requirements of the "duties of goodness" and being "good" are expressed quite clearly. Everyone can evaluate themselves using the conditions presented here. Most importantly, it is clear what kind of people Allah refers to as "good" and under which conditions Allah describes that person as "good".

According to this verse, the duties of goodness are:

- ◆ Believing in Allah, the afterlife, the angels, the Book and the Prophets
- ◆ Sharing what you have with your relatives, orphans, the poor, the homeless, beggars and people under oppression
- ◆ Performing ritual prayers
- ◆ Giving alms
- ◆ Keeping promises
- ◆ Being patient during times of boredom, illness and the fiercest times of war

It is clear that being good is only possible when the actions described by the Creator in terms of belief, behaviour and morality are committed. One who is disrespectful towards Allah, his angels, his prophets and his books, avoids social financial responsibilities, despises worshiping (considering it unimportant or unnecessary) and neglects moral qualities like keeping promises and being patient cannot be “good”.

It is not possible for someone who does not properly implement these responsibilities to be referred to as “good” simply because he consumes good things, knows where and how indulgences can be met best and is treated with politeness because he acts (despite his behaviour resulting in great injustices and cruelties) within the rules of courtesy (which have been determined by similar people). In conclusion, there are two definitions of good: that of society and that of Allah. When evaluating ourselves or someone, it is critical to pay attention to which principles of goodness are being used.

If the marriages of the Prophet had been a result of his lustfulness, then it would have been used as a matter of criticism by his enemies at that time; instead, it is just used by his contemporary enemies.

The Importance Of The Knowledge Of Sirah In Understanding Islam

Sirah is the term used for the biographies of the life of Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad was not only the person to whom Allah revealed the Qur'an, but was also the first one who related the Qur'an to others and the first to apply its teachings. The fact that revelations continued while he was doing this shows the careful manner in which he understood, processed, instituted and shared the divine message. This is why his sunnah is binding.

All books of sirah start with a description of the geographical, social and cultural conditions of the Arabian Peninsula before Islam. Why is such a description necessary? It is necessary because it is not possible to comprehend the behaviour and manners of belief of a society independent from its traditions, social and economic structure and without understanding the period of history in which these things emerged.

For example, in Muhammad Hamidullah's book *The Prophet of Islam*, he describes the marriages of Prophet Muhammad. As an Islamic scholar living in the West, Hamidullah, aware that people in the West were likely to criticize the Prophet, focuses on his marriages.[1] In his explanation Hamidullah states that the Prophet was criticized by his enemies at that time for a variety of fabricated reasons and that he was called bad names by both the Jews and the polytheists but no one ever criticized anyone else because of their marriages because during that time such practices were considered normal. He also indicates that the astonishment common today regarding this matter results from the fact that history is being evaluated using the perceptions of today.

Hamidullah explains that Aisha was engaged to someone else before she married the Prophet. When the engagement was broken off, her father, Abu Bakr, offered his daughter to the noble families in order to find her an appropriate spouse. This evidence makes it clear that the marriage of girls of such an age was a common practice at that time. Even though Prophet Muhammad's marriage to Aisha is recorded in a variety of historical resources, continuing to view this marriage as a novel practice is an attempt at antagonism. If the marriages of the Prophet had been a result of his lustfulness, then it would have been used as a matter of criticism by his enemies at that time; instead, it is just used by his contemporary enemies. In order to reach this conclusion, it is necessary to have detailed knowledge of the social, geographic, cultural, economic and political structure of that time.

Information is the greatest form of power, especially today. When you cannot or do not back up your beliefs with information, they become so weak that they will not survive the slightest blow, let alone a strong storm. As Islam was established as a religion due in part to the trust people felt towards Prophet Muhammad and because of the information of *sirah* which details his life, it is clear that information is at the forefront of religious belief.

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