

A Brief Introduction to Islam

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In the Beginning: The Story of Adam and Eve

The story of the creation of the first human couple is mentioned in several places in the Qur'an. We will consider two groups of verses that will convey the essence of the story. The verses in Surat Al Baqarah (Chapter 2) and Surat Al-A'raf (Chapter 7) are as follows:

“And when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’ They said, ‘Will You place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praise and glorify Your Holy (name)?’ He said, ‘I know what you know not.’ And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said, ‘Tell me the names of these if you are truthful.’ They said, ‘Glory is to You. We have no knowledge, except that which You have taught us. Verily, You are the Omniscient, the Wise.’ He said, ‘Adam, tell them their names.’ When he had told them, God said, ‘Did I not tell you that I know the unseen in the heavens and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?’ When, We said to the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ and they bowed down, all save Iblis: he refused and was haughty. He was one of those who rejected faith. We said, ‘Adam, dwell you and your spouse in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as you will; but approach not this tree lest you become wrongdoers.’ But Satan made them slip from the (garden), and got them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said, ‘Get out, all of you, with enmity between yourselves. On earth you will have a dwelling-place and means of livelihood - for a time.’ Then Adam received from his Lord’s words of inspiration, and his Lord relented towards him; for He is Ever- Relenting, the Giver of Mercy. We said, ‘Get out all of you; but when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who reject faith and deny Our revelations, they shall be companions of the fire; they shall abide therein.’” [2:30-39]¹

“‘Adam, dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat from wherever you desire, but come not near this tree lest you become wrongdoers.’ Then Satan whispered to them that he might manifest to them that which was hidden from them of their shame, and he said, ‘Your Lord forbade you from this tree, lest you should become angels or become of the immortals.’ And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser. Thus, did he lead them on with guile. And when they tasted of the tree their shame became manifest to them and they began to heap on themselves some of the leaves of the Garden. And their Lord called them, (saying), ‘Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is your open enemy?’ They said, ‘Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be lost.’” [7: 19-23]

The above two sets of verses tell the story of the creation of Adam (PBUH)² and Eve. The verses indicate clearly, that the human race was created to live on earth. However, they needed to learn a lesson that would enable them to fulfill their intended function on earth. The short episode of Adam and Eve in paradise was meant to teach them and their descendants the lesson of life. God

¹ Citation of verses 30 to 39 of chapter 2 in the Qur'an.

² PBUH stands for Peace be upon him. This is a traditional reference to prophets in Islam.

created Adam and Eve to live on earth to fulfil a certain objective, to be God's vicegerents on earth.

God created Adam and Eve out of mud but then, breathed in each of them of His spirit. Humans are a unique creation. They have bodies made out of mud but they were given a soul from the spirit of God. The mud brings them down to earth and the soul raises them high in the sky. A body and a spirit. Lowly desires and lofty aspirations.

The other unique feature of the human beings is that they were given an intellect. They can learn and they can teach. This raised their status above that of the angels. To show their respect for the new creation, God commanded the angels to bow to Adam, the representative of the human race.

The verses also show that Eve was not responsible for getting Adam out of paradise. They both fell in the trap laid out by Satan, they both disobeyed God, they both ate from the tree, they both repented and asked for forgiveness, and both of them received God's pardon before going to live on earth and fulfill the objective of their creation.

The verses indicate that Satan is the avowed enemy of the human beings, he will try to seduce them whenever and however he can. But he has no control over them. It is clearly stated in the Quran that Satan's schemes are weak, he has no control over the believers. He will try to tempt them but their faith protects them from succumbing to temptation. When we forget God's warning about the danger that Satan poses, like Adam did, we can fall prey to Satan's attempts.

The jest of the story is that, life is a struggle between human beings and Satan. He will try to seduce them to disobey God. God sent guidance to people, if they follow this guidance they will be able to conquer Satan and they will enjoy living in the paradise of God's obedience.

Adam's main problem was his weakness, while Satan's problem is his arrogance. Weakness led Adam to sin, however, he recovered and repented. Arrogance led Satan to disobeying God, knowing full well that this constitutes an act of rejecting faith. Satan never repented.

Islam

The word “Islam” is an Arabic word that means “submission”, a derivative of this word is the Arabic word “salam” meaning peace. Thus, Islam is a way of life based on attaining peace through voluntary submission to God. This peace is comprehensive. It encompasses peace within oneself, peace with those around us, peace with the environment and peace with the universe. Quran mentions the word Islam when it refers to Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) (PBUH).

“When his Lord said to him: Submit, he said: ‘I submit to the Lord of the worlds.’” [2:131]

Quran uses the word Islam to refer to two different concepts: the general concept of submission to God, as mentioned in verse 131 of the second chapter mentioned above, and the specific message that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Islam, is thus the religion that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is alluded to in Chapter 14, verse 24-25, as the “Good word.” *“Have you not considered how God presents an example, a good word is like a good tree, whose root is firmly established and its branches high in the sky? It produces its fruit all the time, by the permission of its Lord. And God presents examples for the people that perchance they will be reminded.” (14: 24-25)*

Thus, Islam is like a tree. A tree has three components: a root, a trunk, and a crown. Islam has three components as well: a doctrine, rituals, and a way of life.

The Doctrine

The doctrine of Islam consists of six articles of faith. These are the belief in the Oneness of God, the Hereafter, the Messengers, the angels, the Sacred Books, and destiny.

The Belief in the Oneness of God

Islam came to Arabia at a time when idolatry was prevalent. Each tribe had its own idol. The Arabs believed that there was one god, but they also believed that there were a number of smaller deities, similar to the Greek concept of a pantheon of gods, who could intercede on their behalf. Islam brought a clear message that associating partners with God is the most heinous sin a person can commit. The core message of Islam is the belief in one God, the Creator. The Arabic word for this creed is “Tawheed,” which means the belief in the Oneness of God. He is the sole creator and He has absolute control over His creation. He has no partners and He is unique in His attributes. He alone deserves to be worshiped, and to Him alone we look for help and support. This core message is reiterated in numerous verses throughout the Quran. Chapter 112 has been devoted to convey this message.

“Say: He is God, the One God, the eternally Besought of all. He begets not nor was begotten, and there is none comparable unto Him” [112:1-4]

In addition to being a philosophical concept, the belief in the Oneness of God has its own practical implications. Islam inculcates in Muslims the precepts that God has the ultimate authority and power over His creation. And while we can get away with breaking the law of the

land, if we were not caught, God is always watching over us, thus, He knows what we do. We should be careful not to break the Divine law, because God sees and knows all what we do.

The belief in the Oneness of God has two main aspects: the belief in God's power as the One and only God, and the belief in God's compassion as the One and only Lord. The first aspect deals with God as the Creator and His right to be worshipped by His creation. He is the Mighty, He is the Sublime, and He is the Powerful. The second aspect deals with God the Lord of the worlds who takes care of His creation. He is the Provider, He is the Sustainer, and He is the Compassionate.

The Quran mentions a number of attributes that describe the different aspects of the Divinity. Most scholars have agreed that the number of these names is ninety-nine. These are the most beautiful names of God. They have been divided into three general categories: attributes of Perfection, attributes of Majesty, and attributes of Beauty.

The Belief in the Hereafter

God's message assures us of resurrection after death and of a Day of Judgment where we will be held accountable for our deeds on earth. The belief in the Hereafter is a direct consequence of the fact that this life is nothing but a trial for humankind; and that we have to account for each deed, action, or a choice we made during our lives. God created humans and blessed them with intellect, skills, and resources to achieve certain objectives. On the Day of Judgment, God will judge us and every one will see the results of his/her deeds. The place where one will spend the eternal life in the Hereafter depends on the choices one makes during his/her life on earth. This concept has been articulated in several verses, of which we mention

“Blessed is He in whose hand is the sovereignty, and He has power over all things. He who created death and life, that He may test which of you is best in deed; and He is the Eminent, the All-Forgiving. ” [67:1-2]

The Belief in the Messengers

God gave humans guidance to be able to differentiate between right and wrong. Guidance came through messengers, ordinary human beings chosen by God to deliver his Message. God sent men with his guidance so that they would not only deliver the message but they would also act as role models for humanity.

The Quran lists a large number of the Messengers of God. They start with Adam (PBUH) and end with Muhammad (PBUH). The list includes, but not limited to, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Jesus (PBUT). The Quran says, “Every community has been sent a warner.” [35:24]

The Belief in the Angels

The angels are a creation of God, that we do not know much about. We know that they are created from light, they have no free will, and they do what they are commanded to do. They have been assigned tasks to perform. One of these tasks was to deliver the Message of God to the Messengers. We know that the angel who was assigned to perform this task was Gabriel (PBUH).

The Belief in the Sacred Books.

The Message of God was documented in Sacred Books. The Quran mentions several examples of the Books that were revealed to God's Messengers and brought guidance for humankind. These include: The Torah revealed to Prophet Moses (PBUH), the Psalms revealed to Prophet David (PBUH), and the Bible revealed to Prophet Jesus (PBUH).

The Belief in Destiny

God knows what will happen to His creation. No one will escape his/her fate. *"Say, 'Nothing will befall us except that which God has decreed for us, He is our Protecting Guardian,' and in God let the believers put their trust."* (9: 51) *"Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you should be within towers of lofty towers."* (4: 78)

But, how can one reconcile the concept of free will with the concept of destiny. How can we be accountable for something that we have no control over? We have to believe in God's justice. God will never hold us accountable for something that we cannot control. We can think of the domain of action to be composed of two parts. One part includes the actions that we have no control over e.g. our lineage, our gender our genes. The second part includes the actions that we are given the ability to control e.g. our choices and decisions in life. We are only accountable for the actions that belong to the second category, *"Each soul is accountable only for its own actions, and no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another; then to your Lord is your return, so He will inform you of that in which you differed."* [6: 164]

The Rituals

The rituals in Islam are called the pillars of Islam. There are five pillars: The testament of faith, prayers, fasting, poor-dues (alms), and pilgrimage.

The Testament of Faith

Each day, a Muslims has to express verbally his/her belief in the Oneness of God several times. This is called the Testament of Faith (Shahadah), *"I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Messenger."* The enunciation of this statement reminds the Muslim that submission to God has to be practiced in each and every act one attempts. *"Say, 'Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for God, the Lord of the worlds; He has no partner; and this I am commanded, and I am the first of those who submit.' Say, 'What! Shall I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things.' Each soul is accountable only for its own actions, and no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another; then to your Lord is your return, so He will inform you of that in which you differed."* [6:162- 164]

This statement combines all aspects of the Islamic doctrine. The belief in the Oneness of God implies the belief in God as the Lord and the Deity. The word "Lord" refers to the attribute of God as the Creator and the Guardian of his creation, while the word "Deity" refers to God's right to be worshiped by His creation.

The belief in Muhammad (PBUH) as the Messenger of God encompasses the belief in the angels,

in the revealed books, in all the messengers of God, in the Day of Judgment, as well as in the laws and injunctions that he brought forward as part of the message. The Quran says, “*The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from His Lord, as do the believers. Each one of them believes in God, His angels, His Books, and His messengers. We make no distinction between one and another of His messengers.*” [2:285]. “*It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God and the Last day, and the angels, and the Book, and the messengers.*” [2:177]

Prayers

The Arabic word for prayer in Islam means connecting. Thus, prayer is the fundamental conduit through which a person connects with God. It is a form of communication between God and the human being. It serves as a reminder that God’s commands have to be fulfilled. Thus, it is a symbol of the person’s obedience to God. Touching the ground with one’s forehead during prayer is considered to be the symbol of absolute submission to God.

During prayers, one has to face towards the Ka’ba. The Ka’ba is a cubic building that exists in Mecca. It is part of the Holy Mosque; it is believed to be the site of the first place of worship of God on earth. This is where Adam and Eve and their children used to worship God. Facing towards the Ka’ba during prayer brings to mind the fundamental concept of the unity of the human race. The human race started with one couple. All human beings belong to the same family. Although we are all different, but we all belong to the same origin.

When the Ka’ba was destroyed by the elements, God commanded Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and his son Ishmael (PBUH) to rebuild the Ka’ba. This is a reminder of the common roots of the three monotheistic religions.

There are five obligatory prayers every day. Each prayer has a span of time during which a person must perform his/her prayer. The first is the dawn prayer, which can be done anytime between dawn and sunrise. The noon prayer, whose time starts at noon and ends at the midafternoon. The time for the afternoon prayer starts half way between noon and sunset, and ends with sunset. The fourth prayer is the sunset prayer which can be done just after the time of sunset until the time of the disappearance of the twilight. Finally, the evening prayer which can be done from the time of the disappearance of the twilight till dawn.

There is also a number of supererogatory prayers that one can volunteer to do in addition to the prescribed prayers.

It is very important that one performs the obligatory prayers regularly because it is the sign of faith. These prayers are best done in congregation, however, they can also be done individually. Prayers involve movements like standing up, bowing down and prostrating. A person who is unable to perform these movements can perform the prayer sitting down or even laying down. Before praying one has to perform a ritual wash.

On Friday, Muslims perform the weekly congregation prayer. This prayer has to be done in congregation and it is preceded by a sermon.

Fasting

Muslims follow a lunar calendar, called the Hijri calendar, in deciding the holy events of their religion. One of these events is fasting during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month in the Hijri calendar. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, and having intimate relations with their spouses from dawn till sunset. They will then have a meal just after sunset. They usually have another meal before dawn to keep them going until they are allowed to eat again at sunset.

Abstaining from material pleasures is one dimension of the fasting. Another dimension is the spiritual aspect for Ramadan. Muslims should endeavor to do good deeds and to improve themselves during this month. Ramadan is a time for performing extra voluntary prayers, spending money in charitable aspects, and improving our characters.

Poor-Dues (Alms)

Paying the poor-dues is an obligatory ritual. Its main objective is to address the needs of the poor. There are different ways for estimating the money to be paid depending on the type of wealth. The simplest is the alms which are paid for having saved money. The alms are calculated as 2.5% of the money that a person continues to have for a period of a full year.

Paying alms purifies the human soul, *“Take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them increase, and invoke God’s blessing on them.”* [9: 103]

God promises to multiply the reward for those who spend in His cause.

“The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain of corn. It grows seven ears and each ear has a hundred grains. God gives manifold increase to whom He pleases. And God is Vast, Omniscient.” (2: 261) The mathematics is intriguing, how can a single grain become seven hundred, but the more important message is the one given by the image of a grain put in the ground, producing a plant that comes out carrying a multitude of grains. This is an image of the growth of life which inculcates the ideal of giving in the consciousness of people. Giving is in fact taking, and wealth does not decrease by giving but it actually increases. Wealth grows by giving because God rewards in multitude, because God is *“Vast, Omniscient.”* He has limitless resources and He knows what is in people’s hearts. What kind of spending is meant here? It is the spending in the way of God that is not tarnished by hurting the feelings of people on the receiving end. Reminding people that they are on the receiving end is a mean act. It is only done by those who want to show off or want to humiliate others. This charity is not intended to please God. This behavior is unacceptable since it is God’s wealth, not ours that we give away. Those who do not commit this mean act should not suffer any feeling of fear of deprivation or injustice. They should not be saddened that they gave away their money in this life nor by the specter of a bad ending in the Hereafter. The same message is reemphasized, *“A kind word with forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury. God is Self-Sufficient, and He is Most-Forbearing.”* (2: 262) Charity that is followed by hurting the feelings of those who are on the receiving end is useless. Charity should be followed by a kind word and a good feeling. Charity should be followed by a kind word that heals the wounds of the hearts of the deprived and cleanse their souls. One of the objectives of charity is to bring comfort to the

deprived and to make them enjoy a sense of brotherhood and friendship. This objective can only be achieved through a kind word and forgiveness. Charity is not in reality a favor that the wealthy bestows on the poor, but it is an obligation for seeking the pleasure of God. If it is not done right, then it will not be accepted by God. God is Most-Forbearing towards His servants. Their ingratitude after He had bestowed His bounty on them does not anger Him. So, people should learn how to treat others nicely even when they seem slightly ungrateful.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is a commemoration of the acts of submission of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and his family. The rituals of Pilgrimage include circumambulating around the Ka'ba, walking between the two mounts of Safa and Marwah, stoning the devil, and staying for some time in the valley of Arafat. The rituals of Pilgrimage are completed by sacrificing an animal and distributing its meat among the poor and needy.

It is interesting to note that each of the three rituals: walking between the two mounts of Safa and Marwah, stoning the devil, and sacrificing an animal; refer to acts of submission performed by Lady Hajar, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and Prophet Ishmael (PBUH).

When Ishmael (PBUH) was born, God commanded Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to take his son and his mother to the place where the Ka'ba once stood. This was a desolate place in the desert, that had no water nor vegetation. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) prayed God, *“Our Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in an uncultivable valley near Your Holy House, our Lord, so that they may establish prayer; make the hearts of some people incline to them and provide them with fruits in order that they may be thankful.”* (14: 37) By any human calculation, Ishmael (PBUH) and his mother would not have lasted for a long time in such a place. As Abraham (PBUH) was leaving the place, lady Hajar asked him, *“Is this God’s command?”* when he indicated to her that it was God’s command to leave them there, she responded, *“Then, He will never abandon us.”* As the amount of water she had started to decline, Lady Hajar started to run frantically between the two mounts of Safa and Marwah, trying to spot a caravan that might be passing nearby. On the seventh lap of her run, she heard the sound of water gushing up from the ground. She looked at her son, and saw that water was gushing from under his tiny feet. This became the well of Zam-Zam that still exists till now and all pilgrims drink from its water. One of the rituals of Pilgrimage is to emulate the run of Lady Hajar between Safa and Marwah, as a symbol of her submission to God.

As Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was leaving his son and his mother in the desert, Satan approached him trying to tempt him to disobey God’s command. Satan warned him that his son and his mother have no chance of survival in this desolate place. Abraham (PBUH) picked up pebbles from the ground and threw them at Satan to make him go away. One of the rituals of Pilgrimage is to throw pebbles at a rock that symbolizes Satan.

The third ritual commemorates the submission of Prophet Ishmael (PBUH). God commanded Prophet Abraham (PBUH) found himself in, *“And when (his son) was old enough to walk with him, (Abraham) said, ‘My dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. What do you think?’ He said, ‘My father, do that which you are commanded. God willing, you shall find*

me steadfast.''' (37: 102) How wonderful was the faith, the obedience, and the submission? Look at Abraham (PBUH), an old man who deserted his family and kin and migrated away from his homeland, yearning for a child and finally God gave him a forbearing boy. He was looking forward for the child to grow up and be his companion in life. When the child grew up and Abraham (PBUH) was about to start enjoying his son's company, he saw that dream in which he was sacrificing his son. He knew that the dream was a sign from God for him to sacrifice his son. What could he do? It was not a clear command from God, neither was it a revelation from God, it was only a sign. But for Abraham (PBUH) that was enough. He did not hesitate. He submitted to God's sign without even asking why? He was not annoyed nor was he afraid. He accepted God's command willingly. The first thing he did was to approach his son and to tell him about the dream he saw. His words reflected his feeling of security in accepting God's command. He wanted his son to think about this grave situation. He did not cheat nor force his son into accepting the sacrifice. He wanted his son to be his partner in the decision and in the reward that God will give to his obedient servants.

The son's reaction was not much different from his father's. The son not only accepted God's command willingly submitting to the will of God but also showed his confidence in God's wisdom. Like his father, he felt secure and content with God's decree. The Arabic word that has been translated here as, "*My father,*" is an endearing way of address. One can see that Ishmael's (PBUH) response did not even reflect a shred of resentment towards his father. His words did not reflect any feeling of heroism, only an expression of the absolute trust in the will of God, "*God willing, you shall find me steadfast.*"

"Then, when they both submitted (to God), and he had flung him down upon his face," (37: 103) They both submitted to the will of God and they proceeded to do what they were told to do. Their actions proved their faithfulness, their obedience and their submission. God Called, "*We called out to him, 'Abraham; You have already fulfilled the vision' - thus indeed do We reward the doers of good. That was verily a clear test. And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.*" (37: 104-107) They fulfilled the command. Abraham (PBUH) has given the highest example of submission to God, even if it meant to sacrifice his son. God responded and ransomed Ishmael (PBUH) with a momentous sacrifice. God rewarded them for their submission. They were chosen for a very difficult test. God prepared their hearts and gave them the perseverance to accept and fulfill the command. So, they deserved the great reward.

Offering a sacrifice is one of the rituals of pilgrimage. As a matter of fact, it is a ritual for all Muslims who can afford to make such offering, whether they are performing pilgrimage or not. The meat of the sacrificed animal is shared between the individual who makes the offering (and his/her family), the friends and neighbors, and the needy. Each category gets one third of the slaughtered animal.

Way of Life

We mentioned in the beginning that Islam is like a tree. The Quran says, "*Have you not seen how God sets forth examples? A good word like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens; yielding its fruits at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So God*

sets forth examples for people, in order that they may be mindful.” (14: 24-25) The doctrine is the root of the tree of Islam, the rituals are the trunk, and the manners and behavior are the fruits of the tree. Thus, manners are an essential and integral part of Islam, without perfecting them Islam is incomplete.

The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“Faith has seventy something components. The highest of these components is the belief in the Oneness of God, the least a believer can do is to remove harm from the road, and shyness is one of the components of faith.”* The seventy-six components that are referred to in this tradition encompass the articles of faith, the rituals and the manners. Of these components more than fifty relate to the manners. These include fulfilment of obligations, shyness, controlling anger, spreading peace, visiting the sick, being generous to the neighbors and the guests, and perseverance.

The way of life that a Muslim leads should fulfil the purpose of the creation. The purpose of creation is explained in the verse, *“I have not created Jinn and Human kind except to serve me.”* (51:56) Serving God is accomplished by fulfilling the trust that God entrusted to the human being, *“Indeed We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, they declined to bear it and feared it; but the human being (undertook to) bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.”* (33:72) The human race is entrusted to create a moral, ethical, and flourishing life on earth. When they fulfill this role they become worthy of the term “trustees of God on earth.”

The list enumerating the components of faith and which constitute good manners is long. However, one can identify six general themes that constitute the underpinning of an Islamic way of life these are honoring agreements, enjoining goodness and prohibiting evil, moderation, justice, equality, tolerance.

Honoring the Agreements

Surat Al-Maida (Chapter 5) opens with a very short verse, *“You who believe, fulfill the obligations.”* A very brief but compelling command because it underscores a major principle that should be followed by Muslims in all daily life dealings. For life to continue and prosper on earth, human beings have to endure certain controls. These controls are necessary to organize the relationships between individuals, between the individual and people whether of kin or foreign, between the individual and living things, and between the individual and God. Islam delineates these controls clearly and traces them back to God’s ordinance so that they would be respected and obeyed. These controls are not left to the whims and desires of human beings or fashioned to serve certain interests. These controls are meant to serve the interest of people everywhere and at all times. The Quran calls these controls “obligations,” and it commands those who believe to fulfill these obligations.

This opening implies that the word “obligations” has a wider scope than what may appear at first glance. It indicates that the word “obligations” describes all constraints that need to be observed in the course of human life. The first obligation is to believe in the Oneness and uniqueness of

God. It involves understanding and accepting the implications of having One and only one God. All other obligations spring out from this fundamental obligation.

The obligation to believe in God was originally administered to Adam (PBUH) by God. The obligation is stated in the following verse, *“We said, ‘Get you down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.’”* (2:38) This was the condition stated for Adam (PBUH) and his descendants to become the vicegerents of God on earth. The condition for being vicegerents is to follow God’s guidance and to fulfill the first obligation that Adam (PBUH) was commanded to fulfill. The command to fulfill this obligation was renewed to all of Adam’s (PBUH) descendants in the verse, *“When your Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying), ‘Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?’ - They said, ‘Yes, we do testify.’ (This), lest you should say on the Day of Judgment, ‘Of this we were never mindful’”* (7:172). This is a covenant which God has taken from each and every one of the children of Adam (PBUH). This covenant was declared when the children of Adam (PBUH) were in their father’s loins. We may not understand how this happened, but we have no right to ask how, God knows best His creation. This knowledge is part of the “unseen,” it is beyond the comprehension of the human mind.

Enjoining goodness and forbidding evil

One of the roles that should be performed by Muslims in general and Islamic states in particular is outlined in the verse, *“Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong, and these are the successful.”* (3: 104) It is absolutely necessary to have a group of people who invite people to what is good, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is evil. It may be possible for anyone to play the role of inviting to what is good, but it is the responsibility of the government to command what is right and forbid what is wrong.

Moderation

“Thus, have We made you a justly balanced nation, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger is a witness over yourselves.” (2: 143) It is a justly balanced nation that establishes fairness and justice on earth according to fair standards and measures. The Prophet (PBUH) was appointed as a witness to testify whether this nation had fulfilled its intended role.

The term *“justly balanced nation”* conveys very rich and powerful meaning. It encompasses the full range of the dimensions of the word “balanced.” The nation enjoys well balanced characteristics in all areas of human activities. It is balanced in its faith, its feelings, and its behavior. It shuns all types of extremism. Its religion maintains a balance between spirituality and materialism. Its endeavors are balanced between the well-established traditions and the adventurous new. It maintains a balance between the freedom of the individual and the rights of the community. It has a well-balanced economic and legal systems. It maintains a balance between human creativity and the preservation of traditions. It is well balanced both in time and space.

Justice

Justice is an important theme of Islamic life. This has been emphasized in different verses and was applied in real life by the Prophet (PBUH) and his rightly guided successors.

“You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially. Do not let the hatred of others make you swerve away from justice, act justly, for that is closer to piety. Be conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.” (5: 8) The verse admonishes the believers not to let the hatred of others make them swerve away from justice. It may be easy not to transgress against one’s enemy but it is much harder to treat one’s enemy fairly. Yet the believers were commanded to establish justice even when they were in dispute with people they hated. A support was promised to strengthen the believers in this endeavor. They should strive to become conscious of God. It is the duty of this nation to be steadfast in its devotion to God for the benefit of humankind. Muslims were able to play that role when Islam was their way of life. Muslims faltered in their responsibility when Islamic values became mere slogans.

Equality

“People, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) most conscious of God. Indeed, God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware.” (49: 13) This verse addresses all humankind. The Creator tells all people that they were all created from a single source. The whole human race came from one pair: a male and a female. They were then spread into different nations so that they can get to know each other; work, and collaborate with each other. The standard against which people should be evaluated is God consciousness. People should not be valued according to their race, language, color, gender or nationality. All people have equal worth in the sight of God. The only standard that determines their individual worth is the level of their God consciousness.

Tolerance

The word for tolerance in Arabic has a positive connotation. It is the respect of the right of the other to be different. One can understand the depth of this term when one believes in the fact that the whole human race came from one pair of humans, diversity is an intentional plan of God, freedom of faith should be respected, and justice should be upheld.

Shari'a and Jurisprudence

We talked about a model of Islam where we showed Islam to be comprised of three components: doctrine, rituals, and a way of life. Some scholars used a model that is comprised of two components to describe Islam: doctrine and shari'a. The doctrine comprises the articles of faith while shari'a comprises the divine systems that guide the Muslim in leading a successful life. These systems organize the relationships between the Muslim and his/her Lord, between the Muslim and his/her fellow Muslims, between the Muslim and his/her brothers and sisters in humanity, and between the Muslim and the universe. In general, the systems shapes human behavior in life.

Shari'a and jurisprudence are two different things. The word shari'a in Arabic literally means "a spring that yields water without effort." The word shari'a, thus means a way and a methodology. Jurisprudence is the human understanding of shari'a. So, while there is only one Islamic shari'a, there are different Islamic jurisprudences. While shari'a is divine, jurisprudence is a human effort. The Arabic word that is used for jurisprudence is 'fiqh.' Fiqh means understanding. Thus, jurisprudence is the human understanding of the divine law. However, very often the two terms are used interchangeably.

Jurisprudence

Jurisprudence books describe all the rules and laws that a Muslim has to abide by during his/her life. Scholars have categorized these rules into two main categories: acts of worship and daily transactions. However, the Quran does not separate the two categories, "*It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards east or west; but the truly righteous are those who believe in God and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; those who give away some of their wealth, however much they may cherish it, to their kin, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarer, to those who ask, and to ransom slaves; those who are steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; who fulfill the contracts which they have made; and who are firm and patient, in times of tribulation and adversity, and in time of peril. Such are the people of truth, the God conscious. (2:177)*" This emphasizes that Islam should be taken as a whole and it should not be compartmentalized into different components.

Objectives of Islamic Law

Protection of Faith

"Let there be no compulsion in religion." (2:256)

Protection of Life

"For that, We decreed for the Children of Israel that whosoever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the land, it shall be as if he had killed all humankind, and whoso saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all humankind." (5:32)

Protection of Property

"Your blood and your property are inviolable." (Prophetic Tradition)

Protection of Honor

“Believers, let not some men among you laugh at others. It may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Nor let some women laugh at others. It may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames. Believers, avoid suspicion as much (as possible); for suspicion in some cases is a sin. And do not spy on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? No, you would abhor it.” (49: 11-12)

Protection of Intellect

“Believers, intoxicants, gambling, idols (worship), and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, of Satan's handwork. Eschew such (abomination), that you may prosper.” (5:90)

Schools of Jurisprudence

The Hanafi Madhab³

This madhab was founded by Imam Al-Nu'man ibn Thabit (Abu Hanifa). He was born (699 CE/80 H) in the city of Kufah in Iraq, and died (767 CE/150 H). His approach in arriving at a ruling is to follow the hierarchy

1. The Quran
2. The Tradition of the Prophet (PBUH)
3. The opinions of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH).
4. His own opinion. (Logical analogy and People's benefit).

However, he was selective in using the opinions of the companions.

This school is labelled the “School of Opinion,” in reference to Abu Hanifa's strong dependence on his own opinion. In reaching an opinion, he would use due diligence in making sure that there is no contradiction between such an opinion and the Quran, the tradition, and the objectives of Islamic law. His approach relies heavily on the use of logical analogy. He was inclined to prefer opinions which are more beneficial for people.

The Maleki Madhab

(the people of hadeeth madhab)

This school was founded by Imam Malek ibn Anas Al-Asbahi. He was born in the year (711 CE/ 93 H) and died in Medina (795 CE /179 H). This school is the second oldest school of jurisprudence. The madhab is based mainly on the deeds of the people of Medina. His approach followed the hierarchy

1. The Quran
2. The Tradition of the Prophet (PBUH)
3. The deeds of the people of Medina.
4. The fatwa⁴ of the companion of the Prophet (PBUH)
5. Logical analogy, people's benefit.

³ The Arabic word “Madhab” means a school of thought

⁴ The Arabic word “fatwa” means a legal opinion by a scholar

The madhab started in Medina then it spread to Hijaz, Basrah, Egypt, North Africa, Andalusia, and the Muslim parts of Sudan. It also spread in Baghdad but died out after the fourth century.

The Shafie Madhab

This madhab was founded by Imam Muhammad Idris Al-Shafie. He was born in Gaza (767 CE/150 H) and died in Cairo (819 CE/ 204 H). His madhab followed the following hierarchy

1. The Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH)
2. The consensus of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH).
3. Opinions of the individual companions of the Prophet (PBUH).
4. Logical analogy

Al-Shafie is the one who established the science of the fundamentals of Jurisprudence.

The Hanbali Madhab

This madhab was founded by Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal. He was born in Baghdad (780 CE / 164 H) and died (855 CE / 241 H). His madhab followed the following hierarchy

1. The Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH)
2. The consensus of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH).
3. Opinions of the individual companions of the Prophet (PBUH).
4. Mursal Hadeeth
5. Logical analogy

Quran

Quran is the Sacred Book of Islam. Muslims believe that it is the verbatim word of God that has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is recorded in books and it has been transmitted from one generation to another.

The Quran is divided into 114 chapters (suras.) The Quran is not arranged into chronological order. With the exception of the first surah named al-Fatihah (The Opening), the suras are arranged according to their lengths, for the most part. It is difficult to arrange the suras into a chronological order. The verses in each sura were not revealed in a chronological order, whenever a group verses was revealed, the Prophet (PBUH) would instruct his scribes as to its place in the Quran.

Revelation of the Quran

The Prophet (PBUH) grew up in an idolatry society. However, he never worshipped an idol himself. The Arabs at that time, recognized the existence of God and recognized the history of the Ka'ba and the role that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) played in rebuilding the Ka'ba. However, their faith was corrupted by the belief that the idols can intercede on their behalf.

The Prophet (PBUH) used to go to the desert to contemplate about God and the creation. On one of these trips of seclusion, he was visited by the angel Gabriel (PBUH). Gabriel gave him the first few verses to be revealed from the Quran, and told him that he was chosen by God as a messenger to his people. The first few verses of the Quran read, "*Read: In the name of your Lord who created; created humankind from a clot. Read; and your Lord is the Most Generous, He taught by the pen, taught humankind that which he knew not.*" (96: 1-5)

The process of the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet (PBUH) continued from this time until shortly before his death, 23 years later.

Recording of the Quran

It is believed that Muhammad (PBUH) was an illiterate person. When he was chosen by God to be His Messenger, he appointed a number of his companions to record the Quran. These were his scribes. In addition, a number of Muslims memorized the Quran verbatim.

First Compilation

Upon the death of the Prophet (PBUH) (632 CE) Abu Bakr was chosen to be his successor. It was during the reign of Abu Bakr that the Quran was compiled in a book form. Abu Bakr formed a committee of three people: The second Caliph Umar, Zaid ibn Thabet who was one of the companions who were recording the Quran while it was revealed, and Ubi ibn Kaab.

The terms of reference that Abu Bakr gave the committee were

1. Do not depend on your memory, nor what you have recorded yourselves. Take it from others. You are justices and a justice does not judge according to what he knows but should judge according to known valid facts.
2. Accept only written material.

3. You should seek at least two witnesses to attest to the fact that the written material has been received first hand from the Prophet (PBUH).

The committee was very stringent in its application of the terms of reference. A problem arose when only one eye witness was available to testify that he heard the last two verses in sura 9 directly from the Prophet (PBUH). They were reluctant to add it to the Book even though they had these verses memorized themselves. The two verses were brought to them in a written form by a man named Abu Khuzaimah. Abu Bakr allowed this exception on the basis of a previous testament from the Prophet (PBUH), in a non-related context. The Prophet (PBUH) affirmed that a testimony from Abi Khuzaimah, in a court of law, is worth the testimony of two men.

The Book was entrusted to Abu Bakr for safe keeping. Upon the death of Abu Bakr the Book was entrusted to Umar. Upon the death of Umar, the Book was entrusted to Hafsa, Umar's daughter and the wife of the Prophet (PBUH).

'Uthman's Mushaf

It is narrated that one of the companions of the Prophet by the name Hudhaifa ibn al-Yaman was in Iraq. He found that different people are reciting the Quran in different ways. The differences were about using different synonyms. The different Arab tribes used different synonyms. This difference was allowed by the Prophet (PBUH) to make it easy for the different tribes to understand and memorize the Quran. However, these differences resulted in conflicts that threatened the unity of Muslims. This made Hudhaifa to alert the Caliph 'Uthman. 'Uthman formed a committee of twelve people, chaired by Zaid ibn Thabet and Saeed ibn al-Aas. 'Uthman gave the committee a long list of terms of reference detailing how the committee should go about its task. Particularly important in his instructions was how can they resolve their disagreements regarding the synonyms. He instructed them that they should use the language of the tribe of Quraish. The committee was given the copy of the Quran that was entrusted to Hafsa which was originally compiled by Zayd ibn Thabet. The committee made seven copies of the Quran. One copy was kept in Medina and the rest were sent to the different major cities.

The Main Themes of the Quran

One can discern five major themes in the Quran. These are

1. The Oneness of God
2. The Universe as a Sign for the Creator
3. Quranic stories
4. Resurrection and accountability
5. Islamic law and manners

Within these major themes one can also find sub-themes. These include the human being as an individual, the human being as a member of a community, the Muslim community, and Satan and evil.

The Oneness of God

"And when your Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying), 'Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?' They said, 'Yes, we do testify.' (This), lest you should say on the Day of Judgment, 'Of this we were never mindful.'" (7: 172) The verse discusses the

connection between the initial natural human disposition and faith using the familiar Quranic style. The verse describes an amazing scene, a scene which depicts the whole human race being questioned by their Creator, at the time of the creation of Adam before any of them was yet born, “Am I not your Lord?” The whole human race answered, “Yes, You are.” We recognize You as our sole Creator, we acknowledge Your Lordship, and we pledge to worship You alone. All human beings, who were not yet born at the time of the creation of Adam (PBUH), participated in this dialogue with God.

How did this dialogue take place? We simply do not know. This is a part of the unseen. It is beyond human ability to know the unseen. However, this verse could be understood to mean that God created all people with an initial natural disposition that recognizes God as the sole Creator and this disposition provides the initial drive for the human being to seek and discover God. However, this initial disposition may be corrupted by external influences. Ibn Katheer said in his interpretation of the Quran that the verse means that the initial natural human disposition is inclined to believe in the Oneness of God. We do not think that the scene described in the verse is implausible; God is able to do whatever He wishes. But, we also accept Ibn Katheer’s interpretation, God knows best.

Either way, we come to the conclusion that the initial natural human disposition is bent on the belief in the Oneness of God. Every human being is born with this disposition however, as the person grows up this initial disposition may be strengthened or weakened according to the influence of the external environment. The concept of the Oneness of God is not only part of the initial disposition of the human being but it is also intrinsic to the creation of the universe. The initial natural human disposition is part of the law that govern the whole universe. This law which governs the whole universe is based on the fundamental concept of the oneness of the Creator.

The Universe as a Sign for the Creator

“Do not the disbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), then We separated them? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?” (21: 30) This description of how the universe started may agree with present day scientific knowledge. However, scientific facts may change from one time to the other depending on the discovery of new evidence, but the Quran is unchangeable. This is why we do not try to use the Quran to prove or disprove scientific facts. We believe in the truth of the Quran. The Quran does not offer us a scientific treatise but it offers us a way of life. What we can state now is that the present day theories regarding the formation of heavens and earth do not contradict the text of the Quran. Another scientific fact that these verses state is that water is the origin of all living things. One can also state that there is no contradiction between Quran and science regarding this statement.

The verses continue to explore other cosmic phenomena, *“And We have set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shift with them, and We have made therein broad highways (between mountains) for them to pass through; that they may be guided.”* The mountains were created to maintain the earth’s equilibrium. Broad highways were made between

these high mountains to guide people in their passage. There is also a subtle reference to the guidance that people should seek in their search for God.

“And We have made the heavens as a canopy well-guarded, yet they turn away from its signs.” The Arabic term for heavens refers to anything that is held up high. People look at the sky and see a canopy. God maintains this canopy well-guarded. It is kept flawless to maintain the integrity of the universe and it is kept pure as a place from which the revelation is brought down. But people turn away from these signs.

The day and night are two cosmic phenomena that are closely related to human life on earth, *“It is He who created the night and the day; and the sun and the moon. All swim along, each in its own orbit.”* The sun and the moon regulate human life on earth. They are set in perpetual motion that does not deviate from its set path. This is one of the signs of the oneness of God.

“Say, ‘Travel in the land and see how did God originated creation; so will God produce a later creation; for God has power over all things.’” (29: 20) Traveling in the land opens the eyes to new facts that they have not been seen before. When people stay in one place they get used to it and they do not pay attention to the beauty or the remarkable features of the scenes around them. Traveling opens the eyes and the hearts to discover the remarkable things in life. God is capable of starting life and repeating the creation. He has power over everything. He can only say, “Be,” and it is. This is also can be also a command for people to seek knowledge about themselves and about the universe.

Stories

The Quran includes a large number of stories. The style of the Quran used in composing these stories is unique but versatile. Only one story, the story of Prophet Joseph (PBUH), has been mentioned in its totality in one chapter. All the other stories are told in bits and pieces scattered in different chapters. The most often narrated story in the Quran is the story of Moses (PBUH) and the Pharaoh. Different parts of the story are mentioned in various chapters. However, the theme of each part of the story is aligned with the theme of the chapter that it belongs to. To study the story in its totality, one should collect the different parts together.

The objective of storytelling in the Quran can be summarized as

1. Explaining that God sent one message to different people at different times. The message was brought to people by God’s Messengers.
2. Emphasizing that the Quran is the word of God and it has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
3. Supporting the Prophet (PBUH) and encouraging him not to despair when he is faced with the resistance to his message.
4. Admonishing people and explaining the consequence of disbelief using stories of the people from the past.

Resurrection and Accountability

Believing in the resurrection and the accountability on the Day of Judgment is an article of faith, it is one of the elements of the doctrine. The Quran reminds people about the fact of resurrection, “*Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us (for account)?*” (23: 115) The concept of resurrection is part of the divine plan of creation. It is a stage in the life of the human race; it is a necessary stage to complete this life. Only the heedless who are deprived of insight cannot realize this fact. Death is only a gate to the Hereafter. On the Day of Judgment, people will be held accountable for what they did in the worldly life.

The Prophet (PBUH) was told in the Quran that his mission is to deliver the Message. God is the one who is going to reward or punish people, “*Whether We shall show you (within your life-time) part of what we promised them or take to ourselves your soul (before it is all accomplished), your duty is the conveying (of the Message) and ours is the reckoning.*” (13: 40) This is an important and a fundamental principle. The Messenger’s only task is to deliver the message. Reckoning is for God. Those who did good in their lives will be admitted to paradise while those who committed wrong doings will be destined to Hell fire, “*Certainly those who rejected Our revelations and treated them with arrogance, for them the gates of heaven will not open nor they will be admitted to the Garden until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle. Thus, We requite the guilty.*” (7: 40) This is an amazing scene. Imagine a camel trying to pass through the eye of a needle. Those who rejected God’s revelations can only be admitted to paradise if this impossible act is performed. Hell fire is then their abode. In it, “*Theirs will be a bed of Hell, and over them coverings (of Hell). Thus, do We requite the wrongdoers.*” (7: 41) Not only they will have beds of fire but they will also have fire covers. This is the reward for the wrongdoers.

We now look at another scene, “*But those who believed and did good deeds, We do not overburden any soul beyond its capacity. Those are the rightful owners of the Garden. They abide therein. And We shall remove whatever rancor that may be in their hearts. Beneath them will be rivers flowing, and they shall say, ‘Praise be to God, who has guided us to this (felicity). We could have never found guidance had it not been for the guidance of God. The Messengers of our Lord did indeed bring the truth.’ And they shall hear the cry, ‘The Garden is before you; you have been made its inheritors, for what you have done.’*” (7: 42- 43) Those who believed and did the best they could to perform good deeds, God does not overburden a soul beyond its capacity, are the companions of paradise. By God’s leave and grace, they inherit paradise because they believed and did good deeds. They followed God’s messengers and disobeyed Iblis. Because of this, they received God’s mercy which landed them in paradise.

However, the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁵, “*No one will be admitted to paradise on the basis of their deeds alone.*” The companions asked him, “*Even you, Messenger of God?*” He said, “*Even I, unless God bestows His mercy and grace on me.*” The scene of the disbelievers in Hell fire is juxtaposed against the scene of the believers in paradise. The groups in Hell fire are fighting while the believers live in peace and felicity together. The disbelievers are having beds of fire while the believers will enjoy rivers flowing underneath them. The disbelievers are busy laying the blame on each other while the believers are busy praising God. The disbelievers will be treated with contempt while the believers will be treated with dignity

⁵ Narrated by Abu Huraira and reported by Muslim

and honor. Rancor has been removed from the hearts of the believers. Their hearts will be cleansed of any traces of anger or bad feelings towards each other.

The Quran provides these physical scenes as a means of illustration. The knowledge of what Paradise and Hellfire actually will look like is part of the unseen. It is beyond the power of human intellect to know the unseen. These visual images are used to illustrate the gravity of the decisions that humans make during their lifetime.

Islamic Law and Character

Very few specific laws are mentioned in the Quran. Detailed instructions about the lawful and forbidden are given in the area of food, family relations, and inheritance. Only basic principles are highlighted for economics, politics, and governing.

Many verses in the Quran emphasize the human attributes that God loves and hates. An example of the human attributes that God loves are: doing good (2: 195; 3: 134, 148; 5: 13, 93); God consciousness (3:76; 9: 4, 7); perseverance (2: 146); fairness and justice (5: 42; 49: 9; 60: 8).

Examples of human traits that God does not love are: transgression (2: 190; 5: 87; 7: 55); corruption (2: 205; 5: 64; 28: 77); injustice (3: 57, 140; 42: 40); treason (4: 107; 9: 58; 22: 38); arrogance (16: 23)

Dating and Coherence

Some western scholars refuse to accept the standards of the oral tradition that was developed by Muslim scholars to vet the oral tradition for authenticity. Some of them claimed that the contents of the Qur'an are random selection of text that were put together in an arbitrary manner⁶. Some are of the opinion that Quran was written at a much later date than the time of the Prophet (PBUH). Motzki⁷ (2001) concluded on the basis of a newly designed strategy that he was not able to prove that the Quran in the present form does go back to the time of the Prophet (PBUH), however he stated that Western views which claim to replace the Islamic view by a more plausible and historically reliable accounts are obviously far from what they make themselves out to be.

The question of dating the original manuscript of the Quran has been resolved using the modern technology of radiocarbon dating. The University of Birmingham obtained a parchment which has been dated using this technique to the period of 568 to 645 with a probability of 95.4%. There are other parchments which have been dated around the same time period.

The Question of the coherence of the Quran has been studied by several Western scholars among them Cuypers⁸ (2011) and Farrin⁹ (2014). Cuypers (2011) concluded that the application of rhetorical analysis to the Quran demonstrates clearly that the sacred book of Islam is composed in accordance with literary rules known to the Arab society which was addressed by the Prophet. Farrin (2014) concludes that the text of the Quran could not have been written by multiple authors. He also stated that his study of the Quran concludes that the entire Qur'an, form and content, traces back to the Prophet.

⁶ Rippin, Andrew. 2001. Muslims, their religious beliefs and practices. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge

⁷ Motzki, Harald. 2001. The collection of the Quran, a reconsideration of Western Views in light of recent methodological developments. Der Islam, Bd. 78, S. 1-34.

⁸ Cuypers, Michel. 2011. Semitic Rhetoric as a key to the question of the nazm of the Qur'anic text. Journal of Qur'anic Studies, 13.1, 1-24.

⁹ Farrin, Raymond. 2014. Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation. Ashland, OR: White Cloud

Cuypers (2011) identified three types of symmetry in the Qur'an. These are

1. Parallelism (ABC/A'B'C')
2. Ring composition (ABC/x/C'B'A')
3. Mirror composition (ABC/C'B'A')

He gives an example of the mirror construction using Surat Joseph (Chapter 12) as follows:

Text		Mirror Construction	
A: 1-3	Prologue	A': 102-111	Epilogue
B: 4-7	Joseph's vision	B': 99-101	Fulfilment of Joseph's vision
C: 8-18	Guile of brothers towards Joseph	C': 58-98	Joseph's guile towards his brothers
D: 19-22	Joseph's relative promotion	D': 54-57	Joseph's definite promotion
E: 23-34	Attempted seduction of Joseph by woman	E': 50-53	Outcome of woman's seduction
F: 35-49	Joseph in Prison		

Fig. 1: Mirror Construction

An example of the ring construction is given using surat Al-Baqarah is as follows:

Theme	Text		Ring Construction	
Faith vis disbelief	A: 1-20		A': 285-286	
Allah's creation	B: 21-39	The Creation of Adam and Eve	B': 254-284	Charity and Financial Dealings
Deliverance of law	C: 40-103	Moses delivers the law to the Israelites	C': 178-253	Prophet Muhammad delivers the law to Muslims
Trials	D: 104-141	The Trial of Abraham	D': 153-177	The trial of Muslims
The new Qibla	E: 142-152			

Figure 2: Ring Construction

Sunnah – Prophetic Tradition

Sunnah refers to all the actions and sayings of the Prophet (PBUH), the actions and sayings he approved, and the actions and sayings which he did not object to. The Sunnah provided explanations, interpretations, and details of some of the verses of the Quran.

The Sunnah has been recorded in the books of Hadith. There are six collections of Hadeeth which are considered most authentic. The scholars who authored these books are

1. Imam Muhammad Abu Abd Allah Al-Bukhari (born 809 CE / 194 H)
2. Imam Abu Al-Hussein Muslim (born 821 CE / 206 H)
3. Imam Abu Abd Al-Rahman Al-Nasaie (born 829 CE / 214 H)
4. Imam Abu Dawoud Al-Sagastani (born 817 CE / 202 H)
5. Imam Abu ‘Issa Muhammad Al-Tirmidhi (born 824 CE /209 H)
6. Imam Muhammad ibn Yazid Ibn Majah (born 824 CE /209 H)

These scholars developed a methodology for authenticating the Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH). This methodology had three main components: verification of the authenticity of the text, verification of the integrity of the narrators, and verification of the continuity of the chain of narration.

There is also another source for the tradition of the Prophet. These are the books which talked about the biography of the Prophet. The oldest available book on the biography of the Prophet is the one written by Ibn Ishaq (705-768 CE).

History of Islam

Biography of the Prophet

The Prophet (PBUH) was born in the year 570 CE, in Mecca. His father died before he was born and his mother died when he was six years old. As was the tradition at that time, he was taken, upon his birth, to be nursed by one of the Arab women who used to live in the desert. When he was weaned he was brought back to Mecca to live with his mother; he moved to live with his grandfather after her death. Soon after, his grandfather died and he moved to live with his uncle, Abu Taleb.

He was taught to be a businessman by his uncle and used to go on trade caravans between Mecca and Syria. He worked for a woman by the name of Khadija; and married her at the age of twenty-five. He remained married to Khadija until she died. She bore him four daughters and two sons. However, the two sons died as infants.

The people living in the pagan society of Mecca worshiped idols, in spite of the fact they believed in God and they claimed that they were following the religion that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) brought. They sanctified the Ka'ba, but they claimed that the idols can intercede with God on their behalf.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not approve of the practice of idolatry. He used to go to the desert for meditation. On one of these trips, when he was forty years of age, he was visited by the Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel gave him the first verses from the Quran. The verses read, "*Read: In the name of your Lord who created; created humankind from a clot. Read; and your Lord is the Most Generous, He taught by the pen, taught humankind that which he knew not.*" (96: 1-5) This was a terrifying experience for Muhammad (PBUH). He went home hurriedly to his wife, thinking that he lost his mind. His wife went with him to consult her cousin, Waraqah. Waraqah was well versed in the Christian and Jewish faiths. Waraqah told Muhammad (PBUH) that he is having an experience similar to Moses' (PBUH) experience.

Gabriel (PBUH) continued to bring Muhammad (PBUH) verses from the Quran; a process which continued for a period of 23 years. After becoming a Messenger of God, Muhammad (PBUH) stayed in Mecca for 13 years, then migrated to Medina where he lived for another 10 years.

The Meccan Period

Muhammad (PBUH) started to call people to Islam covertly for a period of three years. The first people to adopt Islam were his closest friend Abu Bakr (age 40), his wife, his cousin Ali (age 10), and his servant Zaid. At the end of these three years, Muhammad (PBUH) started calling people to Islam publicly. This incurred the wrath of the pagan tribes of Mecca, including the tribe of Quraish to which Muhammad (PBUH) belonged. Muhammad (PBUH) continued to call people to Islam for ten more years before migrating to Medina. During these years Muslims were persecuted and tortured by the pagans of Mecca.

Important Dates

These dates are calculated from the time Muhammad (PBUH) was chosen as a Messenger of God.

Years 1 to 3: Secret call to Islam.

Year 4: The beginning of the public call.

Year 5: The migration to Abyssinia

Years 7 - 9: The boycott

Year 10: Death of Abu Taleb and Khadeja

Year 11: Six people from the Tribe of Khazraj (Medina) adopt Islam

Year 12: Isra' and Mi'raj

Year 12: The first oath of allegiance of 'Aqabah. Twelve people from Medina (Aws and Khazraj tribes) adopt Islam

Year 13: 73 people from Medina adopt Islam

Year 13: Migration to Medina

The Medinian Period

These dates are calculated from the time of the arrival of Muhammad (PBUH) to Medina.

Year 1: The Constitution – the Mosque – the Brotherhood pact

Year 2: Change of Qiblah direction – Fasting – Battle of Badr – Banu Qinuqa'

Year 3: Battle of Uhud

Year 4: Banu Al-Nadeer

Year 5: The Battle of the Trench – Banu Quraizah

Year 6: Bani Al-Mustalaq (Juwairryah) – The Lie – Hudaibiyah

Year 7: Khaibar

Year 8: Conquest of Mecca

Year 9: Pilgrimage Abi Bakr

Year 10: Farewell pilgrimage

Year 11: Prophet's death

Relationship between Muslims, Christian and Jews

Quran came to establish the basic principle of the belief in the Oneness of God. The Creator is One, He sent Messengers to Guide people to the right path. The three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam constitute God message to the human beings. The statement of this principle is enunciated in many verses in the Quran, *“And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in the best manner, except those who wronged themselves. And say, ‘We believe in that which has been revealed to us and that which has been revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.’”* (29: 46) The verse emphasizes that all the messengers of God starting with Adam (PBUH) and ending with Muhammad (PBUH) came with the same message. The message came from One God and had one objective: to guide all people to the path of God. The believers who received the message through different messengers belong to one brotherhood. The human race was divided over the centuries into two groups: those who believe in God and those who rejected faith. The statement that this verse reiterates is the single major truth that forms the foundation of Islam. The belief in the one single message brings the believers under one family. The relationships between the members of this family is stronger than blood, tribal, race, or national relationships. They all hold tight to the secure knot that binds them together in the belief in One God. Muslims are commanded to communicate the new message to the people of the Scripture in the best way they can; and to explain the rationale behind the revelation of the last stage in God’s message. Muslims are also commanded to explain the points of agreements between this stage of the message and the previous stages, saying, *“our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.”*

This basic principle has practical implications as well, *“Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the people of the Scripture is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bridal-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.”* (5: 5)

These verses came to provide an answer to a question that was posed by some believers who wanted to know what edible things were lawful and what things were forbidden. The answer came to state that all good things are lawful. Thus, Islam came only to forbid eating things that are bad to humans. The verse indicates that the food of the People of the Scripture is lawful to Muslims. Also lawful is taking Christian and Jewish (people of the Scripture) women, who were living in the Muslim community and had a protection contract between them and the Muslim state, as wives. Islam did not only allow them to practice their religion freely but also permitted cross marriages between Muslim men and Christian and Jewish women. This shows Islam’s attitude towards this religious minority. It encouraged them to be part of the community and treated them with love and kindness. Islam also made the food of the people of the Scripture lawful for Muslims, so all can participate in community social functions. The marriage contract between a Muslim man and a woman from the people of the Scripture is governed by the same

rules that govern the marriage of a Muslim man to a Muslim woman. The man gives the woman her bridal gift with the intention of entering in a marriage contract not as a gift to a lover or a mistress. All these rules and obligations are accepted as part of faith and fulfillment of these obligations is a sign of true faith. The deeds of those who chose to reject these obligations will be in vain.

The following verses show a different aspect of the relationship between Muslims and Christians, "*Alif. Lam. Mim. The Romans have been defeated in a land close by, and they, after their defeat will be victorious within a few years. God's is the command in the former case and in the latter, and on that day the believers will rejoice in the victory of God. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. It is God's promise. God never breaks His promise, but most of people do not know.*" (30: 1 – 6) These verses were revealed when the army of the Persian Empire defeated the Roman's army. The idolaters of Mecca saw in this military victory a victory of the ideology of idolatry over Christendom and the belief in God. They hoped that this victory would be a prelude for their victory over the Muslims. These verses brought glad tidings to the believers in Mecca that the balance will soon tilt in favor of the Christian Romans and they will defeat the Persian idolaters.

The first verse is composed of the three Alphabetical letters, "*Alif. Lam. Mim.*" This emphasizes the fact that the Quran has been composed using the Alphabetical letters of the language that the Arabs have mastered. Yet they were unable to compose a similar book. Then the future is foretold, "*The Romans have been defeated in a land close by, and they, after their defeat will be victorious within a few years.*" The idolaters of Mecca supported the Persian Empire while the Muslims supported the Roman Empire. When the Persians defeated the Romans the idolaters of Mecca were elated and boasted the supremacy of the Persian idolaters over the Roman Christian. One can glean two lessons from these verses. The first lesson is the way that non-believing groups, in spite of the differences in their ethnicity, language, and cultural traditions, form alliances against believing groups. The second lesson is the absolute trust of the Muslims in God's promise. A third lesson is learnt from the subsequent verse, "*God's is the command in the former case and in the latter,*" which emphasizes the fact that all decisions belong to God. God controls all affairs. When God ordains victory for the Romans, the believers will rejoice, "*and in that day the believers will rejoice in the victory of God. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*" God promised victory and God never breaks His promise, "*It is God's promise. God never breaks His promise, but most of people do not know.*" However, people's knowledge is limited.

These verses show clearly that the Muslims considered the Christians a people of the Scripture. They supported them over the idolaters of Mecca and Persia.

Diversity: Cultural Zones in Islamic Civilization

When Islam was revealed to the Prophet of Islam in Arabia, it did not seek to replace the existing cultural structure of people, rather, it preserved the existing cultures which did not contravene the spirit and form of Islamic revelation. Islam adopted the same policy when it spread outside the Arabian Peninsula. Looking at the map of Islamic countries one can identify six major cultural zones.

The first cultural zone is the Arabic zone, which extends from Iraq and the Persian Gulf to Mauritania and before 1942 to the Iberian Peninsula. The word Arab is a linguistic not an ethnic term. The people of the Persian Empire under the Sassnids became Muslim, but they retained their language.

The Arabic zone is characterized by the use of Arabic as the language of religion as well as the language of daily life.

The second cultural zone is the Persian zone which includes Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajkistan. The dominant language is Persian known locally as Farsi, Dari, and Tajik, respectively. The people in this area are predominantly of the Iranian race.

Persia was not always Shiite. It is only after the Safavids that Persia became predominantly Shiite.

The third cultural zone is Africa from the highlands of Ethiopia to Mali and Senegal. Islam spread in Africa mostly through trade. By the 11th century a powerful Islamic kingdom was established in Ghana and by the 14th century an Empire was established in Mali.

The African zone consists of many sub zones with very distinct languages ranging from Hausa and Fulani to Somali. Black Africa presents a remarkable panorama of ethnic and cultural diversity.

The fourth zone is the Turkic zone which include all the people who speak one of the Altaic languages. These include Turkish, Adhari, Chechen, Uighur, Uzbek, Kirghiz, and Turkeman languages. The Turkic people, who were originally nomadic. Migrated south from Altaic Mountains to conquer Central Asia.

The fifth zone is the Indian sub-continent. Islam spread throughout India mostly through the Sufi order. Indian Muslims are ethnically mostly homogeneous but culturally and linguistically very diverse. For nearly a 1000 years the intellectual and literary language was Persian, but several local languages exist e.g. Sindhi, Gujrati, Punjabi, Bengali. Urdu was developed in the 16th and 17th centuries as a marriage between Persian and other Indian languages. (400m)

The Sixth zone is the Malay in South East Asia. It includes Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

In addition, we have the Chinese Muslims, the European Muslims (Albanians, Bosnia, Kosvo), Muslim minorities in North and South America and Europe.

Table 1 shows the regional population distribution of Muslims worldwide.

	Area	Number	Percentage
1	North America	3,480,000	.22
2	Latin America	840,000	.05
3	Europe	43,470,000	2.72
4	Middle east and North Africa	317,070,000	19.82
5	Sub-Saharan Africa	248,420,000	15.53
6	Asia-Pacific	986,420,000	61.66
	Total	1,599,700,000	

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Muslims as of 2010. (PEW Research Center).¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/31/worlds-muslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/>

Identity

Muslim identity has different dimensions and is composed from various components which should mesh together correctly to produce the final and complete image of this identity.

The Individual Dimension

God created human beings with a natural initial disposition that guides them to protect themselves and to promote their individual physical and spiritual health. A direct command not to hurt oneself is given in Surat al-Baqarah (Chapter 2), *“and let not your hands contribute to (your) destruction.”* (2: 195) Spiritual purification is mentioned in Surat Al-Shams (Chapter 91), *“He has succeeded who purifies it.”* (91: 9)

Family and Neighbors Dimension

Many verses in the Qur'an command the individual to look after his/her family, kinsfolk, and neighbors. One of these verses is, *“And serve God and do not associate anything with Him and be good to parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbor of your kin and the neighbor who is not kin, and the fellow traveler and the wayfarer and those whom your right hand possesses; certainly God does not love him who is arrogant and boastful.”* (4:36)

In addition, the tradition of the Prophet is full with commands to look after the parents, the extended family and the neighbors and to treat them kindly.

The Home Land Dimension

Islam recognizes the need of human beings for a place which they feel that they belong to. The legitimacy of this feeling has been expressed by the Prophet on his way to Medina after he has escaped the plot that his Meccan enemies were planning against him. He looked back at the city of Mecca and said, *“I love your land better than any place in the world. If it were not for your people who forced me to flee, I would have liked to stay here forever.”*

Muslim Nation Dimension

The members of the Muslim nation share one belief. The belief in the Oneness of God binds all Muslims in one brotherhood. Thus, a Muslim identifies with fellow Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“The believers feel for each other as if they were a single body, if an organ complained of an ailment the whole body will suffer.”*

Monotheistic Faith Dimension

The fifth dimension is derived from the understanding that Islam is a member of the monotheistic religions. Muslims believe that God sent one single Message to the human race to guide people to the straight path and to help them live a happy life on this earth and in the Hereafter. The Message was delivered to the human race by messengers. These messengers started with Adam and ended with Muhammad, and a large number in between. Those included, among others, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The only parts of the message that were documented and are known to us are Christianity and Judaism.

The Quran indicated in many places that the adherents of Islam, Christianity and Judaism believe in the same God. So Muslims, Christians and Jews belong to one nation that believes in the same God. One of the powerful verses which reflect the concept of being part of one nation are the verses in the beginning of surat 30, *“Alif. Lam. Mim. The Romans have been defeated in a land close by, and they, after their defeat will be victorious within a few years. God's is the command in the former case and in the latter, and on that day the believers will rejoice in the victory of God. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.”* (30: 1 – 5) A very powerful verse which shows how the Muslims should rejoice for the victory of the Christians over the atheists.

Universal Dimension

All human beings are descendants of Adam and Eve. The whole human race constitutes a single family.

“People, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) most conscious of God. Indeed, God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware.” (49: 13) The whole human race came from one pair: a male and a female. They were then spread into different nations so that they can get to know each other; work, and collaborate with each other. The standard against which people should be evaluated is God consciousness. People should not be valued according to their race, language, color, or nationality. All people have equal worth in the sight of God. The only standard that determines their individual worth is the level of their God consciousness.

Diversity is an intentional plan of God. All human beings have to work together to make life on earth better. This is necessary for the Children of Adam to fulfill their mission on earth. God created the Children of Adam to be trustees over the earth and its resources and to create a world of peace and prosperity for its inhabitants. This is the meaning of being vicegerents of God on earth. This role cannot be fulfilled unless the whole human race works together.

Diversity should not be an obstacle for the whole human race to cooperate in fulfilling this mission. On the contrary, diversity should enrich the experience of the human beings on earth.

For the experience of the human beings on earth to be successful, they must understand the other dimensions of their identity and fulfill the requirements of these dimensions.

Thus, the levels and dimensions of the identity of a Muslim are like overlapping circles, the smallest is the circle of family, then the circle of Muslim nation, then the circle of the monotheistic religions, and finally the circle of the whole humanity.

What Does the Quran Say About Women?

In the Islamic tradition, the creation of the human race came out of two partners. Several verses in the Quran stress this fact and the Arabic word to describe these two partners is Zawj. The word Zawj in Arabic means two partners who were created from the same source, who both have equal worth and enjoy the same general rights, and who both have the same responsibilities toward their creator.

A Single Origin for the Human Race

“People, be conscious of your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created, of like nature, its mate and spread from these two, many men and women. Be conscious of God, in whose name you demand your mutual rights. Beware of severing the ties of the wombs; certainly God is ever watching over you.” (4: 1) This address is directed to the whole of humanity to remind them of the concept of the Oneness of their Creator and the common root of their race. People need to reflect on these simple, yet weighty statements. How did humankind come to this world? Who brought them? Through God’s will, we were created and have been given unique characteristics and talents to cope with the many facets of life. The power that creates knows everything about that which has been created and this power has the right to organize lives and to determine the norms and principles which should govern societies.

Human life started with a single decision from God and then humanity sprung from that common root. This makes the whole of humanity one family, connecting all people to one another. Therefore, all societies, ideological or otherwise, that discriminate between people on the basis of skin color, gender, or class have no real justification. So too, the long history of discrimination practices on the basis of gender should have been avoided entirely. Souls of males and females are equal in their uniqueness, complexity and right to be respected. They were created to complement each other. Each has a mission to fulfill and each has been gifted, in their own right, with the skill to fulfill this mission.

The verse above also underscores the importance of the family as the building block of society. Humanity started with a single soul that was complemented with its mate. The idea of starting humanity with a single family stresses the important role that the family plays in enhancing the ties between members of society. These ties; however, cannot be formed if the family unit itself is unhealthy or broken and Islam’s social system paid great attention to developing and strengthening the means which support and protect the family structure. A solid family unit cannot be established while one of the partners is being ill-treated, abused or wronged in any way. To this end, Islam paid great attention to establishing women’s rights as human beings at a time when this was a novel and revolutionary idea. To say Islam was ahead of its time when it comes to women’s right is an understatement.

The verse above urges people to remain conscious of their Lord and to conduct their dealings and create their connections, fulfilling each other’s rights, with His pleasure in the forefront of their minds. There are two expressions we’d like to focus on, the first being “God consciousness” which is understood and repeated throughout the Quran. The second expression is, “conscious of the wombs” an equally important awareness, yet far more difficult to explain. It enlivens the feelings of the human being. The expression impresses upon the believer to be sensitive to the needs and rights of family relationships. It urges believers to avoid hurting, or committing

injustice against those with whom we share a familial tie. Those who are ‘God conscious’ will also be ‘conscious of the wombs’ as they will remember that God is ever watchful over all of us. There is nothing we can hide from Him as He is fully aware of our deeds and even our innermost thoughts.

“It is He who created you from a single soul, and from it made its mate, in order that he might dwell with her (in love). When he covered her, she bears a light burden and carries it about. When she grows heavy, they both pray God their Lord, (saying), ‘If You give us a goodly child, we vow we shall (ever) be grateful.’” (7: 189) Females and males are created from the same soul; however, their functions are different. This difference is intentional and serves as a strength for both individuals, so that spouses can find comfort and tranquility in the company of each other.

“He created you from a single being, then from that (being) He made its mate; and He brought down for you cattle - eight kinds in pairs. He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, in a threefold of darkness. That is God, your Lord. His is the Sovereignty. There is no God save Him. How then you are turned away?” (39: 6) Humans have been created with certain basic characteristics which are common to every person who has lived on earth since the beginning of the human race. These characteristics distinguish us from all other creatures. Humans are created of a soul and a body. The Islamic project provides a plan by which the needs, the aspirations, and the fulfillment of both the soul and the body are guaranteed.

This verse also refers to the stages of the development of the fetus in the womb. The verse mentions three levels of darkness, which modern medicine has helped us decode. The first level of darkness is formed by the placenta which surrounds the fetus. The placenta is surrounded by the uterus which represents the second level of darkness and finally the uterus is enclosed in the mother’s abdomen which represents the third level of darkness. Conception and development in the womb is at once an average occurrence, as it happens every day, and a miraculous occurrence, as the stages of development are truly a marvel. This verse is a reminder that we must be conscious of God in all situations; the mundane and the awe-inspiring.

“People, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) most conscious of God. Indeed, God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware.” (49: 13) This verse addresses all humankind. The Creator is telling all people that we were created from a single source. The whole human race came from one pair: a male and a female. They were then spread into different nations so that they would learn about one another and work together. People should not, and are not in the eyes of God, valued according to their race, language, color, or nationality. All people have equal worth in the sight of God. The only standard by which their individual worth is measured is in their level of God consciousness.

Equal Worth of the Sexes

“The Believers, men and women, are protectors of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil; they establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed alms; and they obey God and His Messenger. God will have mercy on them. God is Eminent, Wise.” (9: 71) The

verse describes the believers as “protectors” of one another. Offering protection requires a noble character which is built on courage and sacrifice and such attributes are part of the character of a believer. The believers are engaged in enjoining in what is good and forbidding what is evil. Such actions require a united front which is formed by the believers, men and women, standing side by side. They establish prayers and pay the prescribed charity due and obey God. They follow the commands of God and His Messenger (PBUH) and they are happy with whatever God and His Messenger (PBUH) decree for them. They will gain the mercy of God in this life as mercy is not meant to be enjoyed in the Hereafter only. If an honest life has been lived for God’s sake, mercy will be granted to the believers in this life as well. So what defines a believer? The believers possess four attributes: they enjoin what is right, they forbid what is evil, they establish prayers, and they pay the prescribed charity due. The subsequent verse promises equal reward for males and females, *“God promised the believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God. That is the supreme felicity.”* (9: 72)

The following verse states the equality of the sexes in rights and responsibilities in unequivocal terms, *“For Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, perseverant men and perseverant women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who engage much in God’s praise, for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.”* (33: 35)

The word Muslim means the one who submits. A believer is a person who believes in the truthfulness of the faith. The two words are closely linked together. They are two sides of the same coin. Submission is the epitome of accepting the faith because true belief leads to submission. Devotion is the voluntary obedience that comes with submission and belief. True devotion emanates from an inner feeling not from an external influence. Truthfulness is an essential trait of Muslims. The Quran says, *“It is those who do not believe in God’s revelations that forge falsehood.”* (16: 105) Perseverance is an essential trait for each Muslim, to be able to fight back against temptation and to fulfill the undertakings of faith. A Muslim should persevere in adversity and when calamities strike. Humility in religion softens the heart and is obtained through standing in awe in front of God. Those who give charity do so to work towards purifying their inner self of greed and stinginess. Giving charity is an expression of gratitude to God and an awareness of the collective responsibility from members of the society. The verse implies that fasting is a trait which indicates that the reference here is to fasting which has become a habit for the believer. Fasting teaches the believer self-discipline. Guarding one’s chastity is a testimony for the strong control over the person’s lowly desires. Remembrance of God is the link that connects people to God. It allows the heart to shine with the light of guidance and reminds the believer to hold tight to this most trustworthy link. Those who enjoy these traits are promised a great reward, *“for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.”*

Accountability

And their Lord has heard them, and answered them, “Never will I let the work of any of you be lost, be he a male or a female, each like the other in reward.” (3: 195) God responded favorably to the supplication of the believers. The verse clearly indicates that God does not differentiate

between males and females in the reward. Both sexes will be rewarded according to the same standard.

The same principle is articulated in the following verse, “*And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female and he (or she) is a believer, they shall enter the garden, and not the least injustice will be done to them.*” (4: 124)

The same principle is reiterated in the following verse, “*We will give, whoever does right whether a man or a woman and is a believer, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their deeds.*” (16: 97) Both males and females are equal in the sight of God. Both are required to do good deeds and both will be rewarded equally. Good deeds are grounded in the belief in God. A strong faith in God instills in the believer the desire to perform good deeds. Good deeds are then transformed from sporadic occurrences to every day events in the life of the believer.

God promised those who believe in Him and carry out good deeds, a good life in this world, and a great reward in the Hereafter. The goodness of the worldly life that they are promised is not measured in terms of material gains only; there is more to a good life than money. A Good life is achieved when the elements of security, health, contentment are combined with God’s blessings. A good life is a life where the individual is continuously connected to God. Good life is a life when the individual lives in harmony with family. A good life is the best reward a believer can hope for. The same principle has been reiterated in verses (40: 40), (48: 5), (57: 12), and (57: 18). Equal punishments for males and females who transgress the law are prescribed, (5: 38) and (24: 2).

Fairness

“*And they ask you for a ruling about women. Say to them, ‘God himself gives you ruling concerning them, and the Scripture that is recited to you regarding female orphans whom you do not give what is ordained for them while you desire to marry them, and concerning the weak among children, and that you should deal towards orphans with equity; and whatever good you do, God certainly knows it.’*” (4: 127) As Islam was being introduced in its entirety, new Muslims were eager to learn the codes that would shape their new way of life. Islam was a way of life that differed in many ways from what people were used to practicing. Old traditions and practices were replaced and people were born anew with the adoption of Islam. Their eagerness was rewarded with a grace from God and He answered all their questions. This verse came to answer a specific question about orphan girls and to rectify an appalling and terrible practice that was prevalent before Islam.

Ali bin Abi Talha (RA) narrated that he heard Ibn Abbas (RA) explaining this verse, he said, “*Before Islam the guardian of an orphan girl had the right to throw his garment over the girl, once he had done that, she was not allowed to marry anyone else. Her guardian can marry her if he so wished. However, if he did not marry her she became a spinster. He would have control over her wealth while she was alive and he would inherit her when she died.*” The verse above came to put an end to this practice.

This tradition gives an idea of how orphan girls were treated by their guardians before Islam. Guardians were greedy. They were more interested in the wealth of the child under their care than in the child's welfare. Similarly, they deprived young children and women of their inheritance rights. The argument used to support this oppressive practice was that young children and women do not contribute to the fighting power of the tribe, so they do not deserve to have a share in the estate left by a deceased relative. The vulnerable had no power and they could not defend themselves against such injustices. Islam came to reverse these backward practices and replace them with fair and compassionate ones. This was not merely a sudden change in human behavior; it was the complete rebirth of a nation.

It is important to note that the rebirth that occurred was not preceded by introductory steps that made the change logical, nor was it the result of a revolutionary change in the life of the nation. The social change in the status of women and children and the new rights that they gained did not result because there was a change in society's need for warriors nor was there a change in the status of warriors. Warriors were needed to protect the growing Muslim society. The move from a system that awards rights on the basis of status to a system that awards rights on the basis of being a member of society was brought about by the arrival of Islam. Islam established the principle of equal worth for all. The change occurred without a revolution but was brought about by a verse in a book that gave birth to a new society. The new values were espoused by the same people who lived on the same land and under the same economic conditions. The verse reminds Muslims again about the connection between values and the originator of these values. Every good deed is recorded and no reward will be lost.

“And you will never be able to do justice between wives, even though it may be your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether, leaving her in suspense; and if you arrange a reconciliation and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. And if they separate, God will render them both free from want out of His abundant bounty, and God is All-embracing, Wise.” (4: 129) God who created the human soul knows the nature of this soul. It is natural to aspire to that which one does not have. Therefore, God has provided individuals with a harness to control these desires and to refine them, but not to completely eliminate them.

A man, who is married to more than one wife, may prefer one over the other. Partiality is instinctive and at times can be unexpected, and therefore, difficult to manage. Islam certainly does not hold people accountable for things that they have no control over. A man married to more than one wife will fail if his goal is to treat them exactly the same. Nevertheless, men, regardless of their personal feelings towards their wives, are commanded to be fair in their treatment towards their wives, in spending equal time with their wives and in providing equally for their wives. A man has to treat his wives fairly in all aspects of life that are under his control and men are warned not to deprive any wife of her stated rights. Men are again reminded of doing the right thing and to be conscious of God in their treatment of women.

If all measures to save the marriage fail and the marriage is dissolved, then God will provide for each one of them.

The following verses paint an ugly picture of one of the traditions adopted by the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era known as, Jahiliya. *“When one of them receives tidings of the birth of a female, his face remains darkened, and he suppresses his grief. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which he was informed of. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now verily evil is what they decide.”* (16: 58) The verse describes the reaction of a father when he would receive the news that his wife delivered a baby girl; his face would turn black reflecting the anger and sadness he felt. There is no gender hierarchy in birth; a baby girl is like a baby boy: they are both gifts from God. The process through which a sperm-drop meets the egg and grows to become a human being is a miraculous process. The resulting new life, whether a boy or a girl, should be celebrated.

The previous verses dealt with the etiquette of respecting people’s privacy in their homes. The following verses address the etiquette of the encounters between males and females. Islam pays special attention to maintaining the integrity of the community by avoiding situations where sexual desires are provoked. The society aims at creating a respectable and decent environment for the encounter between the sexes. Verses (24: 30) and (24: 31) give similar commands to both men and women to behave decently towards each other, *“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do.”* (24: 30) Men should lower their gaze and be modest. This provides a framework for male behavior in the presence of women. Lowering the gaze and being modest require a degree of self-discipline and this self-discipline is motivated by the fact that, *“That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do.”* Similarly, women are also directed to behave modestly, *“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest.”* (24:31) The verse continues to describe in a general way the dress code for women.

Relationship Between the Spouses

“Permitted to you, on the night of the fast, to go in unto your wives. They are your garments and you are their garments.” (2: 187) This beautiful allegory elevates the interaction between husband and wife from a mere physical relationship to one of kindness, tenderness and protection. It expresses the security and comfort that each spouse should provide for one another and find in one another.

“They ask you (Prophet) about menstruation. Say, ‘It is a painful condition, so let women alone at such times and do not approach them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as God has enjoined upon you. Truly God loves those who turn to Him, and loves those who purify themselves.’ Your wives are your tilth so approach your tilth as you may desire; but do some good act for your souls beforehand; and be conscious of God. And know that you are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give good tidings to the believers.” (2: 222-223) These two verses deal with several issues. The first issue is coitus during menstruation. The verse indicates that coitus during menstruation is not allowed. The reason for this prohibition is not explained. One should be careful in understanding the expression, “when they have purified themselves.” The verse does not mean that a woman during her menstruation is “unclean,” and as such she is considered a threat to holiness. Intimate relationship between a man and woman, short of having coitus, are allowable during this time. The verse also raises the objectives of the relationship between husband and wife to higher levels even when discussing

physical intimacy between the two spouses. Sexual intercourse is not an end in and of itself but it is a means to a higher goal, the goal of the continuation of life on earth. A third point that verses postulate is the that the spiritual relationship between a man and woman is the indispensable basis for a healthy sexual relationship.

“And give women their bridal gift upon marriage, but if they of themselves be pleased to give up to you a portion of it, then take it with enjoyment.” (4: 4) This verse establishes the right of the bride to receive a wedding gift which will be solely hers to own and she has the right to use it when and as she sees fit. This single verse put an end to previous traditions that were common in the pre-Islamic society which robbed women of their rights in receiving and disposing of their wedding gifts on their own terms. Before Islam, a woman’s guardian, who would be male, had free reign in deciding whom she should marry; had the right to receive the wedding gift on her behalf and to dispose of it according to his own will. This practice resulted in many of these marriages being treated as business deals to benefit the guardians. This verse came to abolish these oppressive practices and give the woman the right to decide for herself.

“Women who are already married are also prohibited, except those whom your right hand possesses. This is what God has decreed for you. Except for these, all others are lawful, provided that you seek them with gifts from your property in honest wedlock, not debauchery. Those whom you wish to enjoy through marriage, you are obligated to give them their bridal gift. But if after you have fulfilled the obligation, you mutually agree to do otherwise, you will not be blamed; certainly God is Omniscient, Wise.” (4: 24) The previous verse lists women who are prohibited for a man to marry due to their relation to him. This verse further adds to the list. A man cannot marry a woman who is already married. This ruling emphasizes the role of family in Islam as the building block of society. This building block should be fiercely protected and the transparency of the family tree must be maintained. The family in Islam is based on a man and a woman joined in wedlock.

It has been observed that a human baby needs a longer period to mature and become independent than the period required for a baby from any other species; and the education of children takes even longer. The objective of sexual relationships in the animal world is solely for the preservation of the species. Of course, the objective of human relationship goes far beyond procreation and sexual pleasure. The relationship between married parenting couples is a long term commitment to provide care and education for the children and prepare them to become active participants within society. Day-to-day life between couples does not revolve solely around sexual pleasure. Just like in the animal world, attraction is a powerful initial tool in bringing couples together to start a long term relationship. These considerations support the notion of building the relationship between couples on the foundation of the concept of family. The sanctity of the institution of family should be protected. Practice of polyandry threatens this concept and confuses the transparency of lineage; therefore, it is not acceptable in Islam.

Another aspect of importance of the institution of the family is that it provides an environment for the spiritual and physical security for the man and wife. Several verses discuss the spiritual and physical aspects of marriage and how they are inter linked. See verse (2: 223) which commands men to advance for themselves before coitus, verse (2:187) which describes man and wife as garments to each other, and verse (30:21) which indicates that the relationship between

man and woman should be based on tranquility and mercy. They have been created to live together in a peaceful environment and family life is the Islamic answer to this need.

God created the whole universe on the concept of duality “*and from each thing We created a pair, if you remember,*” (51:49). As a part of the universe, the human race is created on the basis of the concept of duality as well. So, living in pairs satisfies the initial natural human disposition. God created this pair from a single soul. God made each member of this pair to be a cause of tranquility, security, comfort, and protection to one another. He made their union a source for sustaining life on earth. Because they were created from the same soul, they stand equal in the sight of God. They are treated equally by God in matters of reward and punishment. They are equal in a court of law, when they are involved in a civil dispute. They have equal rights in owning property.

Men and women have equal worth as human beings but they were created to fulfill different missions. God created each with the appropriate physical and psychological form suitable for the achievement of their respective missions. Along with the appropriate capabilities came a fair distribution of responsibilities. It is the woman’s responsibility to bear children and it is the man’s responsibility to support his family. The verse alluded to the physical and psychological preparation of men and women to be able to carry out their respective tasks and also referred to the man’s responsibility in providing the financial support to his family.

“And if a woman fears cruelty or desertion on the part of her husband, there is no blame on them, if they arrange a reconciliation between them, and reconciliation is better, and avarice has been made to be present in people's minds; and if you do good and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do.” (4: 128) In a previous verse, the Quran deals with a situation involving a family conflict caused by the wife. In this verse the Quran deals with the problem when the husband is the one to be blamed for the conflict. Family conflicts affect the security of the wife and children. Islam provides a realistic methodology to deal with the different aspects of life, recognizing the changes that occur in people and to their feelings towards one another as time passes.

This verse established a methodology for dealing with conflicts arising as a result of a husband deserting his wife. A wife fearing the consequences of such a desertion, which may or may not lead to a divorce, can negotiate with her husband the terms of an agreement to resolve the conflict. This agreement is meant to be an alternative to divorce. If a woman does not want a divorce and wants to resume family life with her husband, then she can make some concessions to reach such an agreement. These concessions may include giving up some of her financial or physical rights. These concessions should be made out of her own free will and with no coercion from anyone.

Acrimonious family conflicts can be avoided through a negotiated agreement between the husband and wife. This approach recognizes human limitations and the realities of life. One of these realities is the ever present nature of greediness within the human heart. This can only be combated by the reminder that excellence and God consciousness are better. The reward for this is guaranteed and will not be lost because God is Totally-Aware of what you do.

Polygamy, Witnesses, Inheritance, and A Degree

“And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women who seem good to you, two or three or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hand possesses; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course.” U’rwah bin Al-Zubair (RA) asked A’isha (RA) about this verse. She said, *“Son of my sister, this is regarding wealthy female orphans whose guardians marry them for the sake of their wealth and beauty but they don’t give them their bridal gifts as they would have given other women.”* This verse above came to abolish the unfair practice described by A’isha. If the guardians are not able to treat those in their care fairly, they should seek matrimony with other women. This removes any chance of abuse of the vulnerable. This tradition shows that Muslims continued to practice dishonest and unjust pre-Islamic traditions until the Quran once again commanded the believers to relinquish these practices and to be careful in their treatment of orphans. The verse insists upon the guardians to exercise justice. Justice is a moral value in Islam that needs to be heeded in all its forms and in any circumstance.

The verse provides a license for polygamy with a certain caveat: fairness has to be observed in the husband’s treatment of his wives. If a man fears that he will be unable to treat all his wives with absolute fairness, then he should not marry more than one wife. This license is a source of debate between those who are against and those who are pro the practice of polygamy. It has also been used as a spring board to launch attacks against Islam. We need to consider this carefully to show the rationale behind this license and the historical background for the practice.

Before Islam, the practice of polygamy was prevalent in Arabia and there was no limit on how many wives a man could have. This verse was revealed not to establish a new norm but to modify an existing norm. Men are not allowed to marry more than four wives with the caveat that they should treat them all fairly. Equal and fair treatment is a condition that must be fulfilled, otherwise polygamy is not permissible.

However, one could ask, why has Islam allowed the practice of polygamy to continue? Islam is a system which understands realistic, legitimate, and necessary human needs. It provides a system which endeavors to refine human behavior, neither ignoring it nor allowing the indulgence in desires without limits.

A system of polygamy which is based on the establishment of justice and the approval of all parties concerned provides a practical solution to social problems that have existed in societies since the dawn of time and will continue to exist till the end of time.

Islam provided a system of legal and restricted polygamy that ensures the rights and preserves the dignity of all parties involved. Islam allows polygamy but does not mandate it. Those who understand the spirit of Islam recognize that Islam does not condone polygamy for its own sake nor as a mechanism to abuse women for the sake of satisfying uncontrolled and unwarranted sexual desires. Islam recognizes polygamy as a necessary solution to certain social problems. It is the exception rather than the norm. It is not left without constraints or controls and should only be exercised under very special circumstances. The permission to engage in polygamy is controlled by the requirement of the fair and equal treatment of all wives. The husband must treat

his wives equally in all aspects of life. Islam recognizes that humans have no control over their inner feelings. So, it is not logical to create laws controlling human emotions. Thus, the scope of the treatment that requires fairness does not include inner feelings or emotions. This exemption has been mentioned in the verse: *“and you will not be able to treat women with absolute fairness, even if you tried keenly.”* (4:129) Some tried to argue that this verse is a proof that polygamy is not allowed in Islam. This is not so. We cannot imagine that the Quran allows a practice in one verse and prohibits it in another. The scope of fairness in treatment mentioned in the first verse encompasses material and physical aspects of life like daily interactions and intimate relationships. Fairness is a necessity in satisfying the material and physical needs of the different wives. The second verse; however, points to the inability of human beings to fully control their inner feelings. Matters of the heart lie in God’s domain of control.

To reiterate, polygamy existed before the advent of Islam. Islam introduced controls and constraints to the practice of polygamy. Islam does not consider polygamy to be the norm but it is an exception that can be used in special circumstances. The fact that some Muslims abuse this license does not warrant its abolishment. The right to marry more than one wife is conditional on the ability of the man to be fair in his treatment of his wives. Fairness in treating all wives is a condition for the license to practice polygamy. Fairness should be observed by the husband in providing for his wives, and allotting equal shares of his time and attention. This condition does not apply to feelings and emotions, since these are beyond the control of human beings.

The verse ends by explaining the rationale behind all these rules, *“that you may not deviate from the right course.”* The right course is the just course. Justice is an objective of all Islamic laws and social justice is a requirement for a sound and healthy society.

The issue of right of a woman to be a witness in a court of law is indicated in the following verse, which describes the rules regarding lending and borrowing money, *“Believers, when you contract a debt for a stated term, put it down in writing. Have a scribe write down justly the terms between the parties. No scribe should refuse to write, as God has taught him, so let him write. Let him who incurs the liability dictate, but let him be conscious of his Lord God, and not diminish anything of what he owes. If the party liable is mentally deficient, or weak, or unable himself to dictate, then let his guardian dictate justly. Call two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as you choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her. The witnesses should not refuse when they are called upon. Do not disdain to put it in writing for a future period, whether it is small or big. It is more equitable in the sight of God, more suitable as evidence, and more convenient to prevent doubts among yourselves; but if it be a transaction which you carry out on the spot among yourselves, there is no blame on you if you do not put it in writing. Have witnesses present whenever you make a commercial contract; and let no harm to be suffered by neither a scribe nor a witness. If you do such harm, it will be sinful conduct on your part. So be conscious of God. God teaches you. And God is well acquainted with all things.”* (2: 282)

“Call two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as you choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her.” Two witnesses are required. The witnesses should be known for their integrity, and they should be agreed upon by both parties involved in the transaction. The verse offers an alternative to

having two men as witnesses. If securing two male witnesses proved to be difficult, then one man and two women can become the witnesses. The reason for accepting the testimony of two females in lieu of a single male is mentioned, “so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her.” The error referred to here may result from the lack of business experience. Having another woman allows the two women to remind each other of the conditions of the transaction.

In other situations, the testimony of one woman is considered sufficient. This indicates that there is no intrinsic deficiency in the woman as a woman but different types of litigations require different number of witnesses. An example of this is the requirement of two male witnesses in some cases and in other cases four male witnesses is necessary.

The rules of inheritance are delineated in Surat Al-Nisaa (4). The following two verses give some of these rules, “*God commands you regarding your children: the male shall have the equal of the portion of two females; then if they are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what the deceased has left, and if there is one, she shall have one half; and as for his parents, each of them shall have the sixth of what he has left if he has a child, but if he has no child and (only) his two parents inherit him, then his mother shall have the third; but if he has brothers, then his mother shall have the sixth after (the payment of) a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt he may have incurred; your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is more beneficial to you; this is an injunction from God, certainly God is Omniscient, Wise. And you shall have half of what your wives leave if they have no child, but if they have a child, then you shall have one-fourth of what they leave after (payment of) any bequest they may have bequeathed or a debt they may have incurred; and they shall have one-fourth of what you leave if you have no child, but if you have a child then they shall have one-eighth of what you leave after (payment of) a bequest you may have bequeathed or a debt you may have incurred; and if a man or a woman dies leaving no parents or offspring, but he (or she) has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall have one-sixth of the inheritance, but if there are more siblings, they shall share one-third of inheritance between them, after (payment of) any bequest that may have been bequeathed or a debt that may have been incurred with no harm done to others; this is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Forbearing.*” These two verses, in addition to a third one at the end of Surat Al-Nisaa, establish the basis for the methodology of distributing an estate among the heirs of a deceased person. These rules were detailed by the Prophet (PBUH) in some cases, and by the work of the scholars in other cases. We will reflect briefly on the interpretation of these verses. More details can be found in books on Islamic jurisprudence. The verses start by stating that these are God’s commands. He knows what is best for the believers. He is the Provider, and it is He who divides the shares among people. The male has twice the share of the female. When these verses were revealed, many of the Arabs who embraced Islam expressed their dissatisfaction with the new rules. They were used to the practice of giving most of the estate to those who can fight and provide protection for the tribe and they wanted this practice to continue. These objections were not appropriate nor were they warranted. God knows best what is beneficial for His servants. Thus, Islam came to change all of this; the female shall have the right to inherit. However, the female share is half that of the male. This division is not rooted in a feeling of patriarchal supremacy. It is congruent with the obligations that males are expected to undertake. It is the husband’s responsibility to provide for his wife and their children. The wife has no obligation to provide for her family. It is

only fair that the male's share of the inheritance to be twice the share of a female in the same category.

People are reminded that there is a rationale behind the legislation of these laws. Heirs whether parents or children should be treated fairly and objectively. God knows better who of them is more deserving than the other. These are God's commands and they should be obeyed. God is Omniscient, Wise.

The responsibilities of a man towards his wife and children are referred to in verse (4: 34), "*Men should take full care of their wives with the bounties God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their property.*" (4: 34) This verse organized family life and allocated responsibilities to each of the two human beings who are necessary for the establishment of a family in the first place. Allocation of responsibilities removes potential friction and competition between the partners and establishes the basic rule that any dispute should be settled by referring to God's rules. The verse established the principle that males are responsible for taking full care of their wives. Males have been given this leadership role because of their intrinsic characteristics and because they are responsible for maintaining the family. The verse also prescribed a procedure for dealing with family disputes. These organizational rules were necessary to maintain the integrity of family life.

The division of responsibilities between the male and the female in a family setting is imperative if fairness is to prevail. Each has a role to play and each has been prepared for that role. Females are given the responsibility of child birth and child care. These are major responsibilities, but females have been created with biological and psychological characteristics which enable them to undertake such responsibilities. It is only fair that the other partner in the family organization be given the responsibility of providing the financial necessities needed to maintain the family. Males are given biological and psychological characteristics which prepare them to fulfill their prescribed roles as well.

Human Rights

The Basis for Human Rights in Islam

Equality

“People, be conscious of your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created, of like nature, its mate and spread from these two, many men and women. Be conscious of God, in whose name you demand your mutual rights. Beware of severing the ties of the wombs; certainly God is ever watching over you.” (4: 1) This verses addresses the whole humanity to remind them of the concept of the Oneness of the Creator and the common root of their race. People need to reflect on these statements. How did humankind come to this world? Who brought them? Before being created they were nothing, they came to life by God’s will. They were given unique characteristics and talents to cope with life on earth. The power that brought them to existence knows everything about them. This power has the right to organize their lives and to determine the norms and principles which should govern their societies.

Human life started with a single decision from God and the whole humanity sprung from one common root. This makes the whole humanity a one family, and all people from the advent of Adam (PBUH) till the end of time are members of this family. Understanding this fact should help diminish the differences that divide people and break up the ties between them. The evils of race discrimination and genocide would have been avoided had the human race recognized and understood this fact. All traditions that discriminate between people on the basis of skin color, gender, or class have no real justification. The long history of discrimination practices on the basis of gender should have been avoided. Souls of males and females are the same. Males and females share the same nature and the same human characteristics. They were created to complement each other. Each has a mission to fulfill and each has been created with the appropriate aptitude to fulfill this mission.

The verse also underscores the importance of the family as the building block of the human society. Humanity started with a single soul and it was complemented with its mate, both formed a single family from which sprang the whole human race. If God had willed, He would have created many men and women in the first instance. The idea of starting the creation with a single family highlights the important role that the family plays in enhancing the human ties between the members of the human society. The social system in Islam paid great attention to developing and strengthening the means which support and protect the family structure. The family starts with two partners. A strong family structure cannot be established while one of the partners is being ill-treated, abused or wronged in any way. Islam paid great attention to establishing women’s rights as human beings and giving them their due respect.

When we reflect further on this verse, we cannot but wonder of how many different men and women sprang from one single family. People born over the centuries, since the beginning of the creation, are all different. They are different in form and shape. They are different in their aptitudes and abilities. They are different in their dispositions and feelings. Who else is able to do this except God, the Creator?

The verse urges people to remain conscious of their Lord in whose name they conduct their transactions and request their rights from each other. It urges them to remain conscious of God when they deal with each other. The meaning of the expression “God consciousness” is understood and it is oft repeated in the Quran. However, the expression “conscious of the wombs” is a different one, it is an amazing expression and difficult to explain. It enlivens the feelings of the human being. The expression exhorts the believer to be sensitive to the needs and rights of family relationships. It exhorts the believers to avoid hurting, or committing injustice against those with whom we share a relationship through the wombs. Remember that God is ever watching over us. He is the Creator who knows His creation. There is nothing we can hide from Him. He is fully aware of our deeds and our thoughts.

Justice

“You who believe, stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; whether he is rich or poor, God can best protect both; therefore, do not follow your low desires, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do.” (4: 135) The verse commands the believers to stand firmly for justice: absolute and comprehensive justice. They are commanded to eradicate injustice and guarantee fair treatment for all people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The right to be treated fairly is a human right. Every human being whether a believer or a non-believer, a friend or foe, poor or rich should enjoy the right to be treated fairly in a court of law. Muslims are accountable to God, and to God alone, in fulfilling this trust. The believers are commanded to be completely objective when they act as witnesses. No desire, whim or nepotism should affect their testimony because the testimony is given in front of God. Even when the testimony is given on behalf of themselves, their families, or their parents, they should be objective in their testimony. This is a difficult task which requires a rigorous training program for people to overcome the natural human weakness and bias towards their own families. It is also a difficult task to be objective when the culprit is poor. A poor person is usually vulnerable and people may tend to change their testimony in favor of a poor person as an act of kindness. But the warning is given, *“Do not follow your whims.”* The verse mentioned some specific examples for motives which may compel a person to follow one’s own whims and to abandon objectivity. Of these: favoring oneself, one’s family, or one’s friends. Absolute objectivity is commanded even when one’s enemy is involved. Similarly, difference in religion, nationality or ethnicity should not be justification for bias. The verse ends by reminding the believers that God is aware of what they do. This is an incentive to fulfill the command.

“You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially. Do not let the hatred of others make you swerve away from justice, act justly, for that is closer to piety. Be conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.” (5: 8) This verse takes the command of treating people fairly another step forward. The believers are admonished not to let the hatred of others make them swerve away from justice. It may be easy not to transgress against one’s enemy but it is much harder to treat one’s enemy fairly. Yet the believers were commanded to establish justice even when they were in dispute with people they hated. A support was promised to strengthen the believers in this endeavor. They should strive to become conscious of God. It is the duty of this nation to be steadfast in its devotion to God for the benefit of humankind. Muslims were able to play that role when Islam was their way of life.

Dignity

God honored humankind over many of His creatures. God honored humankind when He bestowed on them a straight posture and an initial natural disposition that combines mud and God's breath. This is the initial natural disposition which joins the heavens and the earth. God honored humankind when He bestowed on them the aptitude that makes them eligible for the position of vicegerency on earth. He gave them the ability to develop the earth and make it a habitable place. God honored humankind when He subjected the forces of the universe to make him live a better life. God honored humankind when He prepared a huge reception for Adam (PBUH), as a representative of the human race, during which the angels bowed to Adam (PBUH), *"Verily we have honored the Children of Adam. We carry them on land and sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created."* (17: 70)

Freedom

The responsibility to God is an individual responsibility. On the Day of Judgment, everyone will answer for himself/herself. No one will carry the burden of another. An unequivocal statement is made in response, *"Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to the Lord of Mercy as a servant. Verily, He took an account of them (all), and has numbered them (all) exactly. And each one of them will come to Him singly on the Day of Judgment."* (19: 91-95) Every human being will answer to his/her own deeds. This requires that people should be free to choose and decide.

Individual Rights

Life is Sacred

On account of (this deed), We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed all humankind; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all humankind. (5: 32)

Freedom of Religion

The role of Muslims in connection to the call to Islam is explained, *"Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error."* (2: 256) Islam does not subscribe to compulsion regarding matters of faith. The belief in God should be based on thinking, reasoning, and understanding. A person who adopts Islam should do it freely and on the basis of persuasion not compulsion. Islam appeals to rational reasoning as well as to the initial natural disposition of the human being. Islam appeals to the spirit that feels as well as to the mind that thinks. Islam does not rely on miracles as a tool for persuasion. Thus, its banner declares that there should be no compulsion in matters of faith. This clearly reflects the honor that God bestowed on humankind. God decreed that humankind's feelings, thoughts, and will are respected. Humankind has the free will to choose between right and wrong. Each freedom comes with a responsibility.

Islam places the freedom of faith at the top of the list of human rights. Those who deprive people of their freedom of faith deprive them of their humanity. The right of free speech goes hand in hand with freedom of faith. The freedom for free speech implies that each one is able to advocate freely for one's cause.

God told the Prophet in many verses of the Quran that he cannot force people to become believers, *"It may be that you torment yourself with grief, that they do not become believers."* (26: 3) One senses a hint of rebuke in the wording of the verse for the Messenger's (PBUH) sadness caused by the rejection of the Quran by the idolaters of Mecca. The verse comforted the Messenger (PBUH) telling him that it was not his fault that they denied him and rejected the Quran. Had God willed He would have forced them to believe, *"Had We wished, We could have sent down to them from the sky a sign, to which they would bend their necks in humility."* (26: 4) But it is God's will that the evidence of the truth of His Last Message would be the Quran and not a physical miracle. The Quran is the miracle that testifies to the truth of this Message. The miracle of the Quran has been manifested in various ways. It is manifested in its consistent style, in the logical argument that it provides, and in its appeal to the human heart. It continues to provide the message to all people, at all places, and at all times.

"And if your Lord had willed, all who are on the earth would have believed together. Would you (Muhammad) compel people until they become believers?" (10: 99) This is a fundamental rule. Had God willed, He could have created all people the same. He could have made them all believers like the angels. Had God willed, He could have deprived people of the free will, they would have had no ability to choose. God Almighty in His wisdom created human beings with propensity to goodness and evil and gave them the ability to choose either way. People have the free will to choose whether to believe or disbelieve. The Prophet (PBUH) could not compel any one to adopt faith. There should be no compulsion in matters of the heart and the conscience.

Privacy

God made the home a sanctuary for its inhabitants to relax, enjoy their privacy, and feel secure. No one is allowed to intrude on people's homes without permission. This can only happen when the visitors respect the rule that it is the inhabitants' right to decide when to receive visitors. This rule was not respected by the Arabs before Islam. Such a practice tends to put the inhabitants of a house in awkward and embarrassing situations. The verses describe the measures stated by the Quran to guarantee the preservation of the home's sanctity. Visitors should seek permission first and wait until the permission has been granted before they enter. If the inhabitants are not home or they refuse to grant permission, then the visitor should turn back without any bad feeling for being refused, *"Believers, do not enter houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them. That is best for you, in order that you may heedful. And if you find no one in the house, do not enter until permission is given to you; and if you are asked to go back, go back. That makes for greater purity for yourselves; and God knows well all that you do."*

Protection Against Slander and Harassment

The following verses describe a real event that involved the slander of the Prophet's (PBUH) wife A'isha (RA), *“Those who brought forward the lie are a gang among you. Do not think it to be an evil thing to you; on the contrary it is good for you. To every man among them (will come the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a grievous punishment. Why did not the believers - men and women - when you heard of the affair, think good of their own people, and say, ‘It is an evident falsehood?’ Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce any witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of God. Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you in the world and the Hereafter a grievous torment would have certainly touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into. When you welcomed it with your tongues, and uttered with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, you thought it was a trifle but it is very great in the sight of God. And why you did not, when you heard it, say, ‘It is not right of us to speak of this. Glory to God, this is a most serious slander?’ God admonishes you, that you may never repeat such (conduct), if you are (true) believers. And God makes the verses plain to you; for God is Omniscient, Wise. Those who love that slander should be spread concerning those who believe, theirs will be a painful punishment in the world and in the Hereafter. God knows and you do not know. Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you; and that God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy. Believers, do not follow Satan's footsteps; whoever follows in the footsteps of Satan, he will indeed command what is shameful and wrong. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. But God purifies whom He pleases. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”*

The incident of the slander of A'isha (RA) was a very painful experience for the Prophet (PBUH), his wife, and the whole community. Doubts destroyed the serenity of the hearts of the Prophet (PBUH), his close friend and father in law, and the companion of the Prophet (PBUH) Safwan bin Al Mu'atal (RA) for a whole month. Let us listen to the description of the incident as it was narrated by A'isha (RA). Here is the story as narrated by A'isha (RA).

Each time the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to go on a trip he used to choose one of his wives to accompany him. The process he followed was to draw a toss between his wives whoever wins the toss would accompany him. On one of these trips, after Hijab has been mandated, it was my turn to accompany the Prophet (PBUH). My camel had a tent for me to sit in. While I was visiting the toilet, the Prophet (PBUH) commanded his army to prepare for the return trip to Medina. On my way back to the place where I left my camel, I found out that I lost my rosary so I went back to fetch it. In the meantime, the driver of my camel came and drove the camel never realizing that I was not inside my tent on top of the camel. When I came back to the place of the camp I found that the army had left. I decided to stay where I was thinking that soon they will realize that I am not in my tent on top of the camel and they will come back for me. I was tired so I was overcome by sleep. While I was sleeping Safwan (RA) happened to be passing by and saw me. Safwan (RA) knew who I was. So he took me on his camel until we caught up with the army. When I reached Medina I became sick and continued to be sick for about a month. In the meantime, Abd Allah bin Salool made up the story slandering me and he circulated the slander among people. People were talking about the slander and all the time I was unaware of what was going on. I was a bit suspicious of the Prophet's (PBUH) behavior. The Prophet (PBUH) was

always warm towards me, but during this month I sensed a change in his attitude, but he never mentioned anything. One day, after my recovery I was going to the toilet outside the house with Um Mustah (RA). While we were walking I heard Um Mustah (RA) cursing her son Mustah. I was deeply concerned that a man who participated in the battle of Badr would be cursed by his mother. I asked her why she was doing this. She said, "Did you not know about the rumor being circulated?" I said, "No, what rumor." She told me about the rumor accusing me of a relationship with Safwan (RA). This was extremely painful, I became ill again and I went home crying. I spent the whole night crying. The Prophet (PBUH) asked Ali bin Taleb (RA) and Usama bin Zaid (RA) for advice. Usama (RA) defended me and attested to my innocence. Ali (RA) on the other hand said to the Prophet (PBUH) that he can always marry another one if he wanted, but he also asked him to ask my servant of my behavior. My servant attested to my innocence.

The Prophet (PBUH) came to enquire about my health, so I asked him to let me go visit my mother, I wanted to ask my mother about the rumor. She confirmed what I heard from Um Mustah (RA). The next day my parents were with me and the Prophet (PBUH) came to see me. He sat on the bed and told me about what was going on, he said, "If you are innocent, God will announce your innocence, but if you were guilty then you should repent. God forgives all sins." I did not know how to answer back. I asked my mother to respond but she did not say anything. I said, "By God, I know that you heard the rumor and believed it. If I say I am innocent, you will not believe me but if I confess my guilt, while God knows my innocence, you would believe me. I can only say what the father of Joseph said, *'Beautiful patience is most befitting, I seek God's help regarding what you say.'*" (12: 18) I was certain of my innocence but I could not fathom the idea that God would send a revelation to declare my innocence. My best hope was that the Prophet (PBUH) would see in his dream that I am innocent. Suddenly, I realized that the Prophet (PBUH) was in the state of receiving a revelation. When he came around, he was smiling and he said, "A'isha, praise your Lord. He declared you innocent." The Prophet (PBUH) then recited the ten verses in surat Al-Noor which talked about the slander.

Mustah who spread the rumor about A'isha (RA) was Abu Bakr's (RA) cousin. Abu Bakr (RA) used to help Mustah (RA) financially as a form of charity. Abu Bakr (RA) decided that he will stop helping Mustah (RA) as he used to before the incident. But then a verse was revealed which made Abu Bakr (RA) change his mind, *"And let not those who possess dignity and abundance among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and to those who have fled in God's way. Let them forgive and show indulgence. Do you not yearn that God forgive you? God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."* (24:22)

For a whole month the Prophet (PBUH) and his wife, Abu Bakr (RA) and his wife, Safwan (RA), and indeed the whole Muslim community suffered through this horrible experience. The young, pure, and innocent A'isha (RA) was slandered and her reputation has been tarnished. Not only she felt the pain of being falsely accused, but she was horrified at the thought that the Prophet (PBUH) had doubts About her innocence. Her parents suffered with her. Safwan (RA) a companion of the Prophet (PBUH) was deeply pained by the accusations launched against him. The whole episode continued for a whole month before the decisive verses declaring A'isha's (RA) innocence were revealed. The slander was not meant to harm A'isha (RA) only but was also meant to hurt the Prophet (PBUH). The rumors were meant to undermine the Prophet (PBUH), his message, and his leadership. It was planned and executed by a group of people,

“Those who brought forward the lie are a gang among you. Do not think it to be an evil thing to you; on the contrary it is good for you.” It was a gang of people led by Abdel Allah bin Saloul the leader of the hypocrites. The gang included few Muslims who were deceived by the hypocrites, e.g. Hamna bint Jahsh, Hassan bin Thabet, and Mustah bin Athatha. The verse indicated the enormity of the conspiracy but reassured the believers that it was not bad for them on the contrary it was good. It was good because it exposed those who were scheming against Islam; those who were bent on hurting the Prophet (PBUH) and his wives. It is also good because it alerted the believers to the dire consequences of slandering people. Slandering people has a grievous impact not only on the falsely accused but also on the whole community. This incident provided the opportunity to state the standards for the proper Islamic behavior in times of trials. The pains that the Prophet (PBUH), his wife, and indeed the whole Muslim community suffered were the price that had to be paid to pass safely through this trial. Those who fabricated and propagated the lie will be punished, each according to his/her share in the crime. Abdel Allah bin Saloul who twisted the facts, fabricated the lie, and worked hard to propagate it will have the greatest share of the punishment.

“Why did not the believers - men and women - when you heard of the affair, think good of their own people, and say, ‘It is an evident falsehood?’” The verse describes the proper Islamic behavior when faced with such trials. The believers should have consulted their hearts and listened to their gut feelings. They would have reached the conclusion that it was a lie. They should have known that the wife of their Prophet (PBUH) the chaste daughter of the Prophet’s (PBUH) close friend could not have committed such indecency. There are stories that were narrated indicating that this was exactly the reaction of some Muslims e.g. Abu Ayoub Al-Ansari (RA).

This verse and the following one describe the proper process to handle rumors that slander people. The process consists of two steps. The first step requires the believers to reflect on the accusation and to give the accused the benefit of the doubt. The second step is to assume the innocence of the accused until proven guilty on the basis of hard and concrete evidence. A rigorous methodology in investigating the evidence should be followed, *“Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce any witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of God.”* A heinous accusation such as this should be proven beyond a shred of a doubt before a verdict is reached; four eyewitnesses should come forward to substantiate the accusation. If the person who has launched the accusation is unable to produce four eyewitnesses to substantiate his claim, then he is considered a liar. The believers did not follow this process when the accusation was launched against A’isha (RA). The verses warn the believers not to commit such a mistake again, *“Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you in the world and the Hereafter a grievous torment would have certainly touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into.”*

Jihad or Holy War

In one of his sayings, the Prophet of Islam defines a Muslim as a person around whom people would be safe. In other instances, the Prophet (PBUH) urges Muslims to love for others what they love for themselves. The Qur'an prohibits converting people to Islam by force, saying, "*There is no compulsion in religion.*" [2:256] Islam equates killing a single innocent person to the killing of the whole of humanity in the text reading, "*We ordained for the children of Israel that whoever slew a soul – except as a punishment for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it is as though he slew all men.*" [5:32] Finally, translating *Jihad* as "holy war" is misleading; the term "holy war" has not been mentioned once in the Qur'an. As a matter of fact, in the statement, "*Fighting is ordained for you, even though it be hateful to you.*" [2:216] Qur'an says clearly that fighting is a hateful duty that Muslims must undertake only when it is absolutely necessary.

Jihad is an Arabic word that means "strive" or "struggle." The concept of *Jihad* in Islam is also comprehensive. It encompasses the struggle against the temptation to sin, the struggle against succumbing to one's own desires and whims, the struggle against ignorance, and the struggle against oppressors. The struggle may be spiritual, intellectual or physical. This means that *Jihad* can be accomplished by peaceful means as well as by force. A well-established principle in Islamic jurisprudence is that struggle by force can only be performed by the state. Only the state can declare war. This is an important concept because it negates the basis on which so-called "literalists" justify their acts of violence. Furthermore, for a fight to be an act of *Jihad* it must pass muster on three criteria: justice of the cause, nobility of the means, and the intent of Godliness.

War can be declared in cases of self defence, as the Quran said, "*Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits; for God loves not the transgressors.*" [2:190] Equally, with reference to the words, "*Those who have been wronged are permitted to fight.*" [22:39] it may be invoked to combat oppression and anarchy. A war can only be declared after certain criteria have been met: the war must have a noble cause; all peaceful means to resolve a conflict must have been exhausted; and the war must be the lesser of the two evils.

There is a strict protocol for the conduct of war in Islam. Under Islamic law, non-combatants are protected. Unnecessary harm to the environment is prohibited. The standing order for the army at war is "*do not harm an innocent non-combatant, do not harm children, women, old people or priests/rabbis. Do not burn, cut or flood a tree nor kill an animal unless for food.*"

Thus the development and use of weapons intended to cause non-discriminate damage and carnage - so-called weapons of mass destruction - would be problematic from an Islamic point of view. Lastly it is incumbent on Muslims to come to peace if the enemy chooses to incline to peace at any time after the inception of hostilities, as the Quran has said, "*And if the enemy incline towards peace, you also incline to peace and trust in God.*" [8:62]

Terrorism

It is quite clear from the section on *Jihad*, that Islam does not condone in principle acts of terrorism. There is no justification for killing innocent people. The use of weapons designed and applied to kill people indiscriminately is not allowed even in a legitimate war.

The Quran urges Muslim to provide help and protection even to pagans when they ask for help, *“If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know.”* (9: 6) Even if they did not accept Islam, Muslims are obliged to grant them protection until they reach their safe destination. Islam brought a program for guidance not for revenge and annihilation. This verse refutes the claim that some make saying that the objective of Jihad was to convert people and force them to accept Islam. The objective of Jihad is to destroy the tyrants and to establish the people’s right to be free to adopt the religion of their choice.

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