

THE BOOK OF ESSENTIAL ISLAM

Ali Rafea

With Aliaa and Aisha Rafea



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About the Authors

Ali, Aliaa, and Aisha are the children of **Master Rafea M. Rafea** (1903-1970); a Muslim spiritual guide whose earthly life was a living expression of love to all humanity. Despite his physical absence, his spiritual presence is deeply felt, continuously inspiring them while they carry on his mission. This mission stems from the conviction that people need to correct their views about themselves, thus realizing their humanity. Fulfilling the meaning of being human is a never-ending process. Yet when Man takes the path towards that ultimate goal, he fulfills God's purpose of his creation. Rafea believed that man has always sought that goal and was supported in realizing it by Revelations and all forms of wisdom. As such, he was open to all spiritual knowledge; old and new, from the East and the West.

Ali Rafea is the spiritual guide of the Egyptian Society for Spiritual and Cultural Research (ESSCR)¹. He does not see himself as a teacher or a *shaykh* but a seeker of truth and the symbol of the study circle. This attitude in itself is a breakthrough in spiritual teaching. It marks a new approach to the guide-disciple relationship, for it implies a request from the disciples not to be dependent on outside guidance alone. Rather, a disciple has to struggle in order to derive and understand truthful knowledge from within and through his own experiences. Ali Rafea's sincerity and straightforwardness, his devotion and simplicity are striking. His enlightened soul shines within clean hearts in the circle's members. His words echo in their hearts, springing from within their souls. He guides their steps all along the way. Ali Rafea is also a prominent scholar in Computer Science. He obtained his Ph.D. in France and is now a professor at Cairo University.

Aliaa is an anthropologist and a professor at an Egyptian university. She obtained her Ph.D. from Ain Shams University and her M.A. from the American University in Cairo. She has partici-

¹<http://www.esscr.org>

pated in a number of international conferences and is the author of several academic publications in which she used her knowledge of anthropology to address spiritual issues and their impact on man. For the spring semester of 2002, Aliaa was a visiting Professor at Randolph and Macon Women's college in Lynchburg where she lectured mainly on Islam and where she also gave a public lecture and a number of public addresses all touching on various aspects of Islām. Under the spiritual umbrella of Ali Rafea, Aliaa gathers regularly with a group of women who are interested in spiritual knowledge and leads their discussions on spiritual experiences and the path to spiritual growth.

Aisha is a writer and journalist. She has written several books and numerous articles in the field of spiritual culture. She currently contributes articles to the prominent weekly Egyptian magazine *October* under the title of "*Moments of Realization*." In all her writings, she focuses on the spirituality of Islamic teaching and its role in freeing humans from the enslavement of matter. Without spirituality, she believes, people turn Holy Scripture into literal, lifeless, and dogmatic commandments. They then become stagnant, arrogant, and inclined to dominate others, which is contradictory to the true spirit of religion.

Aisha and Aliaa translated into English *Memoirs of Khabarides: The Future of Spiritualism*,² a piece of fiction that their father Master Rafea wrote in the 1960s in Arabic. It foretells that the 21st century will witness the revival of spiritual awareness, eliminating religious conflicts based on prejudices and misunderstandings.

²Rafea Mohamed Rafea, *Memoirs of Khabarides*, Vantage Press, New York, USA, 1990.

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Notation and Conventions

Abbreviations

HC *Hijrī Calendar*

HQ *Ḥadīth Qudsī*¹

PH *Prophetic Ḥadīth*

Matt. *Gospel of Matthew*

John *Gospel of John*

Deut. *Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Pentateuch, “the first five books of the Old Testament,” also known as the Law of Moses, or Torah.*²

Ex. *Exodus, the second book of the Torah*

Notes

1. Unless mentioned otherwise, the translation of the Holy Qur’ān used in this book, with small changes in some cases, is that of the Holy Qur’ān (Electronic Version 7. 01), Harf Company for Information Technology, Egypt, 1998. (Translation by A. Yusuf Ali.) XXXXXX

القرآن الكريم ، الإصدار السابع ، شركة حرف لتقنية المعلومات ، القاهرة
٠١٩٩٨

2. All Prophetic and Divine *Ḥadīths* in English are the authors’ translations.

¹A *Ḥadīth Qudsī* is a saying in which the Prophet Muḥammad quoted Allāh in His exact words, but which is not part of the Holy Qur’ān.

²According to the *Oxford Dictionary of the Bible*, W. R. F. Browning, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1966.

Preface

In all of human history, man has never witnessed the immediacy of communication that is available now. Distances do not count for much anymore; it is now easy to explore the world via the Internet or other media. Yet this vastly increased proximity has not ended clashes and conflicts on either the ideological or the cultural level. On the one hand, there is an attempt by the more powerful to invade the world culturally, provoking resistance, even enmity, in many areas of the world. On the other hand, dogmas and fanaticism widen the gap between peoples and create obstacles to cultural communication.

In order to bridge these gaps, the world needs to build a dialogue based on assumptions different from those that currently prevail. There is no reason to accept clashes between civilizations merely as facts, nor that only one way of progress must be dominant. Instead, the world should search for common ground, where each nation or civilization can enrich the others and be enriched by them. There is a need for a very special dialogue, one that would bring people together without attempting to impose uniformity. We need a dialogue that deeply penetrates cultures and understands our struggle to discover the purpose of our existence. We need a dialogue that goes beyond diversities in order to see the oneness of humanity and the purpose of existence.

This book represents the authors' reflections on a Call that seeks to gather the world to "a common term, a reconciling principle," *al-kalimah as-sawā'*. It is the Call that the Divine commanded the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace be upon him) to convey; a Call that introduced to humankind a method and a way to realize the purpose of existence; a Call that clarified that all Revelations are representations of the same Truth.

This Call, however, dates from the beginning of humanity's existence on earth; it was revealed in various places, and expressed in diverse terms, languages, and symbolic behavior. Enveloped in darkness and veiled from the authentic state of being, humanity was

deceived by fallacy, mistaking it for reality and truth. As such, humanity shut out the face of our inner messenger and turned a deaf ear to the divine voice inherent in our own existence. Humanity then continued to create an illusory world in which we compete, fight, and kill, while concealing the conflict taking place within ourselves.

As human beings, we share the fact that we like to give meaning to our lives, to look beyond simply satisfying our physical needs. In short, we—directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously—experience ourselves as more than physical matter. Yet we do not allow this natural tendency to emerge and develop. We suffocate the divine inner voice; we allege that we do not need a metaphysical outlook or that we already know everything, thanks to this or that teaching. Thus we are materialistic or dogmatic, antagonistic or atheist. In each case, we evade our inner guidance.

The authors of this book suggest that if any human being, wherever he or she may be, would listen to their inner guidance, he or she would be directed to a path that all Revelations guide us to take. Here we refer to this path as the “common term” or a “common unifying message.” Its commonality is not ideologically imposed or socially invented. This path is “common” because it stems from the nature of the human being as human. In Arabic it is called *fitrah*. To take this path requires and leads to complete inner freedom. Therefore it cannot be indoctrinated or imposed, but must be continuously discovered and individually experienced.

Beyond the diversity of revelations, each with a different name, there is that One Truth, One Wisdom, One Way.¹ It is required now, as it was required through the ages, that we probe into the revelations’ shared meanings and go beyond their various names. Humanity is asked to go beyond this diversity and search for that common Truth. We are challenged to dig deep within so that we can discern between fallacy and reality.

This challenge is not new. Fifteen centuries ago, the Prophet Muḥammad guided people from various creeds to come to this “common term” or “reconciling principle” that can unify their goals,

¹The authors discuss the basic themes of Revelations in their book: *Beyond Diversities: Reflections on Revelations*, Sadek Publications, Cairo, Egypt, 2000.

allowing them to discover that they belong to one another and to the Oneness that has taken varied shapes. That realization is intrinsically related to the Call for peace as one of humanity's primary goals. Even the word Islam connotes and is derived from the same roots as peace, *salām*. Islam as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad points to the One Truth that stands beyond diverse names. It focuses on the main principles with which the other Revelations had constructed their calls.

By discussing the Islamic Call as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad, the authors would like to share their ideas with all those interested in searching for the "common term." By focusing on the meaning of the Islamic Call, the confusion about Islam that has prevailed in the minds of Muslims and non-Muslims may be untangled. The challenge lies in showing how that Call was addressed to the whole world while respecting diversity and freedom of choice; how its universal nature does not seek to abolish variations or impose uniformity. It will become increasingly clear that Islam is based on spreading peace, not waging wars. Islamic teachings focus on how to support each human being in the process of inner transformation so that our very existence might convey love and peace.

Re-examining this Call today opens new channels for religious debate and interfaith dialogue and paves the way toward establishing a world community. Our contention, therefore, is not just theological; it has practical dimensions, as did the original Islamic Call. It was that Call which liberated people from living false lives and on whose principles Islamic civilization flourished.

Introduction

Out of our conviction that the Islamic Call as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace be upon him) was a continuation of all previous revelations,¹ we will show how that Call explains the core of all revelations. By confirming and clarifying the lessons of previous revelations, the Islamic teachings provide comprehensive guidance which integrates a system of spiritual training and a process of coping with mundane life.

What we present herein is in full harmony with what we understand to be the Islamic Call. It is our aim to demonstrate that Islām as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad transcends names and creeds and directly explores the main mission of all revelations. The Prophet Muḥammad said,

God considers not your appearances and your wealth, He rather considers your hearts and your deeds. (PH)²

إن الله لا ينظر إلى صوركم وأموالكم ولكن ينظر إلى قلوبكم
وأعمالكم

The Holy Qur'ān, on the other hand, addresses those who are fooled by illusions:

You worship nothing but names. (Qur'ān 12:40)

مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءَ

In a world full of ethnic conflicts and battles in the name of religion, the Call conveyed through the Prophet needs to be addressed once more. It teaches that no privilege should be based on religious affiliation, race, or gender, and that submitting oneself to Allāh is the main principle that brings people closer together.

¹The word "revelation" as used throughout this book points to all revelations, natural or Prophetic. When capitalized, "Revelations" points to those of the Prophets, from Abraham to Muḥammad.

²Narrated by Muslim, Ibn Mājah, and Aḥmad.

And they say: None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian. . . . Nay, whoever submits his whole self to Allāh and is a doer of good will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (Qur'ān 2:111, 112)

وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تِلْكَ أَمَاتِيهِمْ
قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ بَلَى مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ
وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

To submit one's whole self to Allāh is the core meaning of Islām. As simple as that may sound, knowing how to surrender to Allāh is a complex process. This submission is the purpose of creation. All revelations have pointed to this submission, using different terms and different means.

The word "Islām" in the Holy Qur'ān points to that one Religion that has appeared in all revelations. However, the use of the word "Islām" was confused over the centuries, so that it gradually lost its broad meaning. Instead it has become a reference to certain cultural identities. These distortions have accumulated over time, leading to the present situation in which confusion prevails and the use of the word "Islām" is linked to behaviors and concepts which are alien to the original meaning uncovered by the Revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad. The Islamic Call that transformed people during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad needs to be rediscovered. It can empower us to create a new world, one full of peace and love.

Just as the use of the word "Islām" has been confused with meanings alien to its original intent, the term "Islamic Call" is also unclear and subject to certain stereotypes. When it is used, several questions are raised: Does it imply that Muslims see themselves as superior? Does it attempt to convert others to Islām? Is it the right of Muslims to judge the followers of other revelations? Do Muslims have the right to wage wars against non-Muslims until they convert to Islām? Do Muslims consider followers of all other revelations to be "non-believers"? Do Muslims have the right to fight others simply because they are "non-believers"? Do Muslims insist that the whole world should be Muslim?

Various groups wearing the label of Islām have given very different answers to these questions. This is not the forum in which to present a critique of the various conceptions of the “Islamic Call”; instead, we introduce our own reading, supported by the main ideas of the Islamic Call that were developed during the life of the Prophet.

From our perspective, the Islamic Call is not linked to a certain creed; nor does it merely belong to history. It is still alive and relevant today. While the life of the Prophet represents for humanity an example of how the Call can be fulfilled. The continuation of that Call shows that there is a method that is as valid and as credible now as it was long ago, because it is related to the “pure nature of things,” *al-fiṭrah*. Each of us is required to revive the call for Truth within our own heart and to strive to liberate ourselves from illusions and dogmas.

We can safely say that uncertainty about the meaning of the Islamic Call prevails because politics are confused with religion. The role of Muḥammad as a statesman has attracted the attention of historians, analysts, and even those who claim to be his followers, to the detriment of the core meaning of the Call that he conveyed. Such observers view Islamic history with the assumption that Islām’s main goal was to establish a strong community and that the Prophet was first and foremost a political leader. Accordingly, they overlook the spiritual guidance that was the root of all the social changes that followed.

From our perspective, the primary objective of the Islamic Call has always been to guide humankind to realize the goal of our existence and to reach the highest rank that human beings can achieve. The path of Islām offers a way to maximize the spiritual gain that an individual can reap during their short earthly life. Following this way, a person’s spiritual struggle is reflected in their ordinary work and in their relationship with nature, with other individuals, and with the whole world. The Call to witness the oneness of God had a great impact on the lives of the first disciples of Muḥammad, radically changing the social environment of Arabia. It can still bring change today, this time to the entire world.

The Islamic Call is universal in the sense that it is imbued with love for all people. And it is universal in that it reveals the law

of spiritual growth revealed in previous revelations. The Prophet Muḥammad said,

I was sent to ALL human beings. (PH)³

أُرْسِلْتُ إِلَى النَّاسِ كَافَّةً

I was sent to all human beings including the red and the black. (PH)⁴

بُعِثْتُ إِلَى النَّاسِ كَافَّةً الْأَحْمَرَ وَالْأَسْوَدَ

Speaking of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Holy Qur'ān says:

We have not sent you but as a universal (Messenger) to men. (Qur'ān 34:28)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِلنَّاسِ

This Call does not force those of different creeds to abandon their teachings. On the contrary, Islām as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad confirmed the teachings of the previous Revelations and even explained them to their followers. The followers of other Revelations are invited to learn, through Islām, more about the teachings that they already have. Those who follow Muḥammad are guided to see that the teachings of Islām had their roots in all previous revelations. The “common term” that all these revelations share is how to believe not only theoretically, but practically, in the oneness of God. This belief leads to the fulfillment of the purpose of our creation. The Prophet Muḥammad articulated the ethics of a debate that can take place among followers of various creeds that adhere to the one Religion as expressed in those creeds. These ethics were feasible then and remain so today.

In order to eliminate the confusion that has prevailed for more than fourteen centuries, certain preliminary requirements must be met, such as clarifying certain issues that have distorted the meaning of the Islamic Call. For example, when it is said that Islām has universal dimensions, certain implications have been wrongly

³Narrated by Aḥmad.

⁴Narrated by Aḥmad.

attached. Some Muslims seem to dream of converting the whole world to the Islamic creed, even forcing people to become Muslim. Similar confusion veils our ability to receive the guidance of the Islamic Call. We have tried to address these issues below.

Multiplicity versus Unity: Relativity versus Universality

Variation is an intrinsic principle in nature. We are asked in the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān to observe nature in order to comprehend how the world is ordered. Science is the offspring of this observation, but the target of contemplation transcends scientific knowledge. It is inspiring as it gives both heart and mind the means to observe certain principles of creation. By observing the natural world, we can learn that variation is in the nature of things:

. . . We produce vegetation of all kinds: from some We produce green (crops), out of which We produce grain, heaped up (at harvest); out of the date palm and its sheaths (or spathes) (come) clusters of dates hanging low and near: and (then there are) gardens of grapes, and olives, and pomegranates, each similar (in kind) yet different (in variety). (Qur'ān 6:99)⁵

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ نَبَاتَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
فَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهُ خَضِرًا نُخْرَجُ مِنْهُ حَبًّا مَاتِرَاكِبًا وَمِنَ النَّخْلِ مِنْ
طَلْعِهَا قِنْوَانٌ دَانِيَةٌ وَجَنَّاتٍ مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ وَالزَّيْتُونَ وَالرُّمَّانَ مُشْتَبِهًا
وَعَيْرَ مُتَشَابِهٍ

And the things on this earth which He has multiplied in varying colors (and qualities). (Qur'ān 16:13)

وَمَا ذَرَأَ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ

⁵The stress on this and the following verses is added by the authors.

And in the mountains are tracts white and red, of various shades of color, and black intense in hue. And so among men and crawling creatures and cattle, are they of various colors. (Qur'ān 35:27-28)

وَمِنَ الْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌ بَيضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٍ، وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ

And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors; truly in that are Signs for those who know. (Qur'ān 30:22)

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

If your Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one Nation: but they continue in their differences. (Qur'ān 11:118)

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَرَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ

If the Holy Qur'ān stresses that variation is a part of the nature of things, it is unlikely that people should be expected to follow a unique creed or only one way of thinking. However, as human beings we share the fact that we are all created for a purpose. Therefore our goal is one, but it is very natural that our ways to achieve that goal will vary. Each person even has their own unique way to develop spiritually. The Islamic teachings address all people and reveal the unity behind this diversity without attempting to deny the varied nature of things.

To each among you have We prescribed a Method and an Open Way. If Allāh had so willed, He would have made you a single Nation, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allāh. (Qur'ān 5:48)

لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً

وَلَكِنْ لِيُنَبِّئُكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَأَسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ
جَمِيعًا

Because there is this unifying goal underlying our differences, the Prophet's mission is universal. Once man is aware that he is to devote himself to Allāh, he will search for that which makes him closer to Him.

From this perspective, multiplicity and unity are two categories used to express different ways of seeing the same phenomenon. Therefore they do not contradict each other, but integrate in a higher level of perception. Within this context, relativity refers to the way that each revelation expresses the one truth according to human-kind's awareness of spiritual realities and the cultural languages that different groups employ. The universality of the Islamic Call lies in the fact that the main themes by which human life spiritually evolves are the same in all revelations and are clearly defined and explained in the Islamic teachings.

Dynamism versus Stagnation: Belief versus Dogma

From certain perspectives, religion and dogma are somehow linked. The simple logic behind this linkage posits that religion offers realities assumed to be beyond space and time. According to this view, the person of faith should adhere to those so-called realities regardless of the actuality of human life in a changing world. There are numerous examples in history where religious institutions confirmed this link between religion and dogma when they played a role in fighting innovation and scientific discovery.

Religious teachings that seek to establish dogma are a common feature of religious institutions and are a phenomenon shared among nations, but such dogmatic tendencies are surely alien to the authentic teachings of revelations. All revelations came to encourage man to think for himself, to discover realities through experience rather than through blind obedience. It is a mistake, then, to focus on religious institutions, thinking that they represent authentic heavenly teachings. What applies to revelations in general

applies to Islām in particular. Islām, like all heavenly Revelations, encourages dynamism and innovative thinking, and highlights inner individual experiences.

The belief in one divine origin of life does not conflict with our continuous growth in knowledge, be it scientific or other. That belief helps human consciousness acknowledge a manifested order in the universe. On the basis of that assumption, scientific achievements are being made continuously. As humans discover the world and themselves, they realize their own limitations as imperfect beings and realize, too, that perfection is attributed to a power that transcends their knowledge. Revelations came to assert to humanity that the spontaneous realization of the Unseen, Unknown Supreme is well-founded.

These beliefs stand unshaken for a believer regardless of circumstances. Faith in a Divine Power means that the person affirms this Power's existence and rejects the notion that Divinity is a human invention. For the person of faith, this Truth does not even require proof; he is sure of what he considers to be the Truth. To ask him to prove his faith is like asking him to prove that he exists.

A person's faith reflects a vision of the heart, an insight, rather than a result of the mind and logic. A faithful person's behavior is evidence of and describes his faith. One does not absolutely need to codify those beliefs in the form of doctrine. Rather, a believer should be open to learning in an ongoing way. We are challenged to purify our hearts continuously, to improve our ability to decode the secret of our own existence.

The rule of spiritual development is not rigid and cannot be judged outwardly. For example, it is not *what* one does that will move one to a higher spiritual status, but *how* and *why*. Faith in the Divine opens channels for knowledge. This knowledge belongs to the realm of the heart but does not contradict that of the mind. Such knowledge cannot turn into dogma, simply because it cannot be imposed logically, but is revealed only through spiritual experiences and communicated to those who share similar experiences.

Due to the nature of this knowledge, the rate and speed of acquiring it and the spiritual evolution that accompanies it cannot be measured. While the grace of God is not necessarily measured

proportionally to man's deeds, the first step in asking for His grace comes from man. This inner feeling of yearning for Allāh is in itself His grace. Those who are spiritually awake and alive have the responsibility to call for those who remain spiritually blind, knowing that there is no guarantee of a response. But the responsibility of those who call does not extend to attacking, insulting, or even judging those who reject the call. The only task of the former is to remind the latter of the call and then leave them to their own unique experiences.

In short, faith in the Divine opens up a realm of spiritual knowledge and spiritual transformation. This faith can be awakened, not imposed, and as such it is not part of a dogma but is the language of the soul.

This understanding explains the difference between a dogmatic call, according to which people claim to know the absolute Truth, and a call in which people believe in the Divine as an unattainable Truth. The former pays much attention to forms, names, and rituals. The latter focuses on purity of the heart, life experiences, and the meanings of all religious symbols. For the first group, calling others means indoctrinating them with certain teachings and orders. For the second group, calling means reminding those who are ready to open themselves to the Truth.

The inner experience is free of the names of specific religions, worship systems, and rites. The Islamic Call focuses on how to awaken people spiritually, regardless of creed. It does not stoop to judging or humiliating people who are different.

It may be clear now that we do not approach Islām from a superior standpoint or with prejudice; our task is to convey what we believe is best for our humanness. If we unify our goals to achieve the highest possible rank of humanness, we will realize how close we are, regardless of various heritages and religious practices.

We present our ideas in six chapters:

The **first chapter** considers the use of the word "Islām" in the Holy Qur'ān, showing that it is not limited to the Revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad alone; rather it is used to describe all Revelations. As such, "Islām" is the One Religion that has appeared and that has been explained by various Prophets and Messengers

of God.

In a similar vein, the **second chapter** discusses how the teachings received by the Prophet confirmed previous teachings. Islām as it was revealed to the Prophet is a continuation of other Revelations. In confirming their teachings, the Revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad clarified them and explained them anew.

In order to guide humankind to a clear path, the Revelation to the Prophet established some basic concepts; the **third chapter** explains these. In order to be effective, these concepts move us from the mental sphere to our very core as human beings and can radically change our outlook on life.

In order for man to cultivate his own existence, he should become aware of his primary mission on earth. The spiritual training system in Islām, commonly known as the worship system, functions as a constant reminder of that mission. The **fourth chapter** explains how this spiritual training system is a coherent discipline that maximizes spiritual awareness if approached correctly, not only in the form of rites or rituals, but as meaningful expressions of our longing for the Divine.

It is a common tendency to seek short-cuts for what should and should not be done in order to travel a straight path. Our approach to the recommendations of Islamic teachings and the instructions of Islamic law, *Shari'ah*, is different. We argue that without the basic concepts that form the core of Islamic teachings, the guidance of the Prophet and the legal system of the Call cannot be comprehended or implemented in order to serve their true purposes. The **fifth chapter** explores this in detail, arguing that Islām as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad links living on earth and cultivating oneself for heaven.

Acting on an essential principle in Islām that one is not a person of faith unless one loves people to the same degree that one loves oneself, Muḥammad called his community and the world to Islām, but never used violence to impose it. The **sixth chapter** clarifies many misconceptions related to the Islamic Call and the Prophet's teachings in this regard.

We conclude our work by emphasizing the great need to understand and solve the problems of the modern world from a spiritual perspective that focuses on uncovering the oneness of revelations

and coming to a “reconciling principle.” The oneness of life and the oneness of humanity are derived from our faith in the Oneness of the Creator.

Ali, Aliaa, & Aisha Rafea

1

One Religion, Many Revelations

In the Revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad (Peace be upon him), the term “Islām” is used to point to the One Primordial Religion, the *Dīn al-Fiṭrah*. To clarify this statement, we will explore how the Holy Qur’ān uses the words “Islām” and “Muslim.” Three points will be covered. First, it is obvious that in the Holy Qur’ān as well as in the Prophet Muḥammad’s teachings, “Islām” points to the Primordial Religion that was revealed to Abraham and to all the Prophets who followed. Second, Islām is expressed through the behavior and beliefs of those called Muslims in the Holy Qur’ān. Third, to be a Muslim is to live in harmony with the Divine Order. The Prophets are exemplars of how this can be accomplished and their teachings guide man to that end.

There Is Only One Religion Revealed to Humanity

The Holy Qur’ān speaks of One Religion that is “Islām”:

The Religion that was revealed by Allāh is Islām. (Qur’ān 3:19)¹

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ

“Islām” within this context points to all revelations, as the verse explains:

People who were given the Book differed after they received the knowledge, for they were unjust to each other. (Qur’ān 3:19)

¹Our translation.

وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ
بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ

The People of the Book “differed” among themselves not because their Revelations were different but because they were not following the straight path. Despite the fact that they received the knowledge of Religion through that one “Book” as revealed at various times, they continued to live in conflict. This is because they “were unjust to each other” as the phrase *baghyan baynahum*² indicates.

To elaborate, it is interesting to observe that the word “Islām” is derived from the root *s-l-m*. From this root are also derived the noun *salām* “peace,” the verb *sallama* “to surrender,” and the adjective *sālim* “the saved one.” *Baghyan* is derived from *b-gh-y*. Used alone, *baghy* means an unjustified attack. Those who disagree cannot coexist with each other; they quarrel without justification. Such conflict is in itself an indication of deviation from holy guidance. In this way, people lost the ability to discern between what is true and what is false. In contrast, Muslims (in the broadest sense of the word) are those who surrender to the holy and therefore live in inner peace and manifest peace outwardly. The following verse, in which the Holy Qur’ān addresses the Prophet, explains:

So if they dispute with you, say: “I have submitted my whole self to Allāh and so have those who follow me.” And say to the People of the Book and to those who have not received holy guidance: “Do you (also) submit yourselves?” If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn back, your duty is to convey the Message; and in Allāh’s sight are (all) His servants. (Qur’ān 3:20)

فَإِنْ حَاجُّوكَ فَقُلْ أَسْلَمْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّهِ وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِ وَقُلْ لِلَّذِينَ
أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْأُمِّيِّينَ ءَأَسْلَمْتُمْ فَإِنْ أَسْلَمُوا فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ
تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلَاغُ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ

²*Baghyan* is an Arabic word that implies all forms of injustice and dishonest competition. *Baynahum* means “among themselves.”

The Prophet was asked to convey the Message of Allāh by being an exemplar, not by imposing anything on others. Peace, not conflict, was what he manifested. He said of himself,

O People, I am Mercy that is presented to you (by Allāh).
(PH)³

يا أيها الناس إنما أنا رحمة مهداة

He called for the One Religion by uncovering the oneness of the Revelations to the Prophets who had come before him:

The parable of the Prophets who preceded and myself is like a building that someone had beautifully and perfectly constructed. But a single brick was missing in one of its corners. So, whenever people passed by that building, expressing their fascination in it, they used to say, "The missing brick has to be laid." I am (like) that brick. And I am the Seal of the Prophets.
(PH)⁴

إن مثلي ومثل الأنبياء من قبلي كمثل رجل بنى بيتا فأحسنه
وأجمله إلا موضع لبنة من زاوية فجعل الناس يطوفون به
ويعجبون له ويقولون هلا وضعت هذه اللبنة قال فأنا اللبنة
وأنا خاتم النبيين

³Narrated by Dārimī.

⁴Narrated by Bukhārī and most *ḥadīth* scholars. The Prophet, said in another *ḥadīth*, *The Prophets are (like) half brothers to one father. They have several mothers, but their Religion is one.* (Narrated by Bukhārī)

الأنبياء أخوة لعلات، أمهاتهم شتى ودينهم واحد

Stressing the oneness of the Prophets and the revelations, the Prophet tells his followers, *Do not ever try to show the superiority of one Prophet over another.* (Narrated by Abū Dā'ūd and Aḥmad)

لا تخيروا بين الأنبياء

The Prophet also said, *A servant of Allāh should not say that I, the Messenger of Allāh, am better than Jonah, the son of Matthew.* (Narrated by Muslim and Abū Dā'ūd)

ما ينبغي لعبد أن يقول أنا رسول الله» خير من يونس بن متى

Thus the Prophet explained to his followers that believing him implied believing in all previous Prophets and Revelations. The Holy Qur'an expresses this truth:

The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. Each one (of them) believes in Allāh, His angels, His Books, and His Messengers. We make no distinction between one and another of His Messengers. And they say: "We hear, and we obey, (we seek) Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the end of all journeys. (Qur'an 2:285)

ءَامَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ
وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا
وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

The Holy Qur'an states that Allāh revealed the same truth to all the Prophets, those who are mentioned and others who are not mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

We have sent you inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: We sent inspiration to Abraham, Ismā'īl, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms. Of some Messengers We have already told you the story; of others We have not, and to Moses Allāh spoke directly. (Qur'an 4:163-164)

إِنَّا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ كَمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى نُوحٍ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَوْحَيْنَا
إِلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَعِيسَى
وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُونُسَ وَهَارُونَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَآتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ زَبُورًا، وَرُسُلًا قَدْ
فَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَرُسُلًا لَمْ نَقْضُضْهُمْ عَلَيْكَ وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ
مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا

Because there is only One Religion, God asks those who follow the Prophet to say,

We believe in Allāh, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismā'īl, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) the Prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them: and to Him we surrender (become Muslims). (Qur'ān 2:136)

قُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

Guidance to believe in the one Religion revealed to all the Prophets was first directed to the Prophet Muḥammad by the Divine:

Say: "We believe in Allāh, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismā'īl, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the the Prophets, from their Lord: we make no distinction between one and another among them, and to Allāh do we bow our will (in Islām)." (Qur'ān 3:84)

قُلْ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

In the language of the Holy Qur'ān, the Prophets are called Muslims, as were their followers. This serves as a sign of the One Religion:

Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he followed the Primordial Religion and hence was a Muslim, and he took not gods with Allāh. (Qur'ān 3:67)

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

It is the faith of your father Abraham. It is He Who has named you Muslims, both before and in this (Revelation). (Qur'ān 22:78)

وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ
سَمَّاكُمْ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ

Jesus' disciples are recorded in the Holy Qur'ān as calling themselves Muslims, when Jesus said,

"Who will support me in the Message of Allāh?" "We are supporting Allāh's message with you, we believe in Allāh, and you bear witness that we are Muslims," said the disciples. (Qur'ān 3:52)

فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ
الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ ءَأَمَّنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَاشْهَدْ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

And behold! I inspired the Disciples to have faith in Me and My Messenger; they said, "We have faith, and do you bear witness that we bow to Allāh as Muslims." (Qur'ān 5:111)

وَإِذْ أُوحِيَتْ إِلَى الْحَوَارِيِّينَ أَنْ ءَامِنُوا بِي وَبِرُّسُولِي قَالُوا ءَأَمَّنَّا
وَاشْهَدْ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

Moses addressed his people saying,

"O my people! If you do (really) believe in Allāh, then in Him put your trust if you submit (your will to His and become Muslims)." (Qur'ān 10:84)

وَقَالَ مُوسَى يَا قَوْمِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ ءَأَمَنْتُمْ بِاللَّهِ فَعَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلُوا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
مُسْلِمِينَ

The Pharoah's Magicians who followed Moses called themselves Muslims:

“Our Lord! pour out on us patience and constancy, and take our souls unto You as Muslims (who bow to Your Will)!”
(Qur’ān 7:126)

رَبَّنَا أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَتَوَفَّنَا مُسْلِمِينَ

Noah said,

“But if you turn back, no reward have I asked of you; my reward is only due from Allāh and I have been commanded to be among (the Muslims) those who submit to Allāh’s Will.”
(Qur’ān 10:72)

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَمَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

Solomon said,

“. . . and knowledge was bestowed on us in advance of this, and (that is because) we have been Muslims.” (Qur’ān 27:42)

وَأَوْتَيْنَا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهَا وَكُنَّا مُسْلِمِينَ

Joseph asked the Lord to bless him by making him submit to Allāh’s will as a Muslim till the end of his life on earth:

“O my Lord! You have indeed bestowed on me some power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events, O You creator of the heavens and the earth! You are my Protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Bless me by ending my journey (on earth) as a Muslim, and unite me with the righteous.” (Qur’ān 12:101)

رَبِّ قَدْ ءَاتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمُلْكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ فَاطِرَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّ فِى الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

Islām as Seen Through the Behavior of Muslims

It is obvious by now that the word “Islām” as used in the Holy Qur’ān is the description of the “path” or the “method” that the Prophets followed. Islām is revealed through the behavior, attitude, and belief of those who were called Muslims in the Holy Qur’ān. In each use of the word “Muslim” in relation to the Prophets and their followers, there is a semantic dimension that reveals various aspects of what being a Muslim implies.

Preparing Oneself to Receive Allāh’s Grace

By sincere struggle and searching for Truth, a Muslim is one who prepares himself to receive Allāh’s Grace. The greatest grace of all is to realize the one origin of all and to open oneself to receiving the guidance of Allāh from within. That is the way Abraham realized the Oneness of God; he called this realization God-given “knowledge.” Abraham is quoted in the Holy Qur’ān as saying:

“O my father! To me has come knowledge which has not reached you.” (Qur’ān 19:43)

يَأْتِبْتُ إِنِّي قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ

This knowledge was God’s grace to all the Prophets. The Prophet Muḥammad clarified that God’s grace is to be sought by man ceaselessly. As an exemplar of a Muslim he says,

“O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge.” (Qur’ān 20:114)

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

Over and above that knowledge, when reflecting upon the narrated stories of the Prophets in the Holy Qur’ān, we find that Allāh’s grace takes various forms. Moses was commanded by Allāh to show His support to Him by the use of supernatural signs. Solomon learned the language of birds and animals, and Joseph could interpret dreams. Allāh’s grace to Abraham revealed to him the Primordial Religion within his heart.

The verse in which the Holy Qur'ān called Abraham a Muslim—and not a Jew or a Christian (Qur'ān 22:78)—was a response to a dispute taking place between Jews and Christians (the People of the Book), as described by the following verses:

You People of the Book! Why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Have you no understanding? (Qur'ān 3:65)

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنزِلَتِ التَّوْرَةُ
وَالْإِنْجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

The question posed at the end of the verse shows that there was something very obvious that the People of the Book did not recognize: that Abraham did not gain his knowledge from a Holy Book, but was inspired because he prepared himself to receive Allāh's Grace. When he did not allow the illusory ideas of his people to suppress his inner quest, his insight began to illuminate his way. He could thereby find the Primordial Truth. As such, those verses which ascribe Abraham to Islām rather than to Judaism or Christianity do not compare Islām to other religions, nor do they humiliate another for being Jewish or Christian. They simply emphasize that Abraham is part of Islām as a primordial religion, and thus he should not be named by creed; nor, from this perspective, should any other Prophet.

The knowledge given to Joseph was of a different sort; he could interpret dreams and events, deducing from them messages that others could not. His ability to decode those messages was bestowed upon him as a result of a righteous life in which he observed ethical values and divine teachings.

When Joseph attained his full manhood, We gave him power and knowledge: thus do We reward those who do right. (Qur'ān 12:22)

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ ءَاتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Joseph said,

“. . . That is what my Lord has taught me. I abandoned the ways of a people that believe not in Allāh and that (even) deny the Hereafter.” (Qur’ān 12:37)⁵

ذَلِكُمْ مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَهُمْ
بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ

Joseph explained his way:

“And I follow the ways of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and never could we attribute any partners whatever to Allāh: that (comes) of the grace of Allāh to us and to mankind: yet most men are not grateful.” (Qur’ān 12:38)

وَاتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ
نُشْرِكَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ذَلِكَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ
أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ

Solomon’s knowledge and power derived from his being a Muslim:

We gave knowledge to David and Solomon and they both said,
“Praise be to Allāh, Who has favoured us above many of His believing servants.” (Qur’ān 27:15)

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ عِلْمًا وَقَالَا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي فَضَّلَنَا عَلَى
كَثِيرٍ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Solomon acknowledged the grace of Allāh and called the Queen of Sabā’ to believe in Allāh who bestowed on him such knowledge. He says,

“I found her and her people worshipping the sun besides Allāh; Satan has made their deeds seem pleasing to their eyes and has kept them away from the path, so they receive no guidance.” (Qur’ān 27:24)

وَجَدْتَهَا وَقَوْمَهَا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ
الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ فَهُمْ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ

⁵Our translation.

His mission was fulfilled; she followed his path and became a Muslim:

She said: "O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul. I do (now) submit (in Islām), with Solomon, to the Lord of the Worlds." (Qur'ān 27:44)

قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ
الْعَالَمِينَ

She understood that there was an unseen power that ordered everything. With this realization, she submitted to that power and abandoned her previous illusions.

Respecting Reason, Fearing Nothing, and Realizing Complete Freedom

All the Prophets in the Holy Qur'ān show respect for reason by rejecting stagnant traditions that humiliate reason and bestow undue respect on dogmas. Because of their respect for reason, the Prophets refused blind imitation. They were not like the people of their times, who would say,

"We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we guide ourselves by their footsteps." (Qur'ān 43: 22)

إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِم مُّهْتَدُونَ

The Prophets realized that to be completely spiritually free is to be devoted to God and not to any man-made dogma. Their refusal to worship false deities was an expression of their search for spiritual freedom and their awareness that a person is deprived of that freedom when they bestow divinity on what is not really divine. They were fully aware that the worship of idols is not merely an outward practice; it is an inner attitude of rigidity and stagnation that blocks a person's capability to be spiritually free. It is an attitude that traps the soul in illusions created by a limited existence. In the Holy Qur'ān, Abraham says to his father,

“Do you take idols for gods? For I see you and your people in manifest error.” (Qur’ān 6:74)

أَتَّخِذُ أَصْنَامًا ءِالِهَةً إِنِّي أَرَاكَ وَقَوْمَكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

“O my father! Why worship that which hears not, and sees not, and can profit you nothing?” (Qur’ān 19: 42)

يَا أَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ مَا لَا يَسْمَعُ وَلَا يُبْصِرُ وَلَا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ شَيْئًا

Joseph also says,

“If not Him, you worship nothing but names which you have named—you and your fathers—for which Allāh has sent down no authority.” (Qur’ān 12:40)

مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءٌ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَءَابَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ

Abraham is not afraid of his father’s threat to punish him for insulting his practices and beliefs. When his father tells him,

“O Abraham, if you forbear not, I will indeed stone you” (Qur’ān 19:46)

يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ لَبِئْسَ لِمَ تَتَّبِعِ لِأَبِئِكَ

he simply tells him,

“Peace be on you. I will pray to my Lord for your forgiveness, for He is to me Most Gracious. And I will turn away from you (all) and from those whom you invoke besides Allāh. I will call on my Lord; perhaps my prayer to my Lord will not go unanswered.” (Qur’ān 19:47-48)

قَالَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكَ سَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَكَ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِي حَفِيًّا وَأَعْتَرِلَكُمْ وَمَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَأَدْعُوا رَبِّي عَسَىٰ أَلَّا أَكُونَ بِدُعَاءِ رَبِّي شَقِيًّا

In the Holy Qur'ān, the Pharaoh's magicians are also examples of being Muslim. They followed Moses when they realized that there was a higher power that ordered the seen and unseen aspects of life. They knew through experience that Moses was not performing magic, but exploring the manifestation of the Unseen, Supreme Power. Faith in Allāh sprang forth in their hearts intuitively and they did not fear the power of the Pharaoh; nor did they change their faith in the face of his threat. They submitted completely to Allāh's will. The story of the magicians demonstrates how people differ in their reactions in the face of the same event. The Pharaoh and his magicians witnessed the same phenomenon, yet while he denied its miraculous aspect, they received Allāh's message wholeheartedly. To be a Muslim in the way they were means that a person fears nothing and realizes complete freedom. Submission to God's will empowers man's will with determination. When Moses spoke to his people, he stressed that aspect; he wanted them to be courageous enough to face the tyrant with faith and confidence. When they were not sure what to do, fearing the power of the Pharaoh who said,

"Their male children will we slay" (Qur'ān 7:127)

قَالَ سَنُقْتَلُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ

Moses advised them to place their trust in Allāh alone:

"Pray for help from Allāh, and (wait) in patience and constancy: for the earth is Allāh's, to give as a heritage to such of His servants as He pleases; and the end is (best) for the righteous." (Qur'ān 7:128)

قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ اسْتَعِينُوا بِاللَّهِ وَاصْبِرُوا إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لِلَّهِ يُورِثُهَا
مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

Defending One's Belief and Supporting the Word of Truth

A Muslim in the Holy Qur'ān is one who has enough inner power to uphold faith strongly and substantively. The disciples of

Jesus serve as examples. Jesus' call was part of a recurring theme; he called people to the straight path and few followed him. Those who did were his disciples, calling themselves Muslims (Qur'an 3:52), while the majority rejected his call. For Jesus' disciples, being a Muslim required responsibility on their part; they felt obligated to support Jesus' message. To be a Muslim is to defend one's belief and to support the word of Truth. In another part of the Holy Qur'an we read:

And behold! I inspired the Disciples to have faith in Me and My Messenger; they said, "We have faith; bear witness that we bow to Allāh as Muslims." (Qur'an 5:111)

وَإِذْ أُوحِيَتْ إِلَى الْحَوَارِيِّينَ أَنْ ءَامِنُوا بِي وَبِرَسُولِي قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا
وَإِذْ بَاتَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

Being a Muslim enables one to be supported by Allāh through inspiration or any other means.

The Holy Qur'an clarifies that all the Prophets and devotees to Allāh were models of strong defenders of faith:

How many of the Prophets fought (in Allāh's way), and with them (fought) large bands of godly men? But they never lost heart if they met with disaster in Allāh's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And Allāh loves those who are firm and steadfast. (Qur'an 3:146)

وَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ نَبِيِّ قَاتَلَ مَعَهُ رَبِّيُونَ كَثِيرٌ فَمَا وَهَنُوا لِمَا أَصَابَهُمْ فِي
سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَمَا ضَعُفُوا وَمَا اسْتَكَانُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الصَّابِرِينَ

Expecting No Reward, nor Seeking to Please People; a Muslim Relates Directly to Allāh

In the Holy Qur'an, Noah is a model Muslim as he did not expect any reward from his people, nor did he seek to please them. His primary concern was to follow the straight path; thus he was guided to be a Muslim and was saved.

They rejected him, but We delivered him, and those with him, in the Ark and We made them inherit (the earth), while We overwhelmed in the Flood those who rejected Our Signs. Then see what was the end of those who were warned (but heeded not)! (Qur'ān 10:73)

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَتَبَايَعْنَا فِي الْفُلِّ وَمَنْ مَعَهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُمْ خَلَائِفًا وَأَعْرَفْنَا
الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَاَنْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُتَذَكِّرِينَ

The Holy Qur'ān reveals that all the Prophets, when calling their people to the straight path, are motivated by love and mercy, seeking no personal gain of any kind. The Prophets Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lūṭ, and Shu'ayb say,

"No reward do I ask of you for it: my reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds." (Qur'ān 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180)

وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِي إِلَّا عَلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

The Prophet Muḥammad was also guided by the Divine to say,

"No reward do I ask of you for it but this: that each one who will may take a (straight) path to his Lord." (Qur'ān 25:57)

قُلْ مَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ
سَبِيلًا

Respecting Earthly Laws and Praying For Divine Support

To surrender to Allāh (i.e., to be Muslim) requires continuous prayers for Allāh's support, accompanied by using every possible way to achieve one's goals. This is a common feature among the Prophets.

Noah built the Ark, realizing that it was the way to save his people from the flood. Moses went to the Pharaoh and spoke to him, using logic to convince him to free the Children of Israel and allow them to leave the land of Egypt. Yet, at the same time, he asked

Allāh for support and would not face the Pharaoh unless Allāh assured him that He was with him and his brother, watching over and protecting them. The Prophet Muḥammad endured humiliations and resistance in Mecca. He did not depend on miracles to come and rescue him and his followers; rather he used his human capabilities to reach people and awaken their consciousness. When he migrated, he again used reason, for he knew of the Qurayshi leaders' determination to kill him.

The Holy Qur'ān demonstrates clearly how the Prophet Joseph respected earthly laws while at the same time praying for God's support. When the Pharaoh gave him the responsibility of solving Egypt's coming economic woes, he told the Pharaoh that he would manage the problem pragmatically:

"Set me over the store-houses of the land: I will indeed guard them, as one that knows (their importance)." (Qur'ān 12:55)

قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ

In the meantime Joseph expressed his devotion to Allāh and his awareness that it was with His support that he would gain the straight path. He says:

"O my Lord! You have indeed bestowed on me some power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events, O You Creator of the heavens and the earth! You are my Protector in this world and in the Hereafter. Take my soul (at death) as one submitting to Your Will (as a Muslim), and unite me with the righteous." (Qur'ān 12:101)

رَبِّ قَدْ آتَيْتَنِي مِنَ الْمُلْكِ وَعَلَّمْتَنِي مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ فَاطِرَ
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّي فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ تَوَفَّنِي مُسْلِمًا
وَالْحَقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

The Holy Qur'ān also clarifies that one way of surrendering to Allāh, to be a Muslim, is to make use of everything with which God has endowed us and thus to improve all aspects of life. It is

when we use all our capabilities that we really live in harmony with the Divine Law. In doing this we are considered grateful to Allāh. Hence the Holy Qur'ān praises followers of Prophet Solomon for striving in that sense:

They worked for him as he desired, (making) arches, images, basins as large as reservoirs, and (cooking) cauldrons fixed (in their places): "You work, Sons of David, with thanks! But few of My servants are grateful!" (Qur'ān 34:13)

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِبٍ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجُبَابِ وَقُدُورٍ
رَاسِيَاتٍ اعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ

The guidance to respect earthly laws and at the same time seek God's support is mentioned in various ways in the Holy Qur'ān, when it urges people to work, to seek knowledge of all kinds, and to search for the secrets of creation.⁶

To Be a Muslim is to Live According to the Divine Law

Despite the Prophets' varied experiences as Muslims, they were similar in their surrender to the Unseen Exalted Power. This surrender freed them from fear of any temporal authority and led them to the path of complete inner freedom. When they directed themselves to God, they were inspired to do different things and acquired different capabilities and knowledge. They were following the Divine Law.

When man was created, he was endowed with Divine knowledge. The individual must then search for it within; otherwise, he risks being attracted to illusion and forgetting his age-old commitment. Illusion can divert him from the innate tendency embedded within his heart that urges him to find meaning and goals in this life and to then attempt to fulfill them by being in harmony with the purpose of his own existence. This is the very meaning of surrender, Islām. Once man searches for the true meaning of life, he will

⁶More details of this aspect will be discussed in Chapter Five.

be answered by the Unseen Supreme Power. Alas, human beings can easily be drawn away from that direction. Out of Allāh's Mercy, the Prophets were sent, not only to guide people's way, but also to remind them of the embedded Truth within each person's heart and to demonstrate how anyone can seek it. All the Prophets began their mission searching for the Truth and struggled to find answers to their questions about the meaning and the ultimate goal of life. In seeking to serve the purpose of their existence, they were also guiding people, supporting them to awaken their souls, and providing them with striking evidence of the history of humankind on earth. They realized that the highest rank a human being can achieve is to be a servant of God. This servanthood liberates us from illusion, so that we will not be deceived into giving absolute value to what is only transient.

The Human Being is Endowed with the Divine Knowledge from the Time of His Creation

The Holy Qur'ān points to the fact that we are endowed with knowledge of our Lord:

When your Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying) "Am I not your Lord?" They said: "Yea! We do testify!" (This), lest you should say on the Day of Judgment: "Of this we were never mindful." (Qur'ān 7:172)

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ
أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا
كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

Allāh addresses the Prophet Muḥammad in the Holy Qur'ān, saying:

So set your face towards the Primordial Religion, the Divine Order (Divine Nature) innate in human beings. There is no distorting (the nature of) Allāh's creation. This is the au-

thentic religion: but most among mankind do not understand.
(Qur'ān 30:30)⁷

فَأْتِمُّ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا
تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Reading this verse in Arabic, one notes the interesting word *hanīf*, which may be used as either an adverb or an adjective. Within the context of the verse, *hanīf* can be interpreted as a description of the One Religion and can also be understood as a description of the Prophet's approach. There is no one word in English that conveys the whole range of meanings condensed in the word *hanīf*, among which are correct, direct, pure, authentic, and original. When describing religion, it may be translated as the Primordial Religion. On the whole, one may conclude that in order to receive knowledge from the higher source, man needs to take the correct approach; that is, he must prepare himself by awakening his innate inner quest.

Call on me; I will answer you. (Qur'ān 40:60)

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

For those who recognized the Divine source of the Message to Muḥammad, their hearts were endowed with that knowledge:

. . . those on whom knowledge has been bestowed may learn that (your guidance) is the Truth from your Lord, and that they may believe therein, and their hearts may be made humbly (open) to it: for truly Allāh is the Guide of those who believe, to the Straight Way. (Qur'ān 22:54)

وَلِيَعْلَمَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَيُؤْمِنُوا بِهِ فَتُخْبِتَ
لَهُ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهَادِ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

⁷Our translation.

Some People Do Not Follow the Divine Knowledge Embedded in Their Hearts

To follow the Primordial Religion requires more than observing mere scripture. To have a holy text and heritage without using the correct approach is misleading. In the Holy Qur'ān, those who did not respond to the Prophetic guidance say:

*"We already know how much of them the earth takes away.
With us is a Book (that provides the complete knowledge)."*
(Qur'ān 50:4)

قَدْ عَلِمْنَا مَا تَنْقُصُ الْأَرْضُ مِنْهُمْ وَعِنْدَنَا كِتَابٌ حَفِيظٌ

Because they did not interact with the Law of Life by awakening their insight, those who rejected the Revelations adhered to a limited way of understanding and could not, therefore, discern the truth. What needs to be followed is the inner guidance, which is in harmony with the Law of Life:

Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts, which are in their breasts. (Qur'ān 22:46)

فَأَنَّهُمْ لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِنْ تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ

Following the Primordial Path, *Fitrah*, the Divine Order Leads to the One Religion, "Islām"

The Holy Qur'ān describes the Primordial Religion as *Fitratul-lāh*, which can be translated as "the Divine Order." "Islām," "the Primordial Religion," and "the Divine Nature" convey the same meaning and can be used interchangeably. The Prophet Muḥammad was advised to follow the Religion that is the Divine Order.

"So set your face towards the Primordial Religion, the Divine Order (Divine Nature) innate in human beings. There is no distorting (the nature of) Allāh's creation. This is the authentic religion: but most among mankind do not understand."
(Qur'ān 30:30)⁸

⁸Our translation.

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا
تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

The word “Islām” is not mentioned explicitly, but Islām in its broadest meaning is implicit. It is clear that one who follows the Divine Order is a Muslim. The Law of Allāh is the that which orders everything in the seen and unseen worlds, in the spiritual and physical existence of man. Allāh created an ordered world. Without faith in this Order, life would be meaningless. Spiritual growth, like physical growth, follows a law. To surrender to the Law, which is the core concept in the Primordial Religion “Islām,” is to make oneself accessible to the law of spiritual growth.⁹ Violation of the Law of spiritual attainment is a choice that can lead to the destruction of one’s spiritual being.

When Man Struggles to Find the Truth, He Will Be Answered

The Prophet explained the process of attaining knowledge and the way to continue along the path. He said that Islām is the religion of innate purity, *fitrah*.¹⁰

By the time people reach adulthood, purity is a goal, for by that time they are polluted by society’s illusions; without any spiritual nourishment, they go astray, allowing their desires and lusts to direct them. They become so involved in illusory values that they may lose the ability to regain their purity.

When their hearts and their insights are ready, the guidance given by Holy Books will light their way. The following verse explains:

Do you not see that Allāh has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made His bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen? Yet there are among men those who dispute about Allāh, without

⁹See Chapter Four for further elaboration on this point.

¹⁰According to a Prophetic *hadith* narrated by Bukhārī and Muslim: *Every newborn is given the religion of fitrah, whether his parents give him the name of a creed, so he may become a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian.*

ما من مولود إلا يولد على الفطرة فأبواه يهودانه أو ينصرانه أو يمجسانه

knowledge and without guidance, and without a Book to enlighten them! (Qur'ān 31:20)

أَلَمْ تَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَخَّرَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَأَسْبَغَ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعَمَهُ ظَاهِرَةً وَبَاطِنَةً وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ

Those who follow that inner guidance and realize the existence of the Supreme are able to recognize the truth that is given in Revelations, as the following verses indicate:

Those to whom We gave the Book before, and when it is recited to them, they say: "We believe therein, for it is the Truth from our Lord: indeed we have been Muslims from before this." (Qur'ān 28:52-53)

الَّذِينَ ءَاتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ هُمْ بِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ، وَإِذَا يُتْلَى عَلَيْهِمْ قَالُوا ءَأَمَّا بِهِ إِنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّنَا إِنَّآ كُنَّا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مُسْلِمِينَ

(Being) those who have believed in Our Signs and became Muslims. (Qur'ān 43:69)

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا مُسْلِمِينَ

In the Holy Qur'ān, the Lord addresses the Prophet Muḥammad:

Say: "Truly, my Lord has guided me to a Way that is straight, and correct, a precious religion, the path of Abraham, true in faith, and he (certainly) joined not gods with Allāh." (Qur'ān 6:161)¹¹

قُلْ إِنِّي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيَمًا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

¹¹The stress on this and the following verses is added by the authors.

The Prophets as Exemplars Following the Primordial Path

Abraham did not blindly adhere to his people's beliefs; he sought the truth sincerely, as did the Prophet Muḥammad. Neither began with a text to be read fanatically, nor with a creed to be followed blindly, but from an authentic cry for the Truth and a sincere quest to understand the meaning of life within themselves and in their surroundings. By so doing, their quests were answered. They received guidance through inspiration and revelation from the Unseen Supreme Power, Allāh.

The way that was adopted by Abraham and Muḥammad demonstrates a relationship between the human and the Unseen. If we search for truth, we will be guided to find it. This has always worked and always will.

The way that they sought truth also explains the relationship between the human and our inner messenger, the heart. While support comes from the higher source, the quest comes from the inner self. Knowledge is revealed to the soul and expressed through the joy that we experience as when Abraham cried:

"Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray." (Qur'ān 6:77)

لَئِنْ لَمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ

That was a real discovery for Abraham, who was at that moment in the midst of confusion, looking at the moon, trying to establish a relationship between what he was seeing and the Lord he was seeking. That discovery sprang from within; he was not yet sure who was his Lord. The realization that there is a Lord who guides put Abraham on the right path to receiving knowledge about the Transcendental Unseen Supreme. About the path of Abraham, the Holy Qur'ān says:

Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allāh, does good, and follows the Way of Abraham the true in faith? For Allāh bound Abraham to Him closely. (Qur'ān 4:125)

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ دِينًا مِمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ وَاتَّبَعَ مِلَّةَ

إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَاتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ خَلِيلًا

The Way of Abraham is the righteous, correct, straight Way. In Arabic, the Way is *Ṣirāṭ*, followed by the word *Mustaqīm* as an adjective. *Mustaqīm* connotes a range of meanings, such as straight, right, correct, proper, direct, harmonious, etc. *Aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm* can be a synonym of the Law, as well as the outcome of surrendering to the Law. In the wording of the Holy Qur'ān, *aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, the correct way, is

The Way of Allāh, to Whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. Behold (how) all affairs tend towards Allāh! (Qur'ān 42:53)

صِرَاطِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَلَا إِلَى اللَّهِ
تَصِيرُ الْأُمُورُ

Following Abraham's path, the Prophet Muḥammad's guidance was intended to lead humanity to the right Divine Way:

A Book which We have revealed unto you, in order that you might lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into light—by the leave of their Lord—to the Way of (Him) the Exalted in Power, Worthy of all Praise! (Qur'ān 14:1)

كِتَابٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ
رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ

But truly you call them to the Straight Way. (Qur'ān 23:73)

وَإِنَّكَ لَتَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

To be on the straight way is the ultimate goal for man, which he must seek. For that reason, in the first *sūrah* (chapter) of the Holy Qur'ān we read the following:

Show us the straight way, the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray. (Qur'ān 1:6-7)¹²

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ، صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ
الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

Striking Evidence to Awaken People's Insight

Because it is not easy for people who have veiled themselves in darkness to recognize that Law, they need striking evidence so that their eyes may open and they may become aware of the fatal destiny that awaits those who violate that Divine Law. The word *Sunnah* (plural: "Sunan"), in referring to the Law, relates to people who perished because they violated it. The Prophets were asked to draw people's attention to what happened to previous nations who failed to follow heavenly guidance. From this observation, they could learn about the Eternal Divine Law. That there is no change in the Divine Law is repeatedly emphasized in several places in the Holy Qur'ān:

(This is Our) Law (as revealed) to the Messengers whom We sent before you: you will find no change in Our Law. (Qur'ān 17:77)¹³

سُنَّةَ مَنْ قَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ مِنْ رُسُلِنَا وَلَا تَجِدُ لِسُنَّتِنَا تَحْوِيلًا

That is Allāh's (Divine) Law that worked among those who lived aforetime: no change will you find in Allāh's (Divine) Law. (Qur'ān 33:62)

سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا

¹²It is worth mentioning that the ritual prayers, *aṣ-ṣalāt*, that the Prophet Muḥammad taught his followers, according to the Divine commandment, includes this *sūrah* as an essential part, without which the ritual is not complete and valid.

¹³This and the following three verses are our translations.

Allāh does wish to make clear to you and guide you to the Law that was revealed to those before you. (Qur'ān 4:26)

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ وَيَهْدِيَكُمْ سُنَنَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ

But their professing the Faith when they (actually) saw Our Punishment was not going to benefit them. (Such has been) Allāh's Law which has been working among His servants. Accordingly, the ungrateful shall be lost. (Qur'ān 40:85)

فَلَمْ يَكُ يَنْفَعُهُمْ إِيمَانُهُمْ لَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا سِنَّةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي قَدْ خَلَتْ فِي عِبَادِهِ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْكَافِرُونَ

What It Means to Be a Servant of Allāh

In a very general sense, the Straight Way is the Divine Law. To surrender to that Law is to realize one's purpose of existence. As the Holy Qur'ān explains, man is created to be God's representative:

Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I will create a representative on earth." (Qur'ān 2:30)

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

The Holy Qur'ān clarifies that to serve Allāh and to be on the Straight Way are one and the same thing. Jesus said,

"Truly Allāh is my Lord and your Lord. Therefore serve Him: this is a Way that is straight." (Qur'ān 19:36)

وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ

The Lord says,

I created the jinn and humankind only that they might serve Me. (Qur'ān 51:56)¹⁴

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

¹⁴Our translation.

And that you should worship Me, (for) this was the Straight Way. (Qur'ān 36:61)

وَأَنِ اعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ

Worshipping God is not merely the performance of certain rites, but an awareness of the existence of the holy, an awareness that reflects on our way of life. Those rites carry within them meanings which can be uncovered through practice. Our life will thus be directed to a certain purpose, i.e., to become a tool in the hand of the Supreme. That is the Straight Way, *aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*. To achieve that goal requires “knowledge.” Abraham said to his father:

“O my father! To me has come knowledge which has not reached you, so follow me; I will guide you to a Way that is even and straight.” (Qur'ān 19:43)

يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي أَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا
سَوِيًّا

Summary

The word “Islām,” as used in the Holy Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad's teachings, does not point to a creed that was meant to parallel or compete with existing creeds. “Islām” in its original sense pointed to the eternal call from Allāh to surrender to the Divine Law of Life. “Islām” is a synonym for the One Religion that all the Prophets brought to humanity. Thus we can interpret “Islām” as *ad-Dīn al-Hanīf*—“the pure, Primordial Religion.” *Taslīm* (surrender), *salām* (peace), and *sallamah* (salvation) are interrelated. The core concept is that man needs to be in harmony with the Divine Law; the act of achieving that harmony is *Taslīm*. Once we surrender to the Law, we will be at peace with ourselves and with everything in the universe. That is the real salvation. All revelations came to support man in achieving that purpose. Islām is inherent within man's soul; that is the meaning of *Hanīfiyyah*.

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